

# Bible Study

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### Pierre Cannings, Ph.D.

**20:1–3a** treats Paul’s leave-taking in Ephesus and his journey through Macedonia to Corinth in the most summary fashion. The account can be supplemented considerably from 2 Cor 1–7, where Paul discussed the events of the same period. There had been considerable tension with the Corinthian church during the final portion of Paul’s Ephesian ministry. Paul seems to have written a rather confrontive letter to that congregation during that period. He described the letter as “painful” and written “with many tears” (2 Cor 2:3f.).<sup>418</sup> Strong opposition to Paul had arisen in the church, and there were attacks on his status as their apostle. In the letter Paul seems to have confronted the opposition directly and severely. The letter was sent by way of Titus, and Paul evidently wanted to hear Titus’s report back to him about “how it went” before proceeding himself to Corinth.

At this point the events treated in 2 Cor 1–7 overlap with Acts 20:1–2. Paul took his leave of Ephesus and set out for Macedonia (Acts 20:1). Along the way he hoped that Titus would meet him on his return trip from Corinth with a report on how things went with the letter. He stopped first at Troas and had an opportunity for witness there. His mind was, however, on Corinth. Titus did not join him at Troas, so he moved on to Macedonia—most likely Philippi—in the hopes of intercepting Titus there (2 Cor 2:12f.). There he finally met up with Titus returning from Corinth. Titus brought Paul the joyous news that the letter had had its effect, the offenders had been disciplined, and the church had become reconciled to Paul (2 Cor 2:5–11; 7:5–13). Evidently Paul wrote 2 Corinthians at this point and sent it on ahead of his own coming. Finally he went to Corinth himself. This was the visit referred to in Acts 20:2–3 as his three-month stay in “Greece.” It was his final visit to Corinth and probably took place in the winter of A.D. 55–56. During this time he wrote the Roman Epistle.

A major concern of Paul during this period was his collection for the Jerusalem Christians. All of his epistles written during the course of this third missionary period mention this project.<sup>429</sup> Evidently the concept was first put in Paul’s mind at the Jerusalem Conference when he was asked to “remember the poor” (Gal 2:10). “The poor” is likely a reference to the Jerusalem Christians (cf. Rom 15:26). Paul already had participated in a relief offering to the mother congregation from the Antioch church (Acts 11:27–30). Now, toward the end of his ministry in Asia, Macedonia, and Greece, Paul determined to put together a major offering from his Gentile churches for the church in Jerusalem. Not only was it to meet a genuine need, but it also was a graphic way of demonstrating the unity in Christ between his Gentile converts and their Jewish Christian brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. The importance the collection held for the apostle is best illustrated in Rom 15:25–29, where he indicated that he was putting off his visit to Rome and his cherished mission to Spain in order first to deliver the collection to Jerusalem. He was

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<sup>148</sup> This “epistle of tears” is most likely no longer extant, although many scholars feel that 2 Cor 10–13 is a portion of it.

<sup>249</sup> The main texts are Gal 2:10; 1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8–9; Rom 15:25–32.

doing this with full awareness that the undertaking involved considerable personal risk from unbelievers and possible rejection from the Jerusalem Christians (Rom 15:31).

**20:3b–4** Acts 20:3b–4 should be viewed in light of this collection for Jerusalem. This applies to both Paul’s change in travel plans (v. 3b) and the list of his traveling companions (v. 4). He had already experienced opposition from the Corinthian Jews (18:6, 12–16), but the danger on the open sea is even better explained if Paul had a considerable amount of money with him.<sup>530</sup> Likewise, the long list of traveling companions given in v. 4 is best seen as the names of the delegates from the Gentile churches who joined Paul both for protection and as official representatives of the churches. In his epistles Paul mentioned his intention to be accompanied to Jerusalem by such representatives of the churches (1 Cor 16:3; 2 Cor 8:18f.). The list in v. 4 would indicate that there was representation from each of the major areas where Paul had established churches. Sopater,<sup>541</sup> Aristarchus,<sup>552</sup> and Secundus came from the Macedonian churches. Gaius<sup>563</sup> and Timothy represented the churches of southern Galatia. Tychicus<sup>574</sup> and Trophimus<sup>585</sup> were the delegates from the churches of Asia.

**20:5–6** It is not at all clear from v. 5 whether this whole company of delegates traveled on to Troas ahead of Paul. “These men” possibly refers only to the Asians Tychicus and Trophimus, who went ahead to their native province to seek a ship for the company to travel to Palestine. In any event, Paul traveled to Philippi and spent the Passover there. At this point the “we” narrative resumes. The first-person narration last occurred in the account of Paul’s Philippian ministry (16:17), and this may indicate that Luke had stayed behind in Philippi and remained ministering there until this point.<sup>596</sup> After the completion of the Passover, Paul and his companions departed Philippi, sailing from its port of Neapolis. This time the voyage to Troas took five days.<sup>5107</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> The Western text adds to v. 3 that “the Spirit” bade Paul to return through Macedonia. See E. Delebecque, “Les deux versions du voyage de Saint Paul de Corinthe à Troas (Ac 20, 3–6),” *Bib* 64 (1983): 556–64.

<sup>451</sup> Possibly the Sosipater of Rom 16:21. If so, Sopater may well have represented the church of Corinth since he is listed in the personalia of Romans, which was written from Corinth. (Berea is connected with his father, Pyrrhus.)

<sup>552</sup> For Aristarchus cf. Acts 19:29; 27:2; Col 4:10.

<sup>653</sup> The Western text harmonizes the Gaius of 20:4 with the Macedonian Gaius of 19:29 by changing Derbe to Doub(e)rios, a Macedonian town twenty-five miles from Philippi. Derbe is almost certainly the correct reading, especially since Gaius is paired with Timothy. Both were Lycaonians.

<sup>754</sup> Tychicus was a coworker of Paul mentioned in his later epistles: Col 4:7f.; Eph 6:21f.; 2 Tim 4:12; Titus 3:12.

<sup>855</sup> For Trophimus see Acts 21:29 and 2 Tim 4:20. In v. 4 the Western text has the rather curious reading Eutyclus (cf. 20:9) in place of Tychicus and designates the Asians more specifically as “Ephesians.”

<sup>956</sup> Some commentators locate Luke in Corinth on the basis of the “us” in v. 5 and argue that Luke had been sent to Corinth in connection with the collection as “the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel” (2 Cor 8:18).

<sup>1057</sup> Compare the unusually brief voyage of two days in 16:11f.

Paul was primarily occupied with his Jerusalem collection during the period covered by Acts 20:1–6. The mystery is why Luke did not mention it. He was certainly aware that Paul took a collection to Jerusalem, for it is mentioned explicitly in Paul’s later speech before Felix (24:17). The group that accompanied Paul was almost certainly the collection delegation from the churches. Yet Luke did not mention this, nor did he mention the collection at all in connection with the journey to Jerusalem, which Rom 15:25–28 clearly indicates was undertaken to deliver the gift. Why is Acts silent on the subject?<sup>5118</sup> Was there ultimately some problem with the collection?<sup>5129</sup> Did Luke deliberately not make much of it because it might have proved an embarrassment for the Jewish Christians in their relations with the Jewish community or for Christian relations with the Roman authorities?<sup>6130</sup> Or perhaps were Paul’s fears well-founded (Rom 15:31) and the collection not well-received by the Jerusalem Christians?<sup>6141</sup> These are unanswerable questions, and any solution would at best be an argument from silence. It is clear, however, what Luke did want to emphasize. He wanted to show how Paul’s journey to Jerusalem was as foreboding as that of his master before him, how it ended in chains, but how even in the seeming defeat of his arrest in Jerusalem God turned the events to the triumph of the gospel, leading Paul to the capital of the empire, the end of the earth, to bear his witness openly and unhinderedly.

## **(2) Restoration of Eutychus (20:7–12)**

**<sup>7</sup>On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. <sup>8</sup>There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. <sup>9</sup>Seated in a window was a young**

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<sup>1158</sup> Some scholars argue that Acts is not silent on the subject and that the collection of 11:27–30 is Luke’s account of Paul’s Jerusalem offering. This, however, requires radical revision of the Acts chronology. See C. H. Buck, Jr., “The Collection for the Saints,” *HTR* 43 (1950): 1–29; P. S. Minear, “The Jerusalem Fund and Pauline Chronology,” *ATR* 25 (1943): 389–96. Equally unlikely is the view that Luke did not know of the collection or that he did not fully understand it (C. R. Bowen, “Paul’s Collection and the Book of Acts,” *JBL* 42 [1923]: 49–59).

<sup>1259</sup> E. B. Allo suggests it may have been seized by brigands or confiscated by the authorities (“La Portée de la Collecte pour Jerusalem dans les Plans de Saint Paul,” *RB* 45 [1936]: 529–37).

<sup>1360</sup> K. F. Nickle argues that Paul’s collection was based on the analogy of the temple tax that was collected from the Jews of the Diaspora. The collection of this tax was carefully regulated by the Romans, and Nickle suggests they might have considered Paul’s collection an illegal and unauthorized assessment. Luke would not have wanted to raise this specter, given his apologetic emphasis. See *The Collection* (London: SCM, 1966), 148–51.

<sup>1461</sup> Acts 21:20f. reflects James’s concern that Paul’s association with the Gentiles might be considered an abandonment of the law by the more zealous Jewish Christians. A collection from the Gentile churches might have indeed been coolly received under such circumstances. See D. Georgi, *Die Geschichte der Kollekte des Paulus für Jerusalem* (Hamburg: Evangelischer, 1965), 87–90.

man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. <sup>10</sup>Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “He’s alive!” <sup>11</sup>Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. <sup>12</sup>The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.

**20:7** Paul and his traveling companions spent a week in Troas (20:6), evidently awaiting the departure of their ship. On their last day there, which happened to be a Sunday, Paul met with the Christians for worship. This is one of the earliest references to Christians meeting for worship on Sunday, the first day of the week. Christians may have continued to observe the Jewish Sabbath as well, but eventually the Lord’s resurrection day became the sole day of worship for Christians.

At Troas, aware of his intended departure the next day, Paul hung on to every minute with the Christians there and spoke well into the night, even until midnight. There is some question whether this was Saturday night or Sunday night. If Luke’s reckoning was the normal Jewish method, it would have been Saturday night, since the days were reckoned as beginning at sunset and running until the following sunset. If Luke was following Roman reckoning, and this seems to have been the case, days were reckoned from midnight to midnight, as is our own procedure. It thus would have been Sunday night, and Paul’s projected departure was Monday morning.<sup>6152</sup> In any event, at Troas we are given a glimpse into the main elements of an early Christian worship service. It was observed on the first day of the week and consisted of the breaking of bread (the Lord’s Supper) and preaching. That the Lord’s Supper was accompanied by a larger fellowship meal may be indicated by the reference to their “eating” in v. 11 (cf. 1 Cor 11:20f.).

**20:8–9** The story of Eutychus is one of those delightful anecdotes with which Acts is filled. That Luke intended a gentle touch of humor is altogether possible. One can sympathize with the lad.<sup>6163</sup> A warm spring evening, a room filled with torches burning up the oxygen supply, a long-winded preacher going into the wee hours of the morning and probably long past the lad’s normal bedtime—all these factors conspired against the youth. He probably had taken refuge in the window to catch a breath of fresh air, fighting his drowsiness. That effort, however, brought disastrous results. He fell asleep, lost his perch, and tumbled from the third story to the ground below. This, of course, was not a laughing matter. The fall evidently killed him. It could only be viewed with humor retrospectively in light of its happy ending because through the apostle, God turned tragedy into joy.

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<sup>1562</sup> For the argument that Luke followed the Jewish method (Saturday night), see W. E. P. Cotter, “St. Paul’s Eucharist,” *ExpTim* 39 (1927–28): 235, and R. Staats, “Die Sonntagnachtgottesdienste der Christlichen Frühzeit,” *ZNW* 66 (1975): 242–63. For the Roman method (Sunday) see W. Rordorf, “Sonntagnachtgottesdienste der Christlichen Frühzeit?” *ZNW* 68 (1977): 138–41.

<sup>1663</sup> Reference to Eutychus as a “young man” is perhaps misleading. The term νεανίας used in v. 9 can indeed refer to a young man, but in v. 12 he is called a παῖς. Citing Hippocrates, Philo (*Opif. Mundi* 105) notes that the term παῖς designates a youth between nine and fourteen years of age.

**20:10** The story belongs to the category of resurrection miracles, such as Jesus' raising of the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:11–15), of Jairus's daughter (Luke 8:49–56), and of Lazarus (John 11:38–44), and of the restoration of Dorcas through Peter (Acts 9:36–41).<sup>6174</sup> There is even a striking correspondence to the raising of lads by Elijah and Elisha (1 Kgs 17:21; 2 Kgs 4:34f.) when Paul threw himself over the boy's body (v. 10), just as the prophets had done. In the New Testament, miracles of raising from the dead present an implicit symbolism of the resurrection. In the case of Lazarus it is quite explicit. Indeed, in the present case there are some rather strong linkages with the resurrection. It was Easter time. The Passover had just ended, the season of Jesus' death and resurrection (v. 6). It was the first day of the week, the day of Jesus' resurrection (v. 7); and, given the season, Paul may well have been expounding on that event. The restoration of Eutychus's life was a vivid reminder to the Christians of Troas that the Jesus whom Paul had been preaching was indeed the resurrection and the life.<sup>6185</sup>

**20:11–12** We could draw two conclusions to the Eutychus incident. One focuses on Paul, the other on the lad. The first serves to connect the incident to the larger narrative of Paul's journey (v. 11). Assured of the youth's recovery, Paul returned to the upper room, partook of the Lord's Supper with the other Christians, and evidently shared a larger meal with them.<sup>6196</sup> He then continued his discourse with them until daybreak. Afterwards he departed, since he would soon need to hasten to Assos to catch his ship (v. 13f.). The second conclusion focuses on Eutychus (v. 12). He was taken home fully recovered. Everyone was immeasurably comforted. It was more than comfort. They were encouraged and strengthened in their faith by what they had witnessed that night.<sup>6207</sup>

### **(3) Voyage to Miletus (20:13–16)**

**<sup>13</sup>We went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos, where we were going to take Paul aboard. He had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot. <sup>14</sup>When he met**

<sup>1764</sup> Many interpreters argue that no miracle was intended by this story but that Paul's remark in v. 10 indicates the lad's life was still in him. The significance of the story is seen in Paul's "resourcefulness and commonsense" in the face of the crowd's hysteria. See J. E. Roberts, *The Story of Eutychus*, The Expositor Series 3, 26 (1923): 376–82. Paul's remark in v. 10, however, is almost surely an indication that the lad's life had returned, and v. 9 states flatly that he was "picked up dead," not picked up "as if" dead.

<sup>1865</sup> In a provocative article B. Tremel argues that the whole of Acts 20:7–12 is penetrated by a rich symbolism around the brightness of the room and the preaching of Paul, contrasted by the sleepiness of the lad and his resultant "fall" into darkness and death ("A propos d'Actes 20, 7–12: Puissance du Thaumaturge ou du Témoin?" *RTP* 112 [1980]: 359–69).

<sup>1966</sup> Verse 11 seems to reflect two meals, the Lord's Supper (the "breaking of bread") and a further meal, which he "ate" (γεύομαι, "tasted").

<sup>2067</sup> The word translated "comforted" in the NIV of v. 12 is παρακαλέω, an important NT word that often means *to encourage, to strengthen*. It is the same verb used in 20:1 for Paul's "encouraging" the disciples at Ephesus and in 20:2 for his speaking words of encouragement to the Macedonians. Paul's encouraging and strengthening of the Christians at Troas was especially through the miracle involving Eutychus.

us at Assos, we took him aboard and went on to Mitylene. <sup>15</sup>The next day we set sail from there and arrived off Kios. The day after that we crossed over to Samos, and on the following day arrived at Miletus. <sup>16</sup>Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost.

**20:13–16** Paul's journey resumed with the collection delegation, including Luke as narrator, setting sail from Troas to Assos (v. 13).<sup>6218</sup> Perhaps they took a smaller vessel that ran close to the coast, intending to look for a seagoing ship to Palestine at Miletus. Paul did not at first accompany them but chose to go by foot to Assos, an easy journey of around twenty miles. The boat would have had to round Cape Lectum in order to reach Assos, a longer and more difficult route than the land route. This likely made it possible for Paul to catch up with the boat there. Just why Paul did not depart with the boat at Troas is not specified. He may not have relished the difficult voyage around the Cape, or he may have wished to spend the last possible moment at Troas, or perhaps the incident with Eutychus had delayed him.

The journey from Troas to Miletus is given with exceptional detail. It seems to have taken about five days' sailing time, with each port given representing a day's journey. They evidently put into port each night. The winds usually died during the night, and the rocky coastal area was more favorable to daytime sailing.<sup>6229</sup> From Assos their voyage took them to Mitylene, the chief city of the island of Lesbos, located on the eastern shore of the island. The next day's voyage took them just offshore of the island of Kios, which was famed as the birthplace of the poet Homer. The following day they passed by the island of Samos, the birthplace of the "founder of mathematics," Pythagoras.<sup>7230</sup> On the final day they sailed to Miletus, a major Asian city in Paul's day which lay on the south shore of the Latonian gulf at the mouth of the river Maeander.<sup>7241</sup>

Verse 16 presents something of a puzzle, explaining that Paul had decided to avoid stopping at Ephesus in his haste to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost.<sup>7252</sup> The next verse then tells how he sent for the elders at Ephesus to come to him at Miletus. Miletus was some thirty miles or so from Ephesus, and the main coastal road was somewhat longer. It has been estimated that the time involved in sending a messenger and for the elders to come would have taken perhaps five

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<sup>2168</sup> Like Troas, Assos was located in Mysia. It was south of Troas and somewhat east at the mouth of the gulf of Adramytium.

<sup>2269</sup> See W. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen* (1897; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 293.

<sup>2370</sup> Παρεβάλομεν in v. 15 is not altogether clear. It may indicate that they "stopped at" Samos, but more likely it means they "passed by" the island. The Western text adds after "Samos" the words "staying at Trogyllium." This is possibly the original reading. The Trogyllium was a promontory from the mainland adjacent to the southeast side of Samos, forming a narrow passage between the mainland and the island, which was scarcely a mile wide.

<sup>2471</sup> See D. Boyd, "Miletus," *IDBSup*, 597f.

<sup>2572</sup> Chronologically, the reference to Pentecost is quite appropriate. Allowing for the seven days of unleavened bread spent in Philippi, the five days to Troas, the week in Troas, and the five days to Miletus, Paul would have arrived in Miletus about halfway between Passover and Pentecost. When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, however, there was no further mention of it being the time of Pentecost.

days. Saving time would not likely have been the primary factor in Paul's avoiding Ephesus. It may be that it was not safe for him to go to Ephesus at this time (cf. 2 Cor 1:8–11). It also may be that he was tied to his ship's schedule, with Miletus, not Ephesus, as the port of call. Or it may be that Paul simply thought that if he visited Ephesus there would be no way to tear himself away quickly from the Christians there. It would be more expeditious to have the leaders come to him.

#### ***(4) Farewell Address to the Ephesian Elders (20:17–35)***

**<sup>17</sup>From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. <sup>18</sup>When they arrived, he said to them: “You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. <sup>19</sup>I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. <sup>20</sup>You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. <sup>21</sup>I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.**

**<sup>22</sup>“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. <sup>23</sup>I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. <sup>24</sup>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.**

**<sup>25</sup>“Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. <sup>26</sup>Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. <sup>27</sup>For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. <sup>28</sup>Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. <sup>29</sup>I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. <sup>30</sup>Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. <sup>31</sup>So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.**

**<sup>32</sup>“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. <sup>33</sup>I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. <sup>34</sup>You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. <sup>35</sup>In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ ”**

Paul's address to the Ephesian elders is the third and final example in Acts of his speeches during the course of his missionary work. The first, delivered in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch (13:16–41), was given during the course of his first mission and was to a Jewish audience. The second, delivered before the Athenian Areopagus (17:22–31), was given during

his second mission and was to a Gentile audience. The Miletus address was delivered in the course of his third mission and was given before a Christian gathering.<sup>7263</sup>

Of all Paul's speeches in Acts, the Miletus address has the most in common with Paul's epistles. There are many parallels both in wording and in general thought. This striking similarity may be due to the fact that this address is not a missionary sermon or a legal defense as with his other addresses in Acts. It is delivered to Christians and thus has more affinity to the epistles, which were also addressed to Christians. In form the address can be characterized as a "farewell address." It is delivered as a conscious final legacy of the apostle to the leaders of the Asian church. Paul did not expect to return. As a farewell speech it has much in common with similar speeches in both the Old and New Testaments. Examples are Jacob's legacy to his sons in Gen 49, Joshua's farewell address to Israel in Josh 23–24, and Samuel's farewell to the nation in 1 Sam 12.<sup>7274</sup> New Testament examples include Jesus' words to his disciples at the last supper (Luke 22:14–38; John 13–17). The most striking parallels to the Miletus speech are Paul's words to Timothy in 1 Tim 4:1–16 and 2 Tim 3:1–4:8.<sup>7285</sup> Certain common features characterize these addresses: the assembling of the family or followers, the note that the speaker will soon depart or die, sometimes an appeal to the personal example of the speaker, exhortations to desired behavior on the part of the hearers, and often a prediction of coming times of trial and difficulty.<sup>7296</sup> All of these features are present in Paul's Miletus address. Although delivered specifically to the Ephesian elders, it is a suitable legacy from the apostle for *all* his churches as he left his field of mission and challenged the church leaders to continue in his footsteps.<sup>7307</sup>

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<sup>2673</sup> For extensive treatments of the Miletus address, see J. Dupont, *Le Discours de Milet: Testament pastoral de Saint Paul (Actes 20:18–36)*, Lectio divina 32 (Paris: Cerf, 1962); H. J. Michel, *Die Abschiedsrede des Paulus an die Kirche, Apg. 20, 17–38* (München: Kösel, 1973); H. Schürmann, "Das Testament des Paulus für die Kirche, Apg. 20, 18–35," in *Unio Christianorum: Festschrift für L. Jäger*, ed. O. Schilling and H. Zimmermann (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1962), 108–46.

<sup>2774</sup> The form is particularly common in the late Jewish literature. Examples are *The Assumption of Moses* and *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*.

<sup>2875</sup> L. R. Donelson argues that the parallels between the Miletus address and the Letters to Timothy reflect an Ephesian tradition of a legacy left to them by Paul ("Cult Histories and the Sources of Acts," *Bib* 68 [1987]: 1–21).

<sup>2976</sup> For a full treatment of the farewell discourse form, see J. Munck, "Discours d'adieu dans le Nouveau Testament et dans la littérature biblique," *Aux Sources de la Tradition Chrétienne: Mélanges Maurice Goguel*, ed. O. Cullmann and P. Menoud (Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1950), 155–70.

<sup>3077</sup> That the Miletus address marks the culminating point of the entire Pauline mission and is intended as a legacy for the whole postapostolic church is argued by J. Lambrecht, "Paul's Farewell Address at Miletus (Acts 20, 17–38)," in *Les Actes des Apôtres: Traditions, rédaction, théologie*, ed. J. Kremer (Gembloux: Duculot, 1979), 308–37. For a similar view, see O. Knoch, *Die 'Testamente' des Petrus und Paulus* (Stuttgart: KBW, 1973), 32–43; P. R. Tragan, "Les 'Destinataires' du Discours de Milet," *A Cause de l'Évangile* (Paris: Cerf, 1985), 779–98.



The Miletus address is not easy to outline. Basically the speech falls into two main portions: Paul's relationship with the Ephesians—his ministry among them, his present plans, and his future prospects (vv. 18–27)—and his exhortation to them for their role as church leaders (vv. 28–35). The following discussion follows a fourfold division: (1) Paul's review of his past example in ministering to them (vv. 18–21), (2) Paul's consideration of his future prospects (vv. 22–27), (3) his warning to the elders to be on guard against future false teachings (vv. 28–31), and (4) a commitment of their ministry to God and final admonition to follow his example (vv. 32–35). Verse 17 provides an introduction to the speech, noting the assembling of the elders in response to Paul's invitation.<sup>7318</sup> Paul's speech follows directly.

#### PAUL'S PAST EXAMPLE (20:18–21)

**20:18–19** The opening section of Paul's address reminded the elders how Paul had conducted himself during the whole time of his ministry with them (v. 18). He pointed to three basic characteristics of his ministry. First was the humility that had marked his service for the Lord (v. 19). Paul's language here is reminiscent of his epistles. He often spoke of "serving" (*douleuō*) the Lord (cf. 1 Thess 1:9; Col 3:24) and described himself as a servant or "bond-slave" (*doulos*) of Christ (cf. Rom 1:1; Gal 1:10; Phil 1:1). The proper demeanor of a servant is "humility" (*tapeinophrosynē*), and Paul frequently pointed to that quality as a major hallmark of the Christian life (Phil 2:3; Col 3:12; Eph 4:2). It is striking that Paul reminded the Ephesian elders of his trials through the plots of the Jews. The narrative of his Ephesian ministry in Acts does not relate any specific Jewish plot against him, although such plots occur frequently in the overall story of Paul's mission—at Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Thessalonica, Berea, and Corinth. The most recent plot was ultimately responsible for his presence at Miletus at this time, causing him to change his original plan to sail directly to Syria from Corinth (20:3).

**20:20** A second characteristic of Paul's ministry was the openness of his proclamation (v. 20). He kept no secrets, held nothing back. Whatever was true to the gospel and helpful to the faithful, he preached both publicly and from house to house. Mention of public proclamation recalls Paul's days in the synagogue of Ephesus and the lecture hall of Tyrannus (19:8f.). The reference to houses most likely is to the house-church meetings of the Ephesian Christians. In contrast, some were not so open in their witness, i.e., false teachers who advocated hidden and secret doctrines. Paul warned the Ephesian leaders later in his speech that such would arise to plague their own church (v. 29f.). He reminded them of the honesty and openness of his own preaching. When one was faithful to the truth, there was nothing to hide.

**20:21** The final characteristic of Paul's ministry was the inclusiveness of his witness. He had preached to everyone, both Jews and Greeks (v. 21). No one had been left out. This had indeed been the case in Ephesus (19:10). Paul saw his own special calling as being the apostle to the Gentiles, but he never abandoned the synagogue. Perhaps more clearly than anyone else in the church of his day, Paul saw the full implications of his monotheism. God is the God of all. In Christ he reaches out for the salvation of all who will trust in him. There is no distinction (cf.

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<sup>3178</sup> Acts is extremely scanty with its information on church organization. At this early stage, how were the Ephesian elders appointed? Perhaps much as in 14:23, with Paul appointing them and the church approving the appointment in a formal commitment service.

Rom 3:29f.). There is no room for exclusivism in the gospel in the sense that the gospel is for Gentiles and Jews, slaves and free, and men and women. The gospel itself is, however, exclusive in its claims, “for there is no other name under heaven ... by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Salvation is available only in the name of Jesus.

The description of the gospel could hardly be more “Pauline” than as stated in 20:21. It is to repent, to turn from one’s former life to God and to “believe,” to place one’s trust in Jesus.

Commentators sometimes remark that Paul appears to have been on the defensive in his Miletus address. Such was not the case. Paul was not defending his ministry. He was presenting it as an example for the Ephesian leaders to emulate. It is a worthy example for every servant of the Lord: a ministry marked by humility, openness, and inclusiveness and rooted in the gospel.

#### PAUL’S FUTURE PROSPECTS (20:22–27)

**20:22–23** Having reminded the Ephesian leaders of his example during his presence with them, Paul now prepared them for his absence. Paul was leaving them and was on his way to Jerusalem, not knowing what would happen to him there (v. 22). He evidently had first decided to take this course while still in Ephesus (cf. 19:21). He was going to Jerusalem with the collection, and he did indeed have serious misgivings about how it would be received there and was fully aware that the enterprise involved some personal risk (cf. Rom 15:31). Under the compulsion of the Spirit, Paul was going to Jerusalem. On the other hand, the Spirit was warning him that “in every city” hardships, even imprisonment, awaited him (v. 23). Some of these warnings were given through other Christians and are related in the subsequent narrative (cf. 21:4, 11). The activity of the Spirit could be seen as contradictory here. On the one hand, Paul was driven on to Jerusalem. On the other hand, he was warned of the extreme risk in going there. These messages of the Spirit were not at odds. Paul was indeed being led to Jerusalem. God had a purpose for his going there. The warnings prepared him for what awaited him in Jerusalem and assured him that whatever happened, God was in it. Paul would undergo severe trials in Jerusalem, but through them he would ultimately bear his witness in Rome, which was his own heart’s desire (cf. 19:21; Rom 1:9f.).

**20:24** In v. 24 Paul stated the reason he was willing to face the dangers in Jerusalem. He was ready to surrender his life for the gospel. In his epistles Paul often stated his readiness to suffer, even to die, for Christ.<sup>7329</sup> The description of his ministry as running a footrace is also common in his letters.<sup>8330</sup> The most striking parallel is with 2 Tim 4:7, where the phrase “finished the race” also appears. The race that Paul was running was the ministry he had received from Jesus. That ministry is described as his testimony to the “gospel of God’s grace.” Oddly, that exact phrase never occurs in the epistles of Paul. One could scarcely summarize the heart of Paul’s message better than the “good news of God’s grace.”

**20:25–27** Paul now gave his farewell to the Ephesian elders. They would never see his face again (v. 25).<sup>8341</sup> Paul was on his way to Jerusalem. Danger awaited him there. Even apart from

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<sup>3279</sup> Cf. 2 Cor 4:7–12; 6:4–10; 12:9f.; Phil 1:20f.; 2:17; 3:8; Col 1:24.

<sup>3380</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 9:24–27; Gal 2:2; Phil 2:16; 3:13f.

<sup>3481</sup> The question of whether the Pastoral Epistles indicate that Paul did eventually return to Ephesus is separate from the present text. At this point Paul did not seem to have anticipated further work in the east. Many interpreters (e.g., G. Krodel, *Acts*, ACNT

the danger, Paul had completed his work in the east and now turned to a new mission in the west (cf. Rom 15:23f.). He concluded this portion of the speech with the statement that he was innocent of the blood of all because he had proclaimed the full will of God (v. 26f.). Here he seems to draw from the “watchman” analogy of Ezek 33:1–6.<sup>8352</sup> The watchman fulfills his task when he blows the warning trumpet in the face of danger. Once he has sounded his warning, he is no longer responsible for the lives of those he is appointed to warn. Paul had preached the full gospel, the whole will of God. He had called people to repentance. Now the responsibility rested with them. Again this remark is not to be seen so much as Paul’s defense of himself as an example to the Ephesian leaders. They were to do what Paul had done before them, herald the gospel and call to repentance. This is the task of a Christian witness, to proclaim the full will of God. Witnesses can do no more. The response is not theirs but the hearer’s responsibility.

#### PAUL’S WARNING OF FUTURE HERESIES (20:28–31)

**20:28–31** The third section of Paul’s address exhorts the Ephesian leaders to be vigilant shepherds over the flock of God, warning of savage wolves who would arise in the future to prey upon it. The clear function of v. 28 in this appeal is to give a basic charge to the elders to be watchful overseers of their charge. It is important to notice, however, that Paul’s first exhortation to the elders called for them to “guard themselves.”

A number of details in v. 28 make it perhaps the most discussed part of the entire speech. The first of these has to do with the role of the Holy Spirit, who is described as having “made” or “placed” them as leaders over the flock. The question arises about the manner of appointment. As noted previously (n. <sup>7368</sup>), Paul may have appointed the first elders himself; but this responsibility soon would have gone over to the congregation if this was indeed not the case from the first. How would the Holy Spirit’s activity fit into such a pattern? Most likely the reference here indicates that church office was viewed more functionally than formally. Those who were recognized by the congregation as having been gifted by the Spirit for a particular role were selected for that responsibility (cf. Eph 4:11f.; also Acts 11:22–26; 13:2–3).

A second major issue in v. 28 is the meaning of the word *episkopos*, which is translated “overseer” in the NIV but which has often been translated “bishop.” A monarchical bishop ruling over a number of congregations is clearly not in view. Such an organization does not seem to have developed until the second century. In the New Testament, where the term *episkopos* is used of a church office, it seems to be virtually interchangeable with the term “elder”

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[Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986], 387) see v. 25 as a reflection of Paul’s martyrdom, written after the fact. Others would argue the opposite, noting the evidence of the Pastorals that Paul did eventually return to Ephesus and concluding that Luke’s inclusion of this statement reflects his accuracy in preserving Paul’s words to the Ephesian elders even though his plans later changed.

<sup>3582</sup> See comments on 18:6.

<sup>3678</sup> Acts is extremely scanty with its information on church organization. At this early stage, how were the Ephesian elders appointed? Perhaps much as in 14:23, with Paul appointing them and the church approving the appointment in a formal commitment service.

(*presbyteros*).<sup>8373</sup> That would seem to be the case here, since the Ephesian leaders are denoted “elders” in v. 17. In this instance, however, the term may not be used to denote an office at all but rather a function—that of overseeing the flock. This would seem to be indicated by the juxtaposition of the term “shepherd” to “overseer” in v. 28 and by the fact that the Septuagint sometimes used the term *episkopos* for shepherds.<sup>8384</sup> Thus, the Ephesian leaders were not designated as bishops but rather as elders who functioned to “watch over the flock of God.” This image of the leaders as shepherds of God’s flock permeates all of vv. 28–30 and is a common biblical theme.<sup>8395</sup>

A final major problem in v. 28 is both text-critical and interpretive. It involves the final clause: “Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” The problem is the very striking statement that *God* purchased the church with his own blood. The reference is surely to the atoning blood of Jesus shed on the cross.<sup>8406</sup> It is quite possible to denote this as “God’s blood” from the perspective of sound Trinitarian doctrine, but such an expression is really quite unlike anything else in the New Testament.<sup>8417</sup> A number of significant manuscripts read “church of the Lord,” which removes the difficulty; but the reading “church of God” seems to be the more likely original reading.<sup>8428</sup> It is possible to argue that “God” is not the intended antecedent but rather Christ, “implicitly,” but that is not likely. Another possibility, favored by many recent translations and commentaries, is to translate the final phrase “with the blood of his own,” “his own” referring to Christ, God’s own beloved Son. This is grammatically arguable

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<sup>3783</sup> This seems to be the case in Phil 1:1 and in the Pastorals (cf. 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:7). See J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians* (London: Macmillan, 1873), 93–97, 189–96. See also P. Livingstone, “The Word *episkopos* in Pre-Christian Usage,” *ATR* 21 (1939): 103–12.

<sup>3884</sup> The cognate verb *episkeptomai* is used of a shepherd in the LXX of Ezek 34:11f. In fact, Paul may have been drawing from Ezek 33–34 throughout this portion of his speech. As already noted, the watchman motif of Ezek 33:1–6 seems to lie behind v. 26. The theme of negligent shepherds and ravaging beasts runs throughout Ezek 34 and is found in vv. 29–30. See E. Lovestam, “Paul’s Address at Miletus,” *ST* 41 (1987): 1–10.

<sup>3985</sup> Cf. Ezek 34:12–16; Jer 23:2; Zech 10:3; 11:4–17; John 10:1–18; 21:15–17; 1 Pet 2:25; 5:2.

<sup>4086</sup> This is the only clear instance in Acts where a redemptive, atoning sense is given to the work of Christ. See C. F. D. Moule, “The Christology of Acts,” *Studies in Luke-Acts* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 171; K. N. Giles, “Luke’s Use of the Term ‘Ekklesia,’” *NTS* 31 (1985): 135–42.

<sup>4187</sup> Catholic scholars seem to have less trouble than Protestant scholars with the concept of Christ’s blood as “God’s blood.” See C. F. Devine, “The ‘Blood of God’ in Acts 20:28,” *CBQ* 9 (1947): 381–408.

<sup>4288</sup> There is perhaps a slight balance of external witnesses in favor of “church of God,” with  $\alpha$  and B having that reading. Internal probability is the primary consideration. One could picture a scribe altering “church of God” to the easier “church of the Lord,” but not the reverse.

and perhaps the best solution for those who find the reference to “God’s own blood” unlikely for Paul or for Acts.

**20:29–31** The shepherd imagery is continued in vv. 29–30 with Paul warning the Ephesian elders of a time to come when religious predators would ravage the flock of God. They would arise both from outside and inside the church. The term “savage wolves” describes the false teachers from without (v. 29). The term “wolves” often appears in the Jewish apocalyptic literature and in early Christian writings to describe false teachers and prophets.<sup>8439</sup> The early Christian writings appear to be influenced by Jesus’ warning against false prophets who come in sheep’s clothing (Matt 7:15). That false teachers did soon arise to prey upon the Asian churches is well attested by Eph 5:6–14 and Col 2:8 as well as by the Letter to Ephesus in Rev 2:2. The Letters to Timothy, which related to the Ephesian church, confirm Paul’s prediction that some from the church’s own ranks would succumb to such false doctrines and draw other Christians with them (v. 30).<sup>9440</sup> By the second century Asia was a virtual seedbed for Christian heresy. Paul’s warning was thus timely and essential. It is not by chance that this section both opens and closes with an exhortation to vigilance (vv. 28, 31), and Paul’s reference to his three-year ministry with the Ephesians<sup>9451</sup> was not just a reminder of his warnings but also an appeal to be faithful to the sound teachings he had brought them (cf. 20:20f.).

#### PAUL’S BLESSING AND FINAL ADMONITION (20:32–35)

**20:32** The conclusion to Paul’s Miletus address includes both a benediction upon the elders (v. 32) and a final exhortation to follow his exemplary conduct (vv. 33–35). In his benediction Paul committed the leaders to “the word of [God’s] grace,” i.e., to the truth of the gospel that has God’s saving grace at its center (cf. v. 24). The language is again strongly reminiscent of Paul’s epistles. The reference to “those who are sanctified” (*hēgiasmenois*) reflects Paul’s favorite designation of Christians as “the saints” (*hoi hagioi*), those who have been “sanctified,” i.e., “set apart” as God’s people in Christ. He likewise often spoke of the future life of the Christian in terms of sharing in an inheritance (*klēronomian*).<sup>9462</sup> In v. 32 Paul passed on the banner to the Ephesian elders to continue to lead the church after his departure, urging them above all to be faithful to his gospel in the light of the coming threats.

**20:33–35** There was, however, one matter of personal conduct of prime importance he had not yet treated; and he ended on this note (vv. 33–35). In a real sense he ended as he had begun (vv. 18–21), pointing to his own deportment in ministry as an example for them to emulate. The matter in question was the leaders’ relationship to material goods. Paul’s detachment from material gain is well-documented in his epistles. He never used his ministry as

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<sup>4389</sup> Cf. 4 Ezra 5:18; 1 Enoch 89:13ff.; *Didache* 16:3; Ignatius, *To the Philadelphians* 2:2, 2 *Clement* 5:2–5; Justin, *Dialogue* 35:3; and *Apology* 1:16:13. See G. W. H. Lampe, “‘Grievous Wolves’ (Acts 20:29),” *Christ and the Spirit in the New Testament*, ed. B. Lindars and S. Smalley (Cambridge: University Press, 1973), 253–68.

<sup>4490</sup> Cf. 1 Tim 1:19f.; 4:1–3; 2 Tim 1:15; 2:17f.; 3:1–9.

<sup>4591</sup> For the three-year chronology, see commentary on 19:10.

<sup>4692</sup> E.g., Rom 8:17; Col 1:12; Eph 1:14, 18; 5:5; cf. Acts 26:18.

a “mask to cover up greed” (1 Thess 2:5).<sup>9473</sup> At Corinth he supported himself with his own hands (Acts 18:2f.; cf. 1 Cor 4:12; 9:12, 15; 2 Cor 11:7; 12:13). The same was true at Thessalonica (1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:7–8). Verse 34 would indicate that he followed the same pattern of self-support at Ephesus. In his epistles Paul exhorted his Christian readers to follow his example and work with their own hands, not being dependent on others (1 Thess 4:11; 2 Thess 3:9). In the Miletus speech Paul gave the additional incentive that such hard work put one in the position to help the weak. In his epistles he showed a similar concern that Christians help the weak and needy, that they share in one another’s burdens (cf. Rom 15:1; 1 Thess 5:14; Eph 4:28; Gal 6:2). Greed is a universal human problem, and church leaders are not exempt (cf. the exhortation in v. 28 for church leaders to “watch yourselves”). That avarice among church leaders was a real problem in Asia Minor seems to be attested by the Pastoral Epistles, in which Paul insisted that a major qualification for church leaders should be their detachment from the love of money (1 Tim 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7, 11). It may well be that the false teachers were particularly marked by their greed (cf. 1 Tim 6:3–10).

The saying of Jesus with which Paul concluded his address should be seen in light of this context: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”<sup>9484</sup> Paul applied this rule to the specific problem of avarice among church leaders. The minister is to be a servant, a giver and not a taker.<sup>9495</sup> Acquisitiveness has been the downfall for many a servant of God. This word of the Lord as applied by Paul is sound ministerial advice. The one who leads the flock of God should focus on the needs of others, be more concerned with giving than with acquiring. Paul had begun his address by listing the qualities of his own ministry as an example for the Ephesian leaders to follow. He concluded with a final quality he had sought to model. Perhaps he held it off to the end because he saw it as the most essential of all for a legitimate ministry.

##### **(5) Final Leave-Taking (20:36–38)**

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<sup>4793</sup> There were three main forms of wealth in the ancient world: precious metals, food-stuffs, and clothing. Two of these are mentioned in v. 33 (cf. 2 Kgs 5:22f.; 1 Macc 11:24). All three seem to be included in Jas 5:2f. (foodstuffs “rot”).

<sup>4894</sup> It is striking that this logion is not included among Jesus’ sayings in the four Gospels. It has rather extensive parallels in Greek literature (cf. Plutarch, *Moralia* 2.173d, 778c; Thucydides, 2.97.4; Seneca, *Epistles* 81.17). The thought is also found in the Jewish tradition (cf. Sirach 4:31). It seems to be a question of a proverbial statement. Similar thought is found in the gospel tradition, and the emphasis on giving is found frequently in the sayings of Jesus (cf. Luke 6:30, 38; 11:41; 12:33; 18:22). See R. Balgarnie, “Acts xx.35,” *ExpTim* 19 (1907–08): 522f.

<sup>4995</sup> “Receiving” can be a gracious act, and to refuse the well-intentioned gift of another can be an insult or even a rejection of that person. The saying should not be seen as a judgment against gracious receiving but rather against acquisitiveness, against actively “taking” for oneself, a common meaning for λαμβάνω. The emphasis in any event is on giving. See R. Roberts, “The Beatitude of Giving and Receiving,” *ExpTim* 48 (1936–37): 438–41.

<sup>36</sup>When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. <sup>37</sup>They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. <sup>38</sup>What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

**20:36–38** Paul's address concluded, the apostle and the elders joined in prayer together. The prayer surely included a commitment of the elders to the Lord in their leadership of the church in Paul's absence and for Paul's safe journey and deliverance in Jerusalem. Then there was a lengthy and emotional farewell, the elders embracing and kissing the apostle. Their embracing is described literally as "falling upon his neck" in language reminiscent of the patriarchal narratives.<sup>9506</sup> All the Greek tenses are imperfect, which would indicate that their parting was lengthy. Their sorrow was greatest over Paul's statement that they would not see him again (v. 38; cf. v. 25). Then they "sent him forth" (*proepempon*) to the ship. *Propempō* is used of accompanying or escorting people to their point of departure and often has the additional nuance of giving them food and provisions for their journey. That may well have been the case in this instance.

This section provides a transition between the Miletus speech and Paul's journey to Jerusalem. On the one hand, it concludes Paul's Ephesian ministry with its final farewell to the leaders of the church. For that matter it is the conclusion to his entire ministry in the east. From now on the focus would be on Rome. This section also links up with the narrative of Paul's journey to Jerusalem that follows immediately (21:1–16). The ominous tone set by the elders' concern over not seeing the apostle again would continue and even be heightened in the course of that journey.

#### **(6) Voyage to Jerusalem (21:1–16)**

<sup>1</sup>After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Cos. The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. <sup>2</sup>We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. <sup>3</sup>After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. <sup>4</sup>Finding the disciples there, we stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. <sup>5</sup>But when our time was up, we left and continued on our way. All the disciples and their wives and children accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. <sup>6</sup>After saying good-bye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home.

<sup>7</sup>We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for a day. <sup>8</sup>Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. <sup>9</sup>He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

<sup>10</sup>After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. <sup>11</sup>Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.' "

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<sup>5096</sup> Cf. Gen 33:4; 45:14; 46:29.

<sup>12</sup>When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem.  
<sup>13</sup>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.” <sup>14</sup>When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, “The Lord’s will be done.”  
<sup>15</sup>After this, we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. <sup>16</sup>Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Mnason, where we were to stay. He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples.

After the parting scene at Miletus, Paul resumed his final voyage to Jerusalem. At this point the journey motif is quite pronounced with a detailed listing of the ports and stopping points along the way. The most striking characteristic of this section is the warning from Paul’s fellow Christians of the dangers that awaited him in Jerusalem. This is a continuation of the emphasis that began in 20:22f., where Paul told the Ephesian elders how the Spirit was leading him to Jerusalem and of the possible dangers that awaited him there. This “journey motif” is strongly reminiscent of Jesus’ final journey to Jerusalem in the Synoptic Gospels. The same forebodings marked Jesus’ journey—the same strong resolve on Jesus’ part, the same misgivings on the part of his disciples. In the Gospels Jesus’ predictions of his coming passion provide the ominous tone. For Paul’s journey the warnings of the Christians along his way serve this function. In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus’ journey is particularly marked by sayings regarding Jerusalem as the place of rejection for God’s messengers.<sup>9517</sup> In Jerusalem Jesus was arrested and executed. In Jerusalem Paul also was arrested and his life put in extreme jeopardy.

#### WARNING AT TYRE (21:1–6)

**21:1–3** Luke described the journey from Miletus to Tyre in considerable detail, naming each point along their route.<sup>9528</sup> Evidently they took a coasting vessel from Miletus. Their first stopping place was Cos, an island off the Asian mainland about forty miles south of Miletus.<sup>9539</sup> Cos was also the name of the capital city of the island, and they probably put in for the night there. The next day they traveled to the island of Rhodes and put in at its main city, which was also named Rhodes, located at the northeastern extremity of the island closest to the mainland.<sup>10540</sup> The coasting vessel took them the next day to Patara on the Lycian mainland, which was the main port city and capital of the province. Since coasting vessels were not large enough for travel on the open sea, they evidently changed at Patara to a seagoing vessel in

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<sup>5197</sup> Cf. Luke 13:33f.; 18:31f.; 21:20–24.; 23:28–31. See J. Kelsey, “The Function of the Jerusalem Oracles in the Gospel of Luke,” Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, 1990.

<sup>5298</sup> Note the “we” narrative throughout Paul’s journey to Jerusalem. It begins at 20:5, breaks off at 20:15 for Paul’s Miletus address, and then runs throughout 21:1–18, ending with Paul’s arrival in Jerusalem.

<sup>5399</sup> Cos was an ancient town, first settled by Dorian Greeks and famous for its medical school, established by Hippocrates in the fifth century B.C.

<sup>54100</sup> The city of Rhodes was established in 408 B.C. as the consolidation of three earlier towns. A major center of trade, Rhodes was given the status of a free city by the Romans.



order to make the direct journey to Phoenicia.<sup>10551</sup> The journey from Patara to Tyre was approximately 400 miles by a straight course and generally took five days or so under favorable winds. Luke mentioned their sighting the island of Cyprus, which would have been the only land one would view on the open-sea voyage from the Lycian coast to Phoenicia (v. 3).<sup>10562</sup> Tyre was the main port for merchant traffic between Asia and Palestine, and it was thus quite natural that Paul's ship put in there to unload its cargo.<sup>10573</sup>

**21:4** At Tyre, Paul and his traveling companions found the Christian community. The Greek term used (*aneuriskō*) would indicate that they were previously unacquainted with them and had to "seek them out." Most likely the Christian community in Tyre had been established by the Hellenist mission to Phoenicia mentioned in Acts 11:19. Evidently the direct open-sea voyage had saved Paul sufficient time for him to spend a week with the Christians at Tyre and still fulfill his desire to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost (cf. 20:16). During this visit, the Tyrian Christians "through the Spirit" urged Paul not to go to Jerusalem (v. 4). This note has already been struck in Paul's Miletus address, where he indicated to the Ephesian leaders that the Spirit had alerted him to the fact that imprisonment and hardships awaited him in Jerusalem (20:23). Still, the same Spirit was driving him to the city (20:22).

The seeming conflict in the Spirit's directions is even more pronounced here with the note that the Tyrians *under the influence of the Spirit* urged Paul not to go. Obviously the Spirit would not be giving Paul two contradictory messages at the same time. The most likely solution is to see Paul's resolution to go to Jerusalem as the primary emphasis. Paul was absolutely convinced that God was leading him to the city. On the other hand, the warnings along the way prepared Paul for the imprisonment and hardship that did indeed befall him there, fortified him for the experience, and convinced him that God was in it all. This was not at all difficult for Paul to accept. Paul certainly never sought out difficulty. He had no martyr complex. On the other hand, he accepted suffering as a part of his witness and often alluded to this in his letters.<sup>10584</sup> The words of the Tyrians are best understood as part of Paul's preparation for the difficult events in Jerusalem. The Spirit's role is best seen as informing them of those coming hardships for the apostle. Their very natural reaction was to urge him not to go. Their failure to deter him only

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<sup>55101</sup> The Western text adds the words "and Myra" after "Patara" in v. 1. Myra lay a day's journey farther east on the Lycian coast. Since it was the main port of departure for voyages to Phoenicia, many interpreters are inclined to see the Western text as the more original reading on this point. See Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller*, 297–300.

<sup>56102</sup> Verse 3 switches from the term "Phoenicia" to "Syria" as their destination. The terms were interchangeable. Phoenicia is the more specific designation, referring to the coastal strip that ran from the river Eleutherus in the north to Mt. Carmel in the south, roughly between the cities of Tyre and Ptolemais. The area had been annexed by the Romans in 64 B.C. and later consolidated into the province of Syria. The administrative area was designated as the province of "Syria and Phoenicia," a term often found in inscriptions (Latin, *Syrie et Phoenice*).

<sup>57103</sup> Under the Romans, Tyre had the status of a free city. A major commercial center, it was particularly known for its purple-dye industry.

<sup>58104</sup> Among the many passages that could be cited are Rom 8:17; 2 Cor 4:7–12; 6:4–10; 11:23–29; 12:10; Col 1:24f.

heightens the emphasis on Paul's firm conviction that God was leading him to Jerusalem and had a purpose for him there.<sup>10595</sup>

**21:5–6** Paul's leave-taking at Tyre is given in considerable detail (vv. 5–6) and recalls his parting with the Ephesian elders (21:36–38). The scene is filled with emotion. *All* the disciples accompanied Paul to the boat; and kneeling in the soft sand of the beach,<sup>10606</sup> they prayed. In one of the few references to children in Acts, Luke noted that all the members of the Christian families of Tyre joined Paul for his farewell. The reference to prayer is not incidental. Everyone was fully aware of the difficulties facing Paul at Jerusalem. They were also aware that prayer was the disciple's best fortification in a time of suffering and trial. The good-byes were prolonged. The Tyrian Christians did not want to part with the apostle in the face of his ominous future. They did not want to lose him. Still, they accepted Paul's conviction that he must continue his journey. The inevitable parting time came. Paul's party boarded ship,<sup>10617</sup> and the Tyrian Christians returned home.

#### WARNING OF AGABUS (21:7–14)

**21:7** The next stopping point was Ptolemais, some twenty-five miles south of Tyre, the most southerly of the Phoenician ports. An ancient city, it is referred to as Acco in Judg 1:31, was a famous crusader site known as Acre, and today goes by its ancient name of Acco. It was known as Ptolemais in Roman times, after Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–246 B.C.). Paul spent only a day with the Christians of that city, perhaps again being tied to his ship's schedule.<sup>10628</sup>

**21:8–9** Paul was already familiar with the Christian community of Caesarea (cf. 9:30; 18:22). He perhaps had previously met there Philip the evangelist, who had settled in that city (cf. 8:40). Philip became his host on this occasion (v. 8), and we are given the rather interesting

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<sup>59105</sup> The subsequent narrative reveals the divine purpose behind Paul's journey to Jerusalem. His arrest there provided him a unique opportunity for witness—before a Jewish crowd, the Jewish Sanhedrin, Roman governors, the Jewish king, and implicitly before the Roman emperor himself. Note how in Phil 1:12–18 Paul expressed how his imprisonment had led to an effective door for witness.

<sup>60106</sup> The harbor of Tyre consists of a sandy beach. The city was originally built on a small island just off the mainland. In his siege of the city, Alexander the Great built a causeway connecting the island to the mainland. Eventually sand built up on either side of the causeway, and the harbor was located along this beach.

<sup>61107</sup> It is uncertain whether Paul continued on the same ship that had brought him to Tyre, especially since that ship is said to have unloaded its cargo at Tyre. On the other hand, the definite article's presence in v. 6 ("the ship") would most naturally be taken to mean the ship previously mentioned, i.e., the same ship. In either case, whether the same or a new ship, it may have been sailing schedules that ultimately determined Paul's spending a full week in Tyre.

<sup>62108</sup> Paul possibly traveled by foot from Ptolemais to Caesarea. The verb translated "continued" (NIV) in v. 7 (διανύω) more often means *to finish* and may indicate that the voyage ended at Ptolemais. On the other hand, nautical texts evidence that the verb means *to continue a voyage*. Also the land trip from Ptolemais to Caesarea, though only twenty-seven miles, involved high and difficult terrain around the foot of Mt. Carmel. See *Beginnings* 4:267.

information that he had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. Nothing is made of their gift in the narrative. Later tradition placed them in Asia Minor with their father and saw them as important witnesses and preservers of traditions from the apostolic period.<sup>10639</sup> Perhaps the most significant observation in the present narrative is the testimony that there were women in the early church who were recognized as having the gift of prophecy. In his Gospel, Luke mentioned Anna, who was also a prophetess who foretold the future redemptive role of the infant Jesus (2:36–38).<sup>11640</sup> Peter, in his Pentecost sermon, pointed to the prophesying of “daughters” as a sign of the gift of the Spirit in these last days (Acts 2:17).

**21:10–11** In this instance the prophecy was delivered by Agabus (vv. 10–11). Agabus has appeared previously in Acts, prophesying the coming of famine to Judea and prompting the collection from the Antioch church (11:27–30).<sup>11651</sup> In a symbolic act much like the acted-out prophecies of the Old Testament prophets, Agabus predicted Paul’s coming arrest in Jerusalem.<sup>11662</sup> He took Paul’s girdle, the long cloth that was wound several times around his waist, and bound with it his hands and feet. Then, just like an Old Testament prophet, he gave the interpretation of the act, introduced by the usual, “Thus says the Lord,” here expressed in terms of revelation through the Holy Spirit. Paul would be bound by the Jews of Jerusalem and handed over to the Gentiles. The parallel to the fate of Jesus could hardly be more explicit (cf. Matt 20:18f.; Luke 18:32). This was not so much a warning on Agabus’s part as a prediction. Unlike the Christians of Tyre, he did not urge Paul not to go. Rather, he told him what was in store for him. This was all the more certain when one considers the nature of such prophetic acts in the Old Testament. The act itself set into motion the event it foretold. It established the reality of the event, the certainty that it would occur.<sup>11673</sup> Agabus’s act prepared Paul for the events to come and assured him of God’s presence in those events.

**21:12–13** Much like the Christians of Tyre, Paul’s traveling companions and the Caesarean Christians concluded from this dire prediction that Paul should not go to Jerusalem (v. 12). Luke

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<sup>63109</sup> There is some contradiction in the patristic evidence. Polycrates of Ephesus spoke of three prophesying daughters, two buried with Philip at Hierapolis and one buried in Ephesus (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, 3.31.3; 5.24.2). Montanist tradition, which placed great emphasis on prophecy, spoke of four daughters being buried with Philip at Hierapolis. The fathers tended to equate Philip the evangelist with Philip the apostle. See P. Corssen, “Die Töchter des Philippus,” *ZNW* 2 (1901): 289–99.

<sup>64110</sup> See W. V. Whitney, “Women in Luke: An Application of a Reader-Response Hermeneutic,” Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, 1990, 151–58.

<sup>65111</sup> Agabus is said to have come “from Judea.” Caesarea was administratively within Judea and was actually the center of government for the district. Due to its largely Gentile population, it was often viewed separately from “Judea,” in this case Judea being seen as the “land of the Jews.”

<sup>66112</sup> For symbolic prophecies in the OT, see 1 Kgs 11:29–31; Isa 8:1–4; 20:1–4; Jer 13:1–11; 19:1–13; 27:1–22; Hos 1:2. This is the only complete example in the NT of the form, which includes the symbolic act, the formula “thus says,” and the interpretation of the symbolism.

<sup>67113</sup> See H. Patsch, “Die Prophetie des Agabus,” *TZ* 28 (1972): 228–32.

even included himself by using the narrative “we” as among those who begged the apostle to abandon his plans.<sup>11684</sup> They had no more success than the Tyrians. Paul’s response contains a picturesque image, “Why are you pounding away at my heart?” (author’s translation). The verb (*synthryptō*) was often used of washing clothes and referred to pounding them with stones in order to whiten them.<sup>11695</sup> The well-meant pleas of his Christian friends only heightened the conflict for him. They could not deter him from his firm conviction that the journey was in God’s will. He was indeed willing even to die for his Lord if need be (v. 13).<sup>11706</sup>

**21:14** Paul’s resolve finally dissuaded the other Christians, and they ceased in their attempt to stop his journey. They did not want to lose their leader, but they respected his firm conviction that the journey was within God’s will for him.<sup>11717</sup> If this was God’s will for Paul, then they prayed “the Lord’s will be done.” It was much like Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane. He too did not relish facing the human agony of the cross but nonetheless committed himself wholly to God’s purpose for him—“not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). It is not without reason that many refer to this scene as “Paul’s Gethsemane.”

#### ARRIVAL IN JERUSALEM (21:15–16)

**21:15–16** Paul’s journey was now nearly complete. There remained only the final sixty-four miles between Caesarea and Jerusalem. For this final leg they may have used pack animals.<sup>11728</sup> This is all the more likely when one recalls that they were carrying the sizable collection from Paul’s Gentile churches. It would have been a considerable group making the trip, including Paul and Luke, those delegated by the churches to bear the collection (20:4), and some of the Caesarean Christians (v. 16). Once in Jerusalem, the Caesareans led them to the home of a disciple named Mnason with whom arrangements had been made for their lodging.<sup>11739</sup>

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<sup>68114</sup> The use of the present infinitive in v. 12 has the nuance of “to cease going up to Jerusalem,” to “put a stop” to his plans.

<sup>69115</sup> Some interpreters grasp the “bleaching” aspect of the metaphor and see Paul as imploring the Christians not to tempt him to cowardice, not to “make him yellow.” The emphasis of the verb, however, is on the pounding; and that is the most natural meaning—“breaking my heart.” Paul’s conflict was not over whether or not to go. The prospect of separation from his fellow Christians broke his heart.

<sup>70116</sup> Compare this with Peter’s similar statement in Luke 22:33. Peter did not carry through on his resolve. Paul did. If, however, the early Christian traditions about the martyrdom of the two apostles is correct, both of them did ultimately fulfill these words.

<sup>71117</sup> Ultimately individuals are left to themselves to determine God’s purposes for them. On the other hand, the understanding of others is significant input in seeking to determine those purposes for oneself. The present incident provides an excellent example of that sort of interchange within the Christian community between conflicting understandings of God’s will. See F. Bovon, “Le Saint-Esprit, l’Eglise et les relations humaines selon Actes 20, 36–21, 16,” *Les Actes*, ed. J. Kremer, 339–58.

<sup>72118</sup> The verb for “getting ready” (ἐπισκευάζω) is often used in classical Greek for saddling horses or equipping pack animals. See Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller*, 302.

<sup>73119</sup> The Western text has at the beginning of v. 17 “and departing from there, we arrived at Jerusalem.” This would put Mnason’s home en route between Caesarea and Jerusalem. Some interpreters accept this as the original reading and argue for a

Showing his characteristic interest in hosts,<sup>12740</sup> Luke further described Mnason as a Cypriot and a long-time disciple.<sup>12751</sup>

Paul's third missionary journey was complete, having begun after a visit to "the church" in the holy city (18:22) and now ending there. His Greek mission was also complete. He would not return. Luke had prepared his readers well for this reality. Paul had made the fact clear in his address to the Ephesian elders (20:25). Paul's own forebodings (20:22f.) and those of the Christians at Tyre and Caesarea have prepared us for the events that are about to unfold in Jerusalem. Paul would no longer bear his witness as a free man in the subsequent narrative of Acts. He would be in chains, but the chains would be unable to bind his witness. His witness would indeed become bolder still.

#### **VIII. PAUL WITNESSES BEFORE GENTILES, KINGS, AND THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL (21:17–26:32)**

This long section of Acts could be considered the most tedious portion of the whole book. It consists of seemingly endless legal scenes and has more than its share of speeches. That Luke considered this material of vital importance, however, is indicated by the fact that these chapters constitute the fulfillment of the divine promise given to Paul at the time of his conversion that he would bear the Lord's name before Gentiles, kings, and the people of Israel (9:15). The three major speeches that comprise the framework of this section illustrate the accomplishment of that promise. At the beginning is Paul's witness before a mob in the Jewish temple square (22:1–21). It is in every sense a testimony before the people of Israel. The testimony before Gentiles is seen in the constant conversation between Paul and the Roman officials and particularly in the defense before Felix, which stands at this section's midpoint (24:10–21). Finally, there is the climactic speech before the Jewish titular *King* Agrippa II (26:2–29). Considerable overlap occurs in the content of the speeches. This repetition should be a clue in itself that Luke considered the material to be of vital importance. Indeed, it is in this portion of Acts where the major themes of the entire book come together. In this sense these chapters comprise the climax to Acts.

A useful manner of delineating these themes is to consider the main characters who appear in these chapters. Basically, there are three—Paul, the Roman officials, and the Jews. As for Paul, one could consider this period as the nadir of his career. At the beginning he was nearly

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two-day journey, with Mnason located halfway between Caesarea and Jerusalem. See E. Delebecque, "La dernière étape du Troisième voyage missionnaire de Saint Paul selon les deux versions des Actes des Apôtres (21, 16–17)," *RTL* 14 (1983): 446–55.

<sup>74120</sup> Cf. 9:11, 43; 16:15; 17:5; 18:3, 7; 21:8.

<sup>75121</sup> His Cypriot origin most likely links him with the Greek-speaking "Hellenist" group within the Jerusalem Christian community (cf. 4:36; 11:20). Mnason is a variant of the name Jason, a name often taken by Hellenistic Jews. Some manuscripts have Jason in v. 16.

killed by an angry mob, was placed in chains by the Roman cohort, and thereafter was shunted from one official to another, one place of confinement to another. He was constantly under accusation, continually placed on the defense.

If one looks carefully at Paul's "defense," however, it always appears as more of a witness, a positive testimony to his Christian faith. This is in keeping with the words of 9:15. Paul is not to be seen as having to give his legal defense so much as to bear his witness to the name of the Lord. With this section 23:11 is a key verse. Whomever Paul stood before—whether the Jews, the Roman procurator, or Caesar himself—it was above all to testify for his Lord. In so doing, he fulfilled the commission of Jesus (cf. Luke 21:12–19). The role Paul shared with the Twelve was that of witness. This was perhaps Paul's time of greatest witness. Far from a low point, it was in many respects the high point of Paul's career. His witness had no social or political bounds. He would ultimately testify to Christ before Caesar himself.

As for the Romans, the picture is less consistent. On the one hand, throughout these chapters they are shown as Paul's constant protectors. The Roman tribune Lysias, for instance, rescued him from death at the hands of a Jewish mob (21:33; 23:27), from being torn to shreds in the Sanhedrin (23:10), and from the ambush attempt of forty Jewish Zealots (23:30). The procurator Felix refused to give in to Jewish demands that Paul be turned over to them, which would have meant almost certain condemnation (24:22). He gave Paul a great deal of freedom in his confinement and showed an interest in Paul's message (24:23f.). His successor Festus likewise, though perhaps unwittingly, refused to turn Paul over to Jewish jurisdiction and thereby rescued him from another ambush plot (25:1–5). Ultimately the emperor himself became Paul's protector. When Festus seemed to be inclining more toward the Jewish demands for jurisdiction over Paul, it was the process of appeal to Caesar that assured that this would not happen (25:10–12).

Not only did the Romans protect Paul, but they also constantly testified to his innocence. In sending his report to the procurator, the tribune Lysias stated quite emphatically that he had found "no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment" (23:29). Felix was more indecisive and less committal, but there was in his refusal to hand Paul over to the Jews the implicit acknowledgment that the charges against him were without foundation (24:22f.). Festus gave the most emphatic testimony of them all to Paul's innocence, stating that the Jews could not substantiate any of their charges and that he was at a total loss about how to investigate the matter (25:18, 20); indeed, so far as he could ascertain, Paul had done nothing deserving of death (25:25).

The picture of the Romans has another side as well. Paul received some rather rough treatment from Lysias at first, being seized and bound with two chains (21:33). Lysias had no qualms about examining him by the harsh method of Roman scourging—none, that is, until he learned of Paul's Roman citizenship (22:24). His distorting of the facts in his letter to Felix does nothing to alter the picture for the reader (23:27) and only serves to cast his "Roman honor" in a somewhat less favorable light. Felix appears to have been even worse. There was the whole messy question of his marriage to Drusilla, and Luke did nothing to hide it. In fact, he introduced her when it really was quite unnecessary to the narrative and delighted at Felix's squirming when Paul spoke of self-control and the coming judgment (24:25). Then there was Felix's looking for a bribe from Paul (24:26), a thing frowned upon, even condemned by Roman law. Worst of all was the fact that he kept Paul in prison for two years when he had found no

grounds for condemning him. The reason given is that he “wanted to grant a favor to the Jews” (24:27). Lysias probably had the right to release Paul when he had found no grounds for imprisonment (23:29); but at least his action could be justified as a sort of protective custody, given the extreme danger to Paul in Jerusalem. Not so Felix and Festus. Festus, who rather strongly asserted Paul’s innocence (25:25), actually contemplated taking Paul back to Jerusalem—into enemy territory—for trial. The reason again was “to do the Jews a favor” (25:9). What sort of justification for a miscarriage of justice is favoritism? One is reminded of Pilate’s similar equivocation (or cowardice) in giving in to the demands of the mob. The Romans prided themselves in their standards of justice. None of these officials was a worthy example.

Thus the common argument that Luke was offering an apologetic to Romans in Acts needs considerable modification. If he were trying to ingratiate the Romans, it is unlikely he would have portrayed them with quite so many flaws. His picture is realistic enough. It ties in perfectly with Josephus’s description of the procurators and with the testimony of the Roman historians about their officials. It was more likely intended for Luke’s Christian readers than for pagan Romans. They too might experience both the good points and the bad points of Roman officialdom. Like Paul, they too were to make full use of their legal rights wherever possible and respect the government when it served in its rightful role for justice and peace (cf. Rom 13:1–7). If they, like Paul, did find themselves before the Tribunal, it was not to be for any breach of law but solely for bearing the name of Christ (cf. 1 Pet 4:15). Finally, and above all, if they appeared in court for their Christian faith, they were to bear witness to their Lord with pride and with courage, just as Paul did.

The picture of the Jews in these chapters is, like that of the Romans, somewhat multifaceted. They are depicted consistently as Paul’s enemies. It was the temple mob that got him in trouble in the first place. They wanted him dead (21:31, 36). They continued to want him dead (22:22). They plotted to kill him in ambush (23:12–15). A similar plot was hatched on a subsequent occasion (25:3). They brought serious accusations against Paul before the Roman procurators (24:5f.). If they could not get jurisdiction over him and condemn him themselves, they sought a Roman conviction on grounds of sedition.

The Jewish portrait, however, had another side. Not all Jews were Paul’s enemies. Some Jews had become Christians. Being a Jew and being a Christian were not mutually exclusive. This was what Paul was attempting to demonstrate by his participation in the Nazirite vow in the temple when the mob rose against him (21:23–27). His demonstration was primarily for the Jewish Christians, to make a further point—that Paul’s law-free Gentile mission was not incompatible with a Jewish Christianity “zealous for the law” (21:20). In Paul’s speeches there is a strong emphasis on his Jewishness—his speaking in Aramaic (22:2), his thorough upbringing in Judaism (22:3; 26:4f.). The picture of Ananias is that of a devout, law-abiding Jew respected by the entire Jewish community (22:12). Twice Paul related his conversion experience, and each time there was a strong emphasis on his zeal for the faith of the fathers (22:4f.; 26:9–11). More significantly, there is no indication that his conviction made him any less zealous for his ancestral faith. A key concept that runs throughout this section is that of “the Way” (cf. 22:4; 24:14, 22; 25:3). It is a sectarian type of term that describes Christianity not as a separate entity but as a group, a “way,” in fact, Paul would say, the only *true* way within Judaism. In their own manner the Roman officials attested to this concept, maintaining that the whole dispute between Paul and the Jews was a theological difference within their own religion (25:19; 23:29).

The major theological difference centered around the resurrection, and the resurrection was perhaps the major motif in the picture of the Jews in Acts 22–26. Luke’s treatment begins with Paul’s announcement in the Sanhedrin that he was on trial because of his hope in the resurrection of the dead (23:6). This has often been seen as a clever ploy to divert attention from himself because it provoked a sharp division between the Sadducees and the Pharisees in the Sanhedrin. Actually it was no ploy, since the resurrection was indeed the central matter that separated Paul from the Jews. In the Sanhedrin scene the stage was set. The Pharisees sided with Paul because they shared his hope in the resurrection. Theologically the Pharisees were at one with him. Where they differed was their failure to acknowledge the resurrection of Jesus. They had no Damascus road vision of the risen Christ. Twice in the trial before Felix, Paul spoke of the resurrection. In fact, his concluding remark was almost identical to that in the Sanhedrin, stating that the resurrection was the real agenda for his trial (24:21).

The climactic treatment of the theme occurs in the final “trial” scene, Paul’s hearing before Agrippa. Again there are two references to the resurrection in Paul’s speech. The first is part of a complex that involves the hope of the Jews, the promises to the fathers, and God’s raising of the dead (26:6–8). The second unites the Old Testament proofs of the Messiah’s death and resurrection with the mission to the Gentiles and to Israel (26:22f.). One is reminded of the argument in Peter’s sermons in Acts 2–3: the Old Testament points to the suffering and resurrection of the Messiah; the fact that Christ had risen proved that he was the promised Messiah. It was the message to the Jews. It would have little meaning for Gentiles. Festus proved that. When Paul mentioned the resurrection, Festus accused him of having left his senses (26:24). Earlier he had expressed similar perplexity over “a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive” (25:19). But the Pharisees understood (23:8f.). They too believed that resurrection was a part of God’s promises, and they were the dominant religious viewpoint among the Jews of the day. Paul was one Jew who believed that the firstfruits of the resurrection had begun with Jesus. Christ was the culmination of the promises, the fulfillment of the hope of Israel and the promises to the fathers. Christianity was “the Way” for the Jews.

This strong treatment in Paul’s speeches of the close relationship between Judaism and Christianity has led many scholars to argue that this motif seeks to establish Christianity as a movement within Judaism and thus subject to the recognition granted Judaism under Roman rule. The Latin phrase *religio licita* usually designates this concept. Apart from the problems with the concept itself,<sup>761</sup> this does not seem to be the primary function of the emphasis within Paul’s speeches. It is much more a concern for the evangelization of the Jews. Paul never gave up on his hope that his fellow Israelites would trust in Christ (cf. Rom 9–11). In preserving this strong emphasis in Paul’s speeches, Luke showed that he had not either.

Two subordinate themes run through these chapters, both of which are closely related to the first theme discussed earlier, Paul’s witness. The first involves the rather striking parallels to Jesus’ own passion, a phenomenon already noted in the “journey to Jerusalem” motif discussed

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<sup>761</sup> There is no question that Judaism was granted certain privileges by various emperors, such as the banning of the military standards from Jerusalem and exemption from paying homage to the emperor. But the concept that there was an imperial list of officially recognized religions, which the *religio licita* concept maintains, has never been adequately documented.



in the previous chapter. The mob action in the temple square recalls the crowd screaming for Jesus' death. Even the words are the same—"away with him" (Acts 21:36; cf. Luke 23:18). The trials are reminiscent of Jesus' trial—before the Roman procurator, even before the Jewish king, something which only Luke included among the Gospel writers (Luke 23:7–12). Already noted has been the Roman officials' tendency to avoid responsibility and give in to Jewish pressure. There are numerous other minor similarities between Jesus' and Paul's experience, and these will be noted in the commentary. Perhaps Luke included these to remind his readers that the path of discipleship sometimes leads to a sharing in the Lord's suffering, an idea often expressed by Paul (cf. Rom 8:17f.).

Finally there is the concept that is best summarized in Paul's address before Agrippa: "It was not done in a corner" (26:26). There is certainly nothing obscure about the Christian witness in this section since Paul bore his testimony before the leaders of both the Jewish and Gentile communities, before governors and kings. He would ultimately appear before the emperor himself in the capital city of the empire (23:11). The theme is not new. It has appeared before in the apostles before the Sanhedrin, Paul before Sergius Paulus and Gallio, and in Paul's friendship with the Asiarchs in Ephesus. Christianity was no upstart, ephemeral sect. It was empowered by God's Spirit. It was for all the world (cf. 1:8), and that included even those social and political structures the world considered most significant. The world should take note and respond to the gospel.

### **1. Witness Before the Jews (21:17–23:35)**

In a sense all of 21:17–26:32 could be described as Paul's testimony before Jews, since even in the Caesarea trial scenes of chaps. 24–26 Paul appeared before a Jewish legal deputation and the Jewish king. But the Roman officials have a more conspicuous presence in chaps. 24–26, and the scene is set on their turf. In 21:17–23:35 Paul was in Jerusalem and in Jewish territory. First he appeared with the elders of the Jerusalem church. There he experienced something of a minitrial even before them, as they urged him to demonstrate his faithfulness to the law for the benefit of the more zealous Jewish Christians in Jerusalem (21:17–26). To comply with their wishes, he participated in a Nazirite vow, which took him to the temple. There Paul was falsely accused by some Asian Jews of having violated the sacred precincts, and a riot ensued (21:27–36).

Rescued from certain death at the hands of the mob, Paul requested from the arresting Roman commander permission to address the crowd (21:37–40). Permission granted, he delivered a major address before the Jewish crowd (22:1–21). The crowd listened attentively as Paul spoke of his thoroughly orthodox Jewish background and of his experience on the Damascus road. Only when he mentioned the Lord's commission for his witness to the Gentiles did they become agitated again, and Paul had to be spirited away by the Romans. In an attempt to find out more about the causes of the riot, the tribune instead learned of Paul's Roman citizenship (22:22–29). The tribune then led Paul to the Sanhedrin in his attempt to ascertain the Jewish complaint against him. With Paul's mention of the resurrection, the Sanhedrin session ended in utter chaos, with Sadducee set against Pharisee (22:30–23:11). Paul's nephew learned of a plot by forty Jews to ambush Paul and warned the tribune of it (23:12–22). The tribune then sent Paul off to the governor in Caesarea under cover of night and heavy guard

(23:23–35). The narrative is long and given in considerable detail. That Luke considered this material especially significant is indicated by the slowness of the time of the narrative. Less than twelve days are involved in 21:17–23:35 (cf. 24:11). In contrast, the events of the next three chapters cover two years (cf. 24:27).

***(1) The Concern of the Jerusalem Elders (21:17–26)***

**<sup>17</sup>When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. <sup>18</sup>The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. <sup>19</sup>Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.**

**<sup>20</sup>When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: “You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. <sup>21</sup>They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. <sup>22</sup>What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, <sup>23</sup>so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. <sup>24</sup>Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. <sup>25</sup>As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.”**

**<sup>26</sup>The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.**

**21:17–20a** When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, he received a somewhat mixed reception. On the one hand, he was received “warmly” by the brethren there (v. 17). Just who formed the reception committee is not at all clear. Perhaps it referred only to the associates of Mnason with whom Paul lodged (v. 16). It is more likely that Luke intended v. 17 as a general introduction to Paul’s arrival in Jerusalem and that “the brothers” represent his favorable reception by the Jerusalem Christian community as a whole.<sup>772</sup> There were reservations, however, and these quickly unfolded the next day when Paul and his traveling companions reported to the elders of the Jerusalem church (v. 18).<sup>783</sup> The apostles seem no longer to have been present in Jerusalem, and leadership of the congregation was now in the hands of a group of elders, with James, the brother of Jesus, as the presiding elder.<sup>794</sup>

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<sup>772</sup> Some scholars interpret the “warm” reception as an allusion to Paul’s collection for the Jerusalem church; but Luke had been silent about the collection all along, and there is no real basis in the text for seeing even a veiled allusion to it here.

<sup>783</sup> Note that the “we” narrative is discontinued at v. 18 and does not reappear until 27:1, which begins the journey to Rome. For the intervening events, Paul alone was involved.

<sup>794</sup> The Jerusalem Conference of Acts 15:6–29 seems to provide the transition to the new organizational structure. There both apostles and elders assumed the leadership (vv. 6, 22, 24). Even there, however, James provided the main leadership in the decision-making process.

On an earlier occasion—at the Jerusalem Conference—when Paul gave a report of his successful Gentile mission, it was met with stony silence (15:12f.). Now his report was received with greater enthusiasm. The elders “praised God” for the fruits of Paul’s work among the Gentiles (v. 20). At the Jerusalem Conference they had endorsed Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles, and so they naturally received the report of his missionary success with some elation. But Paul’s success had created some problems for them, and they now related those to him. Probably James spoke for the group. The new situation was their own success in the Jewish Christian mission and the many thousands of new converts who had been made. They were all “zealous for the law.”

**21:20b** Faithfulness to the Torah was nothing new for the Jewish Christians. Basically, that was what the agreement at the Jerusalem Conference was all about. The Jewish Christians would remain faithful to the Jewish law, but Gentile converts would not be subjected to it except for the special provisions of the apostolic decree (cf. v. 25). What was new to the present situation is hidden in the word “zealous.” Paul’s arrival in Jerusalem probably was in spring of A.D. 56 or 57 during the procuratorship of Felix. Josephus described this period of the mid-50s as a time of intense Jewish nationalism and political unrest. One insurrection after another rose to challenge the Roman overlords, and Felix brutally suppressed them all.<sup>805</sup> This only increased the Jewish hatred for Rome and inflamed anti-Gentile sentiments. It was a time when pro-Jewish sentiment was at its height, and friendliness with outsiders was viewed askance. Considering public relations, Paul’s mission to the Gentiles would not have been well received. The Jerusalem elders were in somewhat of a bind. On the one hand, they had supported Paul’s witness to the Gentiles at the Jerusalem Conference. Now they found Paul a *persona non grata* and his mission discredited not only among the Jewish populace, which they were seeking to reach, but also among their more recent converts. They did not want to reject Paul. Indeed, they praised God for his successes. Still they had their own mission to the Jews to consider, and for that Paul was a distinct liability.

**21:21** Jews from the Diaspora likely were the ones who spread the reports among the Jerusalem Christians that Paul was inciting Jews to abandon their ancestral customs (v. 21b). The rumor was that he was encouraging Diaspora Jews who lived in his Gentile mission fields to forsake the law of Moses and to abandon the practice of circumcising their children. These were serious charges, for these matters struck at the very heart of the Jews’ self-identity as the people of God. The Torah, particularly in its ceremonial aspects, set them apart from all other people. Circumcision in particular was a sort of badge, a physical mark set in the flesh of every Jewish male on the eighth day after birth to denote his membership in God’s covenant people.<sup>816</sup> Would Paul have urged Jews to abandon this “sign of the covenant”? There is

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<sup>805</sup> See E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, ed. G. Vermes, F. Millar, and M. Black (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1974), 1:462–45; B. Reicke, “Der geschichtliche Hintergrund des Apostelkonzils and der Antiochia-Episode, Gal 2:1–14,” *Studia Paulina* (Haarlem: Bohn, 1953), 172–87.

<sup>816</sup> That by its physical nature circumcision as “the mark of the covenant” was restricted to males shows the strong male orientation of first-century Jewish religion. Females derived their covenantal status indirectly through their relation to their fathers or

certainly no question that he argued strongly against seeing circumcision as a guarantee of salvation. It could be no substitute for faith in Christ, for becoming a new creation in the Spirit (cf. Gal 5:6; 6:15). Consequently, he adamantly opposed circumcision of his Gentile converts. But there is no evidence that he ever encouraged Jewish Christians to abandon the practice and considerable indication to the contrary (cf. Acts 16:3; 1 Cor 7:18f).

The same can be said for Paul's attitude toward the Torah in general. He rejected flatly the supposition that the law could be a means of salvation. He saw faith in Christ, not law, as the sole basis for one's acceptability to God. He adamantly opposed anyone who sought to impose the Torah on his Gentile converts, and this was very much within the spirit of the Jerusalem Conference (cf. 15:10f., 19, 28). But there is no evidence that he urged Jewish Christians to abandon their ancestral law, and Acts would indicate that he himself remained true to the Torah in his own dealings with Jews (cf. 18:18; 20:6; 23:5). In short, Paul saw one's status in Christ as transcending the distinction between Jew and Gentile (Gal 3:28). Being in Christ neither required that the Gentile become a Jew nor that the Jew cease to be a Jew (cf. 1 Cor 9:19f.). Still, there may have been a grain of truth in the rumor that Paul was encouraging Jews of the Diaspora to abandon the Torah. It would not have been Paul's having actually urged the Jews to do so but rather the social situation of Paul's Diaspora churches. In the Diaspora, Jews who became Christians would almost inevitably have transferred from the synagogue to the predominantly Gentile churches. Acts 19:9 would indicate that this had been the case in Ephesus. Having left the base of support for their Jewish identity in the synagogue, there would be the natural inclination to adapt to the ways of the Gentile majority in the Christian churches.<sup>827</sup> Whether or not this was the case, Paul himself had not urged Jewish Christians to abandon the Torah, and there is no evidence that the elders themselves lent any credence to the allegations. Still, they had to deal with them. Paul's presence would soon be known throughout the Jewish Christian community (v. 22). Something had to be done to offset the rumors.

**21:22–24** The elders had evidently worked out a possible solution among themselves of a means whereby Paul could by example demonstrate that he was still true to the Jewish law. This they now set before him (vv. 22–24). There were four Jewish Christians who had taken upon themselves a Nazirite vow, a rather extreme expression of Jewish piety.<sup>838</sup> The four were nearing the end of the period of their vow and soon would be completing it with the customary ceremony in the temple. This involved cutting their hair and burning it as an offering. In addition a number of costly sacrifices were required—a male and a female lamb, a ram, and cereal and drink offerings (Num 6:14f.).

Paul was asked to join the four and bear the expenses of these rites. Aside from paying their expenses, Paul's role in the matter is not altogether clear. He obviously did not join in the vow because the minimum period for a Nazirite was thirty days, and only seven were involved here (v. 27). Also it could not have been a matter of a Nazirite "purification" ceremony in which he

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husbands. They had no independent religious standing. See J. Polhill, "Circumcision," MDB, 156–57.

<sup>827</sup> See R. C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 2:269.

<sup>838</sup> For the provisions of the Nazirite vow, see commentary on 18:18.

participated. There was such a purification ceremony in connection with Nazirite vows, but it was not a regular part of the Nazirite commitment; rather, it was a special provision in case the one under the vow came into contact with a corpse or became otherwise defiled (Num 6:9–12). That could not be the situation here because the Nazirite who underwent the purification rite had to begin the minimum thirty-day period of the vow all over again (Num 6:12). The most likely solution is that Paul was the one who underwent purification. Often a Jew on returning to the Holy Land after a sojourn in Gentile territory would undergo ritual purification. The period involved was seven days (cf. Num 19:12), which fits the present picture (v. 27). Paul thus underwent ritual purification to qualify for participation in the completion ceremony of the four Nazirites which took place within the sacred precincts of the temple. This would be a thorough demonstration of his full loyalty to the Torah, not only in his bearing the heavy expenses of the vow but also in his undergoing the necessary purification himself.<sup>849</sup>

**21:25** James concluded his proposal to Paul with a reminder of the apostolic decrees. The words in v. 25 are to be seen as an assurance to Paul that the basic decision of the Jerusalem Conference had not been changed. Gentiles still were not being asked to live by the Jewish Torah—only to observe those basic ritual matters that made table fellowship and social interaction possible between Jewish and Gentile Christians.<sup>1850</sup> The elders' proposal (vv. 22–24) was strictly for Paul, that he as a Jewish Christian demonstrate his fidelity to the law to offset the rumors in the Jewish Christian community. It was a sort of compromise solution and thoroughly in accord with the picture of James at the Jerusalem Conference. The apostolic decrees were themselves a type of compromise. James wanted both to acknowledge the legitimacy of Paul's law-free Gentile mission and to maintain an effective witness among the Jews, for which faithfulness to the law was absolutely essential. Ultimately the compromise did not work—either in this instance for Paul or in regard to the larger issue of the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christianity. As Jewish nationalism increased, the Gentile mission became more and more of a liability to Jewish Christianity. In the aftermath of the Jewish War with Rome and the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Jewish Christianity was declared heretical by official Judaism; and it was no longer possible for a Christian Jew to remain in the Jewish community. James had seen the problem well and sought to present himself as a strict,

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<sup>849</sup> Some interpreters see Paul using a portion of the collection to pay for the expenses of the vow, but this is wholly speculative since Acts is totally silent on the collection except for the single allusion in 24:17. Evidently, paying the expenses of Nazirites was considered a particularly exemplary act of piety. Josephus indicated that paying such expenses was one of the ways Agrippa I sought to win the favor of the Jews upon his return to Palestine (*Ant.* 19.294).

<sup>8510</sup> For the meaning of the decrees, see commentary on 15:20. The four provisions of the decree in 21:25 correspond exactly to those in 15:20, 29. The Western reading in 21:25, however, differs from the Western reading in 15:20, 29. In 21:25 only idols, blood, and unchastity are listed. The negative golden rule is omitted. See H. W. Bartsch, "Traditions-geschichtliches zur 'goldenen Regel' und zum Aposteldekret," *ZNW* 75 (1984): 128–32.

Torah-abiding Jew, doubtless to strengthen the credibility of his witness to his fellow Jews.<sup>1861</sup> Ultimately, he gave his life for his Christian witness, being put to death at the order of the high priest Ananus in A.D. 62.<sup>1872</sup>

**21:26** Paul was all too ready to be a Jew to the Jews (cf. 1 Cor 9:20). We know from his letters that the collection from the Gentile churches had brought him to Jerusalem, and the major reason for this was to express the unity between Gentile and Jewish Christianity. He knew the risks involved in coming to Jerusalem (cf. Rom 15:31). He was more than willing to participate in this symbolic act of Jewish piety if that would help to justify his Gentile mission in the eyes of the Jewish Christians. He began his purification the next day and announced in the temple the formal date when the Nazirite ceremony would be completed (v. 26). It would take place in seven days, when his own purification was fulfilled.

## **(2) The Riot in the Temple Area (21:27–36)**

**<sup>27</sup>When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, <sup>28</sup>shouting, “Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place.” <sup>29</sup>(They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple area.)**

**<sup>30</sup>The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. <sup>31</sup>While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. <sup>32</sup>He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.**

**<sup>33</sup>The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done. <sup>34</sup>Some in the crowd shouted one**

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<sup>8611</sup> Given the strong Jewish nationalism of the era, it is not necessary to revive the Baur theory and see James as Paul’s antagonist as does G. Lüdemann, “Zum Antipaulismus im frühen Christentum,” *EvT* 40 (1980): 437–55. Even less plausible is the view of A. J. Mattill, Jr., that the proposal of the Nazirite vow was a “set-up” by the Judaizing Christians designed to get rid of Paul (“The Purpose of Acts: Schneckenburger Reconsidered,” *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, ed. W. Gasque and R. Martin [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970], 116–22).

<sup>8712</sup> The martyrdom of James is related in Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.197–203. Evidently, Ananus used the interim between the death of Festus and the arrival of the new procurator Albinus as an opportunity to execute James. Josephus attested to the high reputation of James among the Jews when he noted that the more law-abiding Jews sent a formal protest to Agrippa against Ananus’s action toward James. For a later and more legendary account of James’s death, see the Tradition of Hegesippus quoted in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, 2.23, in which James was thrown from the pinnacle of the temple, stoned, and finally beaten to death with a fuller’s club.

thing and some another, and since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. <sup>35</sup>When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers. <sup>36</sup>The crowd that followed kept shouting, “Away with him!”

**21:27** The purification process required a cleansing on the third and on the seventh days (Num 19:2). Likely it was on the prescribed seventh day that Paul returned to the temple to complete the ritual (v. 27). He was spotted there by some Asian Jews, who immediately began to stir up a crowd against him. Not surprisingly the opposition to Paul came from Asian Jews, probably some from Ephesus. Paul had spent three years in Ephesus and part of the time in their synagogue (19:8). They knew him well. In his Miletus address Paul alluded to plots the Ephesian Jews had already directed against him. Often Diaspora Jews were exceedingly strict in their observance of the Jewish ritual (cf. 6:9), and it may have been some of these same Asian Jews who had spread the rumors about Paul throughout Jerusalem (cf. v. 21).

**21:28** The accusations they began to make against Paul were very serious. Two were the same charges leveled against Stephen (cf. 6:13): He speaks against “our law and this place”; i.e., against Torah and temple.<sup>1883</sup> The third charge was less specific but perhaps the most valid—that Paul taught “against our people.” In a sense Paul did. His leveling gospel of oneness of all in Jesus Christ, Greek as well as Jew, could ultimately do nothing other than reduce the significance of the Jews as God’s chosen people. In this instance they charged him with temple violation. They accused Paul of having violated the temple by taking a Gentile beyond the court of the Gentiles into the sacred precincts that were open to Jews only; i.e., into the area of the temple proper. The large outer courtyard, known as the court of the Gentiles, was open to all. The temple proper was not. In fact, there was a stone barrier that separated the court of the Gentiles from the first courtyard of the temple proper, the court of the women.<sup>1894</sup> According to Josephus, there were warning stones set at regular intervals along this barrier, some in Greek and some in Latin, forbidding non-Jews access beyond this point.<sup>1905</sup> Two of these have been

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<sup>8813</sup> There are some rather striking parallels in this section with the Stephen narrative, as noted by R. C. Tannehill, *Narrative Unity*, 2:273. Not only were the charges the same, but both Paul and Stephen experienced mob violence. Both delivered speeches before their accusers, and both speeches began with the same address, “Brothers and fathers” (7:2; 22:1). Both speeches provoked a violent response (7:54–58; 22:22–23). Both Paul and Stephen were accused by Diaspora Jews (6:9–12a; 21:27). And in Paul’s speech there is a linking reference to Stephen’s death (22:20).

<sup>8914</sup> The temple proper consisted of four courts that proceeded from greatest access to most restricted access. The first court, the court of the women, was open to all Israelites. From there one proceeded to the court of the men, open only to Israelite males. Further in was the court of the priests, open only to the Israelite priesthood. Innermost was the holy of holies, accessible only to the high priest and to him only on one day a year, the Day of Atonement. For a fuller description of the Herodian temple, see J. Polhill, “The Temple in Jesus’ Day,” *Biblical Illustrator* (Summer 1988): 75–80.

<sup>9015</sup> Josephus, *War* 5.194; *Antiquities* 15.417; *Apion* 2.103f.

excavated, both with a Greek text and both with a message to the effect that any foreigner proceeding beyond the barrier did so on pain of death.<sup>1916</sup>

There is some question whether the warnings are of a common ancient taboo type, i.e., a warning that the divinity will strike down any violator. From the testimony of Josephus, it seems more likely that the Jews actually did themselves enforce the prohibition. A speech attributed to Titus indicates that the Romans allowed the Jews to execute violators, even if the violators were Roman citizens (*War* 6.124f.). There is no evidence in the extant literature of anyone ever being executed for this offense. Whether Josephus's testimony on this matter can be trusted and whether the warnings were actually enforced, the stones have been found and are a vivid testimony to the exclusiveness of first-century Jewish religion: "No Gentile to defile our temple on pain of death." This barrier with its warning stones is likely the "wall" between Jew and Greek to which Paul alluded in Eph 2:14. Paul certainly was familiar with it. He had experienced it firsthand.

**21:29** The charge was unfounded. Luke made that clear (v. 29). The Asian Jews had seen Paul in the city with Trophimus, one of the Ephesian representatives in the collection delegation (20:4). They were looking for something against Paul, and they quickly jumped to the conclusion that Paul had taken the Gentile into the inner area of the temple beyond the warning stones. Paul had in fact been there himself. He would have gone there in connection with his purification. He had not taken Trophimus there. On an occasion when he was trying to establish his Jewishness, it was the last thing he would have done! It was an instance of sheer irony. In the temple for his own purification, Paul was accused of having defiled it.

**21:30** Luke could be accused of exaggerating in saying that "the whole city" was aroused (v. 30). But one must recall that the temple area was very much the "town square." The court of the Gentiles was a large area, and great crowds would gather there. When all the hubbub started, people came running from every direction. Paul was dragged out of the temple proper into the court of the Gentiles. The gates to the sacred precincts were slammed shut, perhaps to protect the area from any "further" defilement from the unseemly mob action taking place outside. Some interpreters see a certain symbolism in the shutting of the gates. This is the last scene at the temple in Acts. The gates were closed. Is this symbolic that with this final refusal of God's messenger the temple was forever closed to God's purposes?<sup>1927</sup>

**21:31** Along the northwest corner of the wall that surrounded the whole temple complex stood the Tower of Antonia, a fortress built by Herod the Great for defense of the temple. The Roman troops were garrisoned there. Antonia had several high towers, one which is said to have been 100 feet high, allowing a full view of the entire temple area. Perhaps it was a sentry posted there who first caught sight of the gathering mob and sent word to his commander, the

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<sup>9116</sup> The first was discovered in 1871 by C. Clermont-Ganneau and is now in the Museum of Ancient Orient in Istanbul. The second was discovered in 1935 outside St. Stephen's gate in Jerusalem on the road to Jericho and now resides in the Palestine Archaeological Museum in Jerusalem. The fullest treatment of the warning stones available is that of V. R. L. Fry, "The Warning Inscriptions from the Herodian Temple," Ph.D. diss., the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, 1974.

<sup>9217</sup> An idea first suggested by T. D. Bernard, as cited by F. F. Bruce, "The Church of Jerusalem in the Acts of the Apostles," *BJRL* 67 (1985): 659.



Roman tribune in charge of the Jerusalem cohort (v. 31). This tribune, whose name is later disclosed as Claudius Lysias (23:26), would play a major role in the following two chapters. As a tribune he was a high-ranking Roman military officer in charge of a cohort, which consisted of 1,000 soldiers (760 infantry and 240 cavalry). Since the procurator resided in Caesarea and only made periodic visits to Jerusalem, Lysias had the prime responsibility for the Roman administration and peace-keeping within the city. Not accidentally the barracks were located in Antonia adjacent to the temple. Stairs led from Antonia directly into the court of the Gentiles. The Romans were well aware that should any unrest arise in the city, it would most likely begin in the temple area.

**21:32–33** Lysias lost no time in dealing with this riot. He evidently took a considerable contingent of soldiers with him. Verse 32 indicates that he took along “centurions” (“officers,” NIV). Since a centurion commanded a hundred soldiers, and since more than one centurion is indicated, Lysias’s force on this occasion consisted of at least two hundred. It must have been a significant show of force, for the crowd immediately stopped beating Paul (v. 32). Since Paul was the obvious object of the crowd’s ire, Lysias immediately arrested him, binding him with two chains (v. 33). The significance of the “two” chains is not altogether clear. Paul may have been handcuffed on both arms and chained to a soldier on each side, or he could have been bound hand and foot, as Agabus had predicted he would be (cf. 21:11). In any event, from this point on Paul was “in chains,” if not always literally so, at least in the sense that he was a prisoner to the very last word of Acts.

**21:34–36** Lysias was totally unable to ascertain any substantive accusation against Paul because of the disorder of the crowd (v. 34). As with most mobs, many of the participants probably did not know what the commotion was all about (cf. 19:32). So Lysias ordered that Paul be taken to the barracks. When they reached the steps to Antonia, the soldiers had to lift Paul up and carry him to protect him from the violence of the mob (v. 35). Why this was necessary is not immediately clear. Paul may have been somewhat incapacitated from the severity of his beating. If he was bound at the feet, this would certainly explain why the soldiers found it more expedient to carry him. As they hastened up the steps, the crowd milled below, shouting, “Away with him!”—the same words the mob had screamed against Jesus (cf. Luke 23:18; John 19:15).

### ***(3) Paul’s Request to Address the Crowd (21:37–40)***

<sup>37</sup>As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, “May I say something to you?”

“Do you speak Greek?” he replied. <sup>38</sup>“Aren’t you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the desert some time ago?”

<sup>39</sup>Paul answered, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people.”

<sup>40</sup>Having received the commander’s permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic:

**21:37–38** As they reached the top of the stairs and were about to enter the barracks, Paul asked the tribune for permission to make a request (v. 37). His language was in polite, polished

Greek, and the tribune was amazed that he would speak Greek in the first place.<sup>1938</sup> Lysias then disclosed that he had suspected Paul of being a revolutionary, perhaps the Egyptian who had stirred up a considerable following some time before (v. 38). Josephus also spoke of this Egyptian.<sup>1949</sup> According to him, the Egyptian was a false prophet who stirred up a following of some 30,000 “dupes” (*ēpatēmenōn*), led them into the wilderness and from there to the Mount of Olives, where he promised that the walls of Jerusalem would fall at his command and allow them easy subjugation of the Roman force. Instead of Jerusalem’s walls falling, Felix arrived on the scene with heavy troops, killed four hundred of them, took another two hundred captive, and put the Egyptian and the rest to flight. This was just one of the many incidents of unrest and political foment Josephus related as having occurred during the tenure of Felix. The difference between Luke’s 4,000 and Josephus’s 30,000 is most likely evidence of Josephus’s tendency to give exaggerated figures.<sup>2950</sup>

In Acts the followers of the Egyptian are described as *sicarii* (“terrorists,” NIV). Josephus also spoke of this terrorist group among the more zealous Jewish freedom fighters (*War* 2.254–57). Arising in the time of Felix, they derived their name from the Latin word *sica*, meaning *dagger*. Their practice was to mingle in large crowds on special occasions, plunge the daggers into their pro-Roman political enemies, and then quickly disappear into the crowd.<sup>2961</sup> It is easy to see how Lysias might have confused Paul with these movements. He had witnessed many of them rise and fall. He naturally associated them with crowds and riots like the one surrounding Paul. In this instance perhaps he thought the Egyptian had returned and some of his former “dupes” were now repaying him.

**21:39–40** Paul was no terrorist. He was not even an Egyptian. He was rather a Jew and a citizen of the proud Hellenistic city of Tarsus, “no ordinary city” as he described it (v. 39).<sup>2972</sup> The reference at this point is to his Tarsian citizenship, not his Roman citizenship, which is not divulged to Lysias until later (22:25–29). Originally it was impossible for a Roman citizen to hold

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<sup>9318</sup> Ἐλληνιστὶ γινώσκεις is an ellipsis for Ἐλληνιστὶ γινώσκεις λαλεῖν. Εἰ ἔξεστίν μοι is very polite language.

<sup>9419</sup> There are some discrepancies between Josephus’s accounts. *War* (2.261–63) gives the figure of 30,000, but not the number killed and captured. *Antiquities* (20.168–72) mentions the collapsing walls, whereas *War* seems to indicate a more natural seizure of the city by surprise attack.

<sup>9520</sup> An ingenious reconciliation of the two figures has been suggested, involving a scribe possibly confusing an original Δ in Josephus (the symbol for the number 4) with a Λ (the number 30). The capital forms of these two letters are obviously quite similar.

<sup>9621</sup> For their relation to the larger Zealot movement, see M. Hengel, “Zeloten und Sikarier,” *Die Zeloten*, zweite Auflage (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 387–412.

<sup>9722</sup> The expression “no ordinary city” (οὐκ ἀσήμου) was a common Greek litotes and is found in many Greek writers. Cf. Strabo 8.6.15. The expression is too common to link it with any one specific writing as does R. Harris, who wants to trace it to Euripides’ *Ion* (“Did St. Paul Quote Euripides?” *ExpTim* 31 [1919–20]: 36f.).

dual citizenship, but by the time of the emperors this evidently became quite common.<sup>2983</sup> Paul's exchange with Lysias was relevant to his request to address the Jews. That he was a Jew obviously gave him some grounds for addressing his fellow Jews. That he was obviously cultured assured Lysias that he was not one of the rabble and merited the honor of his request. Permission granted, Paul stood at the top of the steps, brought a hush over the crowd with a wave of his hand, and addressed them in their own native tongue (v. 40).<sup>2994</sup> The crowd had accused him of teaching against the Jewish people, the law, and the temple. The speech that follows was his defense against these charges.

#### ***(4) Paul's Speech Before the Temple Mob (22:1–21)***

**<sup>1</sup>"Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense."**

**<sup>2</sup>When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.**

**Then Paul said: <sup>3</sup>"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. <sup>4</sup>I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, <sup>5</sup>as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.**

**<sup>6</sup>"About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. <sup>7</sup>I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?'**

**<sup>8</sup>" 'Who are you, Lord?' I asked.**

**" 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. <sup>9</sup>My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.**

**<sup>10</sup>" 'What shall I do, Lord?' I asked.**

**" 'Get up,' the Lord said, 'and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.' <sup>11</sup>My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.**

**<sup>12</sup>"A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. <sup>13</sup>He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him.**

**<sup>14</sup>"Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. <sup>15</sup>You will be his witness to all men of what**

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<sup>9823</sup> See A. N. Sherwin-White, *The Roman Citizenship*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 245–50. For a dissenting view, see J. Schwartz, "A propos du statut personnel de l'Apôtre Paul," *RHPR* 37 (1957): 91–96.

<sup>9924</sup> It is generally agreed that the language of Jerusalem in the first century was Western Aramaic, the common speech of non-Greeks in Western Asia. For a dissenting view that argues for Hebrew as the language of Judea, see J. M. Grintz, "Hebrew as the Spoken and Written Language in the Last Days of the Second Temple," *JBL* 79 (1960): 32–47.

you have seen and heard. <sup>16</sup>And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'

<sup>17</sup>"When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance <sup>18</sup>and saw the Lord speaking. 'Quick!' he said to me. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me.'

<sup>19</sup>" 'Lord,' I replied, 'these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. <sup>20</sup>And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'

<sup>21</sup>"Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.' "

Paul's speech before the temple crowd was primarily aimed at establishing his full commitment to Judaism. What he evidently could not accomplish through his participation in the Nazirite vow he now sought to establish by this address. Basically, the speech was his own first-person narration of the events Luke related in chap. 9: his former zeal for Judaism (vv. 1–5), his encounter with the risen Christ on the Damascus road (vv. 6–11), and the visit of Ananias (vv. 12–16). The final portion of his speech is new to the Acts narrative but evidently occurred on Paul's first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion, the visit covered by 9:26–30. It relates a vision Paul had in the temple, where the risen Lord commissioned him for his mission to the Gentiles (vv. 17–21). Up to this point the crowd had listened attentively to Paul's words. With his reference to the Gentile witness, Paul was in trouble with them again (v. 22).

#### HIS FORMER ZEAL (22:1–5)

**22:1** In his opening words Paul addressed the crowd with the formal introduction Stephen used before the Sanhedrin, "Brothers and fathers" (v. 1; cf. 7:2). Both were making a defense and were concerned to establish their loyalty to Judaism; hence this deferential Jewish address. Paul described his address in formal language as a "defense" (*apologia*). His speech did not, however, address the charge that started the riot—that he had desecrated the temple. It did address the larger issue—Paul's faithfulness to Judaism. This defense continues to unfold in the speeches that follow—before Felix and the Jews in chap. 24 and before Agrippa in chap. 26. In a sense all the remainder of Acts is Paul's defense before the Jews. Paul is shown to be a faithful Jew, particularly when one agrees with him that faith in the risen Christ is the true culmination of Judaism.

**22:2–3** As in 21:40, Paul's use of their native tongue underlined his Jewishness and brought a hush over the crowd (v. 2).<sup>21005</sup> Paul then showed how his early life was in every respect that of a strict, practicing Jew. He was born in Tarsus, reared in Jerusalem, and educated under Gamaliel (v. 3). "Born, reared, educated" was a fixed biographical formula common in Greek writings. The significance to this is that when Paul referred to his being "brought up" in Jerusalem, the most natural meaning is that he was reared from childhood in Jerusalem, not in Tarsus, as is commonly supposed.<sup>21016</sup> His family must have moved to Jerusalem when he was

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<sup>10025</sup> Bruce (*Acts*: NIC, 439) describes the effect as like that of an Englishman addressing Irish nationalists in Gaelic.

<sup>10126</sup> The common view has been that Paul was reared in Tarsus and only came to Jerusalem at age twelve or thirteen for his study under Gamaliel. Cf. E. F. Synge, "St.

still quite young. This ties in with the later reference to his nephew's being in Jerusalem (23:16). It underscores the point Paul wanted to make to the Jerusalem crowd: he was no Diaspora maverick but was nurtured from childhood in the holy city itself. Acts 22:3 is the sole New Testament reference to Paul's education under Gamaliel,<sup>21027</sup> and this tradition has often been challenged by scholars on the grounds that his letters do not reflect formal rabbinic training.<sup>21038</sup> More recent scholarship, however, has indicated many points at which Paul reflected thoroughly rabbinic thought,<sup>21049</sup> and in his letters Paul himself referred to his thorough training in and zeal for the law (cf. Gal 1:14; Phil 3:4–7). Again, this is the very point Paul wanted to underscore with the Jerusalem Jews: far from being a lawbreaker, as they were now accusing him (21:21, 28), Paul's former life had been marked by a zeal for the law that matched or exceeded their own.

**22:4–5** Paul then described his former days as a persecutor of the Christian movement. Here his own account parallels Luke's earlier description of Paul's days as persecutor of the Christians (8:3; 9:1f.; cf. 26:9–11), and these other texts supplement the present passage. As in 9:2 Paul referred to Christianity as "the Way," a designation that will recur throughout his defense speeches. It not only serves to link Christianity closely with Judaism<sup>31050</sup> but also with Christ. It was "the Way" Christ established; to persecute the Way was to persecute Christ himself (9:5; 22:8).<sup>31061</sup>

#### THE ENCOUNTER ON THE DAMASCUS ROAD (22:6–11)

At this point Paul related his vision of Christ on the Damascus road. This is one of three detailed accounts of Paul's conversion given in Acts. The first, contained in 9:1–30, is Luke's third-person narrative of Paul's experience. The present account and that of 26:4–23 are Paul's own testimony to the event, delivered in the course of his defense speeches. The three accounts are parallel in their essentials but differ in small details. The most striking differences are to be seen in a comparison between the two accounts given in Paul's defense speeches. These are very much adapted to the audience to whom they were addressed. For instance, in the present speech before the Jewish mob, Paul gave close attention to Ananias and his devout

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Paul's Boyhood and Conversion and His Attitude Toward Race," *ExpTim* 94 (1983): 260–63. The set formula "born, reared, educated" (γεννημένος, ἀνατεθραμμένος, πεπαιδευμένος) speaks against this assumption. In the Greek writings ἀνατεθραμμένος refers to childhood upbringing, much like our term "reared." See W. C. Van Unnik, "Tarsus or Jerusalem: The City of Paul's Youth," trans. G. Ogg, *Sparsa Collecta*, Part 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 259–320; and "Once Again: Tarsus or Jerusalem," *ibid.*, 321–27.

<sup>10227</sup> Gamaliel the Elder was the leading rabbinic scholar of his day, representing the school of Hillel. See the commentary and notes on 5:34.

<sup>10328</sup> E.g., M. S. Enslin, "Paul and Gamaliel," *JR* 7 (1927): 360–75. For a response that shows evidence for the viewpoints of Hillel in Paul's writings, see J. Jeremias, "Paulus als Hilleli," *Neotestamentica et Semitica*, ed. E. E. Ellis and M. Wilcox (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1969), 88–94. See also E. F. Harrison, "Acts 22:3—A Test Case for Luke's Reliability," *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. R. N. Longenecker and M. C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 251–60.

<sup>10429</sup> E.g., W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1958).

<sup>10530</sup> See the earlier discussion of "the Way" in the introduction to this chapter.

<sup>10631</sup> S. Lyonnet, "La 'Voie' dans les Actes des Apôtres," *RSR* 69 (1981): 149–64.

Jewishness. In the speech of chap. 26 before Agrippa and the Roman officials, Ananias is not even mentioned. Paul considered the role of this pious Jewish Christian not as important for the predominantly Gentile audience.<sup>31072</sup> The significant matter is that Luke included a detailed treatment of Paul's conversion three times, this device of repetition underscoring the event and testifying to its importance.

**22:6–9** Verses 6–11 are essentially parallel to 9:3–8, the only differences being in small details and the first-person narration. Only 22:6 gives the specific detail that it was “about noon” when the vision came upon Paul.<sup>31083</sup> This heightened the emphasis on the brightness of the vision. This was no nighttime experience but occurred in broad daylight, at noon when the sun was at its brightest. Verse 7 is closely parallel to 9:4, relating how Paul fell to the ground and heard the heavenly voice addressing him by his Hebrew name, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” As in 9:5, Paul responded by asking the heavenly visitant to identify himself—“Who are you, Lord?” Of all three conversion accounts, only in 22:8 do the words “of Nazareth” occur. The full designation “Jesus of Nazareth” was appropriate to the Jewish audience before whom Paul was relating his experience. The most significant difference between Paul's account and the earlier conversion narrative occurs in 22:9, where it is said that Paul's traveling companions saw the light but did not understand the voice speaking to Paul. In 9:7 the companions are said to have heard the sound but not to have seen anyone. Paul's account emphasizes their seeing; the earlier account, their hearing. Both accounts make the same point. The companions were witnesses to the experience and could verify that something objective took place. It was not merely an inner experience of Paul's psyche. On the other hand, the companions were not participants in the experience: they heard a sound but did not receive the message, saw a light but not the risen Lord. The vision itself was solely Paul's experience.<sup>31094</sup>

**22:10** Verse 10 parallels 9:6 with the difference that in Paul's account he referred to Jesus as “the Lord” when relating the command to rise and go into Damascus. Paul made his confession known before his Jewish audience. At the outset of his vision he may not have known whom he was addressing as Lord (v. 8). Now he knew that it was Jesus, the risen Lord. Up to this point in his speech, Paul had identified closely with his Jewish listeners. In every way he had shown himself to be as Jewish as they were. Now he began to draw the line that differentiated himself from them. On the Damascus road he had seen the risen Jesus. Now he confessed Jesus as Lord. He surely wished the same for them. It was not inappropriate for a faithful Jew to confess Jesus as Lord. He was himself a living witness to that.

**22:11** Verse 11 concludes the opening scene of Paul's conversion account. It closely parallels 9:8, relating Paul's blindness and how his companions had to lead him by hand into

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<sup>10732</sup> For a further treatment of the three conversion accounts and bibliography, see the introductory comments to 9:1–31 and nn. 1, 2, 3 of chap. IV.

<sup>10833</sup> The same term (μεσημβρία) occurs in 8:26, where it seems to have the meaning *south*.

<sup>10934</sup> For a further treatment of the differences between 9:7 and 22:9, see n. 15 of chap. IV. See also M. W. Meyer, “The Light and Voice on the Damascus Road,” *Forum 2* (1986): 27–35.

Damascus.<sup>31105</sup> The most significant difference from the earlier account is the reference to “the brilliance of the light” in Paul’s account. Indeed, the emphasis on light is striking when one compares chap. 9 with chap. 22.<sup>31116</sup> The light was so great it overwhelmed the noonday sun (v. 6). Paul’s companions “saw the light” (v. 9). Paul was blinded by “the brilliance of the light” (v. 11). None of these details occur in chap. 9. Perhaps this was Paul’s way of highlighting the significance of his conversion. In his experience on the Damascus road, he came to a confession of the risen Lord. He had “seen the light.” He wished the same for his fellow Jews in the temple square.

#### THE ROLE OF ANANIAS (22:12–16)

The account of Ananias’s visit to Paul parallels 9:10–17. Although the substance of the two accounts is basically the same, there is not the close verbal agreement that one finds in the two accounts of the vision on the Damascus road. The primary difference is due to the fact that this is Paul’s account of his own experience. Thus he did not relate the vision that came to Ananias (9:10–16) but rather Ananias’s visit to him. The substance of Ananias’s vision is transferred to his visit with Paul as Ananias related that experience to him.

**22:12** Paul introduced Ananias as a pious Jew, a strict observer of the Torah, and a person held in high esteem by the Jewish community in Damascus. This is in striking contrast to 9:10, where Luke introduced Ananias as a Christian disciple. The difference is due to the different settings of the two accounts. In Luke’s account in chap. 9 Ananias was the essential link-up between the newly converted Paul and the Christian community. In Paul’s account before the Jerusalem Jews, Ananias’s devotion to Judaism was stressed. Paul wished to make the same point about Ananias he had been making about himself—that his Christian faith in no way detracted from his loyalty to Judaism. This emphasis continues throughout Paul’s account of Ananias, where he is consistently portrayed as very Jewish.

**22:13–15** Verse 13 parallels 9:17–18 with considerably less detail, relating how Paul recovered his sight through the intercession of Ananias.<sup>31127</sup> Verse 14 is not really paralleled in chap. 9, although the idea of Paul’s being “chosen” is related in Ananias’s vision at 9:15. Ananias’s words to Paul have a strong Jewish flavor. “God of our fathers” is strong Old Testament language. The “Righteous One” is a Jewish messianic title, found earlier in the speeches of Peter and of Stephen to Jews (3:14; 7:52). Ananias delivered Christ’s commission to Paul. He was to be a witness to all people (v. 15; cf. 9:15). The commission was rather general at this point. Obviously the Jewish crowd did not catch on that all people included the Gentiles. This became much more specific in Paul’s account of his temple vision (v. 21). At that point the Jewish crowd got the message all too clearly (cf. v. 22).

**22:16** The scene with Ananias concludes with v. 16, which relates Paul’s baptism (cf. 9:18b). The phrase translated “what are you waiting for?” is a common Greek idiom and implies that it

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<sup>11035</sup> In place of οὐκ ἐνέβλεπον B has οὐδὲν ἔβλεπον, which is closer to 9:8 and, on the basis of a scribal error of sight, has some possibility of being the original reading.

<sup>11136</sup> See D. M. Stanley, “Paul’s Conversion in Acts: Why the Three Accounts?” *CBQ* 15 (1953): 315–38.

<sup>11237</sup> The verb translated “I was able to see him” in NIV is ἀνάβλεπον, which is perhaps an intended double entendre—“I looked up [at him]”; “I saw again.”

was time Paul acted on this commission from the Lord.<sup>31138</sup> The first step obviously was to be baptized into the community of believers. “Be baptized and wash your sins away” could be taken as a proof text for baptismal regeneration. The overarching term, however, is “calling upon the name of the Lord,” the profession of faith in Christ that is the basis for the act of baptism.<sup>31149</sup>

#### THE COMMISSION IN THE TEMPLE (22:17–21)

**22:17** Paul concluded his conversion account by telling of a vision he had in the temple which occurred on his “return” to Jerusalem (v. 17). This would indicate that it took place on his first visit to Jerusalem following his conversion (Acts 9:26–30). The account of Acts 9 does not relate this incident. Perhaps the reason Paul referred to it is that it indirectly answers the mob’s charge that he had defiled the temple. A person who goes to the temple for prayer is not likely to desecrate it.<sup>41150</sup> In the temple Paul fell into a trance<sup>41161</sup> and had a vision of the Lord. In many ways Paul’s vision in the temple parallels the call of Isaiah (Isa 6:1–13). Just as with Isaiah, Paul had a vision of the Lord (for Isaiah the Lord was Yahweh). Both experienced a call, a commission. Both were told that the people would resist their message. In Isaiah’s case the prophet was told to remain in the city in the face of the resistance. Paul was told to leave. The content of Paul’s commission in the temple is also paralleled by Paul’s own references to the experience in his letters. Paul expressed his call to the apostolate in terms of a vision of the Lord (1 Cor 9:1; 15:8). As here, Paul connected his call directly with his conversion and transformation from persecutor to witness for Christ (Gal 1:13–16; 1 Cor 15:9–11). Finally, Paul interpreted his call specifically as a call to the Gentiles (v. 21; Gal 1:16).<sup>41172</sup>

**22:18–21** Paul’s command to leave Jerusalem (v. 18) was perhaps connected with the conflict he encountered in the synagogue of the Hellenistic Jews (9:29). They certainly would not accept Paul’s testimony. Still, Paul protested against the order to leave (vv. 19–20). Such protests are a common feature of biblical commissioning narratives.<sup>41183</sup> Isaiah protested his unworthiness (Isa 6:5). Paul’s protest was that he had a convincing testimony to bear. All

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<sup>11338</sup> Τὶ μέλλεις is found with some frequency in Greek literature and generally with the meaning *What are you waiting for?* It is possible that here it may have the meaning *What are you going to do about it?* (so I. H. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, TNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980], 357).

<sup>11439</sup> Since βάπτισαι is in the middle voice, it could possibly be taken as a strict reflexive (“baptize yourself”) and thus be evidence for self-baptism. It is more likely that it is causative—“have yourself baptized.” One would assume from the sole presence of Ananias in the context (9:18; 22:16) that Ananias administered the rite. On baptism see B. S. Easton, “Self-baptism,” *AJT* 24 (1920): 513–18.

<sup>11540</sup> J. D. Williams, *Acts*, GNC (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 376.

<sup>11641</sup> Cf. Peter’s similar trance in 10:10; 11:5, where the same word (ἐκστασις) is used.

<sup>11742</sup> The parallels to both Isaiah and to Paul’s epistles have been noted by O. Betz, “Die Vision des Paulus in Temple von Jerusalem,” *Verborum Veritas*, Festschrift für Gustav Stahlin (Wuppertal: Rolf Brockhaus, 1970), 113–23.

<sup>11843</sup> For the “protest” in commission narratives see B. Hubbard, “Commissioning Accounts,” *Perspectives on Luke-Acts*, ed. C. H. Talbert (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978), 197f.



Jerusalem knew his former reputation as a persecutor of the Christians, even to the point of participation in Stephen's martyrdom (cf. 7:58b; 8:1a).<sup>41194</sup> They would know that something dramatic must have happened to reverse his direction. Still the Lord insisted that Paul go from Jerusalem (v. 21). He had another task for him—to witness to the Gentiles. Paul's Gentile mission was thus connected closely to the refusal of the Jews to accept his witness to Christ. One recalls Jesus' parable of the great banquet that makes this same point (Luke 14:16–24). It also was the problem Paul wrestled with in Rom 9–11. His answer there was that the obduracy of Israel was perhaps a temporary hardening to allow for the gospel to be taken to the Gentiles. In any event, the reference to the Gentiles led to an immediate fulfillment of Jesus' warning that the people would not accept his testimony. This was certainly true of the temple crowd listening to Paul. With the mention of the Gentiles, the silence ceased, the mob mentality resumed, and Paul was cut off (v. 22).

**(5) *The Attempted Examination by the Tribune (22:22–29)***

**<sup>22</sup>The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!"**

**<sup>23</sup>As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, <sup>24</sup>the commander ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and questioned in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. <sup>25</sup>As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?"**

**<sup>26</sup>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."**

**<sup>27</sup>The commander went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?"**

**"Yes, I am," he answered.**

**<sup>28</sup>Then the commander said, "I had to pay a big price for my citizenship."**

**"But I was born a citizen," Paul replied.**

**<sup>29</sup>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 narrative following Paul's address is extremely dramatic and filled with suspense. At first it looked once more as though Paul might be torn to shreds by the Jewish mob (v. 22), but he was again rescued by the Roman tribune and taken safely into the barracks. But then the tide turned against Paul again as the tribune decided to examine him by the cruel Roman method of scourging (v. 24). Again Paul was rescued—this time by an appeal to his Roman citizenship (vv. 25–29).

**22:22–23** Paul should have known better than to refer to his Gentile witness. It was ultimately Paul's openness to Gentiles that got him in trouble with the crowd (21:29). In those days of rising Jewish nationalism, Paul's law-free Gentile mission seemed to be disloyal to all that was Jewish (cf. 21:21). It was no surprise that the crowd resumed its cry of "away with

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<sup>11944</sup> In v. 20 Stephen is described as a μάρτυς. This is the earliest NT evidence for the word moving beyond its general sense of "witness" to the more specific nuance of a martyr, a witness unto death. Cf. the latter meaning in Rev 1:5; 2:13; 3:14.

him” (v. 22; cf. 21:36). This time they escalated their outcry, adding that such a scoundrel had no right even to exist. Their clamor was accompanied by wild gestures of outrage. No one is quite sure what they did with their cloaks. They either tore them as a gesture of horror at blasphemy (14:14), or they threw them off their bodies as if ready to stone Paul (cf. 7:58), or they shook them out as if trying to rid themselves of the contamination of his blasphemy, or they waved them wildly in the air to express their collective outrage.<sup>41205</sup> Neither is the symbolism of casting dust in the air altogether clear. It may have been a gesture of horror at perceived blasphemy, or it may have been that they hurled dust at Paul for lack of something more solid from the temple courtyard.

**22:24** In any event, it was not a safe setting for Paul, and Lysias quickly ordered him to be taken into the barracks. The tribune still did not have any idea of what the crowd had against Paul (cf. 21:34). Paul’s address had clarified nothing for him, particularly since it was in Aramaic. Therefore he decided to use the standard Roman method for “getting the truth” out of a slave or a common provincial, the form of examination under torture known by the Latin name *flagellum*. This was a particularly cruel manner of scourging that consisted of a beating across the raw flesh with leather thongs in which were inserted rough pieces of bone or metal. The thongs were set in a stout wooden handle.<sup>41216</sup> This was a much more severe manner of beating than that of the rods which Paul and Silas underwent at Philippi (16:22f., 37; cf. 2 Cor 11:25). It was not uncommon for the victim to die as a result of the flagellum.

**22:25–26** Paul was not about to undergo such torture unnecessarily; and as they stretched him out for the flogging,<sup>41227</sup> he wisely inquired: “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?”<sup>41238</sup> The seemingly innocent question immediately caught the attention of the centurion in charge of the scourging. It definitely was not legal to examine a Roman citizen by scourging. The Valerian and Porcian laws clearly established the illegality of such an act, and any Roman officer who transgressed this exemption would himself be guilty of a serious breach of law. The centurion immediately halted the process and lost no time in reporting the new development to his commanding officer (v. 26).

**22:27–28** By now Lysias must have been thoroughly perplexed about Paul. At first he mistook him for an Egyptian revolutionary. Then he learned that he was a Jew and a citizen of

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<sup>12045</sup> The problem is with the meaning of the verb ῥιπτεύω. The earliest commentator on this passage, Chrysostom, interpreted it as “shaking out” (*Hom.* 48:2). See K. Lake and H. J. Cadbury, eds., *The Beginnings of Christianity* (London: Macmillan, 1933), 5:275–77.

<sup>12146</sup> See Bruce, *Acts*: NIC, 445.

<sup>12247</sup> Προέτειναν αὐτὸν τοῖς ἰμᾶσιν (v. 25) could either be “they stretched him out with the thongs” or “they stretched him out for the thongs” (for receiving the beating). The NIV follows the latter.

<sup>12348</sup> Ἀκατάκριτον could either be “without condemnation” or “without a charge.” Although Paul had neither been charged nor condemned, Roman citizens were evidently subject to scourging only when actually convicted of a crime. Cicero’s famous quote would indicate that in his day flogging a Roman citizen was simply not conceivable: “To bind a Roman citizen is a crime, to flog him is an abomination, to slay him is almost an act of murder” (*Verrine Orations* 2.5.66).

the important city of Tarsus, a man of some culture who spoke polished Greek. Now he learned that Paul was a Roman citizen. The surprises were not over. Soon he learned that Paul was no Johnny-come-lately to citizenship status like himself but one who was *born* a citizen (v. 28).<sup>41249</sup> Lysias's comment that he had purchased his citizenship would have been most unlikely in the earlier empire. Citizenship was often conferred for performance of some service to the state or for military duty. Slaves of a citizen who were freed on the basis of service to their owner were granted citizenship. With the granting of colony status whole towns were given citizenship.<sup>51250</sup> But individual purchase of the rights of citizenship would have been looked on askance. There is evidence, however, that under Claudius there was increasing abuse of the privilege; and purchase of citizenship became common.<sup>51261</sup> That Lysias purchased his citizenship during this time is highly likely given his name, Claudius Lysias (23:26). One generally took the name of the patron through whom citizenship was obtained.<sup>51272</sup> It is possible that Lysias was being a bit sarcastic when he referred to paying a "big price" for his citizenship, the implication being perhaps that "now it seems that just anyone can afford it."<sup>51283</sup> If that was so, Paul's response would have been a shocker: no, he did not pay a big price but was *born* into it.

There has been much speculation about how Paul's family received the citizenship. One theory is that they were part of a large resettlement of Jewish freedmen by Pompey in Cilicia in 63 B.C. This is based on a misunderstanding of Pompey's action as well as on a misapplication of a tradition from Jerome that Paul's family migrated to Tarsus from Gischala in Galilee.<sup>51294</sup> Another view suggests that the tentmaking trade of Paul's family may have proved useful to the Roman military and been rewarded with citizenship. Such suggestions are wholly speculative. We simply do not know how his family came into citizenship status. Luke made his point well, however. Paul was a Roman citizen and one of considerable status. His citizenship would hereafter play a large role in the narrative of Acts as Paul interacted with Roman officials.

**22:29** Verse 29 closes the examination scene. On learning of Paul's citizenship, the whole procedure was stopped immediately. Lysias was himself quite alarmed (*ephobēthē*), realizing that he had placed Paul in chains. The picture here is not wholly clear, and our knowledge of Roman law is limited. Evidently the Julian and Porcian laws protected Roman citizens from summary arrest, from being placed in chains without a preliminary hearing. Paul's situation was complicated by the fact that his detention could be considered protective custody rather than

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<sup>12449</sup> For a discussion of how one proved citizenship status and the abuse of citizen rights, see A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 151f., and commentary on 16:37.

<sup>12550</sup> See H. J. Cadbury, *The Book of Acts in History* (New York: Harper, 1955), 74–77.

<sup>12651</sup> See Sherwin-White, *The Roman Citizenship*, 237–50.

<sup>12752</sup> Lysias may have worked his way up through the military ranks and bought his citizenship to qualify him as a tribune. Tribunes had to be citizens with equestrian rank. See Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law*, 155f.

<sup>12853</sup> The Roman historian Dio Cassius (60.17.5f.) seems to bear this out, noting that Claudius's wife Messalina and the members of her court would sell citizenship rights for their own personal gain. He adds that at first the price was high but gradually degenerated to the point where citizenship could be had for a few scraps of glass.

<sup>12954</sup> Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law*, 151f.

arrest.<sup>51305</sup> However that may be, from this point on Lysias treated Paul with great respect. He still did not know the charges against him. Examination by scourging had been ruled out. He now turned to another avenue for answering his questions—the Jewish Sanhedrin.

**(6) Paul Before the Sanhedrin (22:30–23:11)**

<sup>30</sup>The next day, since the commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them.

<sup>1</sup>Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, “My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.” <sup>2</sup>At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. <sup>3</sup>Then Paul said to him, “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!”

<sup>4</sup>Those who were standing near Paul said, “You dare to insult God’s high priest?”

<sup>5</sup>Paul replied, “Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: ‘Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.’ ”

<sup>6</sup>Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, “My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead.” <sup>7</sup>When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. <sup>8</sup>(The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.)

<sup>9</sup>There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. “We find nothing wrong with this man,” they said. “What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?” <sup>10</sup>The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.

<sup>11</sup>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.”

**22:30** Unable to ascertain the Jewish charges against Paul,<sup>51316</sup> Lysias decided to turn to the Sanhedrin in his attempt to establish a substantive accusation.<sup>51327</sup> It is unlikely that Roman officials had the authority to summon a Sanhedrin.<sup>51338</sup> Many interpreters thus assume that

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<sup>13055</sup> E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 634, n. 4.

<sup>13156</sup> The inability of the Roman officials to formulate charges against Paul is a constant motif throughout these chapters: cf. 22:30; 23:28f.; 24:22; 25:20, 26f.

<sup>13257</sup> Formal legal language occurs throughout chaps. 22–26, such as *κατηγορέω* in 22:30. See A. A. Trites, “The Importance of Legal Scenes and Language in the Book of Acts,” *NovT* 16 (1974): 278–84.

<sup>13358</sup> Josephus seems to reflect the opposite in *Antiquities* 20.20f., where the procurator Albinus informed the high priest Ananus that he had no authority to convene a Sanhedrin without his consent. In that particular instance, however, the Sanhedrin had

Lysias did not request a formal meeting of the Sanhedrin but only convened its members for an informal hearing.<sup>51349</sup> Some even suggest that the meeting was held in the Tower of Antonia rather than the council chamber of the Sanhedrin.<sup>61350</sup> In any event, Paul was released from confinement in order to appear before the Jewish high court.<sup>61361</sup> Lysias's decision to consult this body was a logical one. They would surely have heard about the riot against Paul, and it would be the Jews who understood most clearly the legal ramifications of the incident.

**23:1–2** Placed before the Sanhedrin, Paul seized the first word: “Brothers, I have lived as a citizen before God with all good conscience to this very day” (23:1, author’s translation).<sup>61372</sup> The implication is that he had nothing on his own mind to condemn him, that he had been faithful in his conduct toward God in every respect.<sup>61383</sup> Such a remark was itself something of a provocation. If Paul’s life as a Christian left him in complete innocence before God, then the Sanhedrin members who did not share his commitment to Christ were the guilty parties. It is small wonder that the high priest Ananias immediately ordered him to be struck on the mouth for blasphemy (v. 2). His action was completely in character. Josephus depicted him as one of the very worst of the high priests, known for his pro-Roman sentiments, his extreme cruelty, and his greed.<sup>61394</sup>

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condemned and executed James the brother of Jesus, and the illegality involved was the Sanhedrin’s assumption of capital jurisdiction. See Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law*, 54.

<sup>13459</sup> Cf. Marshall, *Acts*, 361; R. Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, Teilband II: *Apg. 13–28* (Zurich: Benziger, 1986), 240–42.

<sup>13560</sup> This would explain how Lysias so quickly secured troops (23:10). See A. T. Robertson, *WP* (Nashville: Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, 1930), 3:196.

<sup>13661</sup> The reference to Paul’s “release” (ἔλυσεν) in v. 30 is ambiguous. It could refer either to his having his chains removed or to his being released from confinement in order to appear before the Sanhedrin. The latter seems the more likely, since the removal of his chains is implied in 23:29.

<sup>13762</sup> The word translated “fulfilled my duty” by the NIV is πολιτεύομαι, which is literally “to live as a citizen.” Citizenship was a big issue for Paul throughout chaps. 21–26—Tarsian, Roman, Jewish. Here Paul stressed that his ultimate citizenship was lived under God’s rule. The word only occurs elsewhere in the NT in Phil 1:27 and there also with the “citizenship” nuance. See R. R. Brewer, “The Meaning of *Polituesthe* in Philippians 1:27,” *JBL* 73 (1954): 76–83. Cf. the close proximity of πολιτεία in 22:28.

<sup>13863</sup> Here the concept of “conscience” seems to be used with its normal secular Greek meaning of the condemning or guilty self-awareness. In Paul’s letters he extended this meaning to include the conscience as a moral guide for future action and for the judgment of the actions of others. See M. E. Thrall, “The Pauline Use of *Suneidesis*,” *NTS* 14 (1967–68): 118–25.

<sup>13964</sup> Identified as the son of Nedebaeus, he was appointed high priest by Herod of Chalcis (brother of Agrippa I) in A.D. 47 and seems to have held the office for eleven or twelve years (*Antiquities* 20.103). He was noted for his bribery and allowed his servants to plunder the tithes designated for the common priests (*Antiquities* 20.205–10, 13). He

**23:3** Given Ananias's character, Paul's angry response is altogether understandable: "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall" (v. 3). His words were prophetic. Less than ten years later, Ananias came to an untimely end at the hand of Jewish freedom fighters.<sup>61405</sup> The image of the whitewashed wall was particularly appropriate, expressing the sheer hypocrisy of this one who stood there in his fine high-priestly vestments, symbolic of his role as intercessor between the people and God. His character and his actions belied the outward appearance. Jesus used the same image to depict hypocrisy, referring to the practice of whitewashing tombs as a warning to people that the defilement of dead bones lay within (Matt 23:27). Paul may also have had in mind Ezekiel's image of a crumbling wall covered with whitewash to conceal its decay, ready to fall with the first rainstorm (Ezek 13:10f.). Paul saw Ananias's action in having him struck as in itself a demonstration of the high priest's hypocrisy. There he sat in his role of judge, and yet he was himself in need of judgment because his striking Paul was clearly against the law (v. 3b). No verdict had been reached, no deliberations even begun, and yet the action of the high priest had already pronounced judgment. This was scarcely Israelite justice (cf. Lev 19:15).<sup>61416</sup>

**23:4–5** It was then pointed out to Paul that it was God's high priest he had just reviled (v. 4).<sup>61427</sup> The emphasis on his being the representative of God shifts the focus from the man to the role, and in that respect Paul's demeanor underwent a radical change as well. It has often been questioned whether Paul really did not recognize the high priest.<sup>61438</sup> His reply would seem to indicate: "I did not realize that he was the high priest" (v. 5a). Paul may have said this with a mild tone of irony: "He didn't act like a high priest should; how could I recognize him as such when he was so totally out of character?" Now that the focus was on the role, Paul made clear that he respected the office. He even quoted Exod 22:28 to underscore that he did respect God's representatives in accordance with the Torah. He was a law-abiding Jew in every respect.

**23:6** At v. 6 the whole proceeding takes a radical turn. Still holding the floor, Paul stated what he saw as the real reason for his trial—his "hope in the resurrection of the dead."<sup>61449</sup> This

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was summoned to Rome for his part in a Jewish ambush of a number of Samaritan pilgrims (*Antiquities* 20.131).

<sup>14065</sup> Because of his pro-Roman sentiments, Ananias was killed by Jewish Zealots at the outbreak of the war with Rome (*War* 2.441f.).

<sup>14166</sup> Clearly Paul's anger was not in the spirit of Jesus' words about turning the other cheek (Matt 5:39) or even within his own ideal of blessing when reviled (1 Cor 4:12); but surely the apostle can be granted a little humanity, and "righteous indignation" is often expressed in his epistles. See Marshall, *Acts*, 363.

<sup>14267</sup> Cf. the similar rebuke addressed to Jesus in John 18:22.

<sup>14368</sup> All sorts of suggestions have been made—that there was a recent change of high priests, that Paul's weak vision was responsible, that Paul may not have been aware who gave the order, or that in this informal hearing the high priest was not wearing his vestments. Perhaps the suggestion of F. Stagg (*The Book of Acts: The Early Struggle for an Unhindered Gospel* [Nashville: Broadman, 1955], 232) is most on target: that v. 5a be translated, "I spoke without taking note of [i.e., taking into consideration] the fact that he is high priest."

<sup>14469</sup> Most interpreters take the phrase *περὶ ἐλπίδος καὶ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν* as a hendiadys, "concerning [my] hope in the resurrection of the dead." See O. Lagercrantz,

is often seen as a clever ruse on Paul's part to divide the assembly and divert attention from himself. Luke seems to prepare for such an understanding by noting that both Pharisees and Sadducees were present in the Sanhedrin. Paul without doubt sought to align himself with the former group by affirming that he was himself a Pharisee and a son of Pharisees.<sup>71450</sup> Neither his mention of his Pharisaic affiliation nor of the resurrection is without relevance to the situation. The resurrection was the issue that separated Paul from the rest of the Jews. It was the real issue behind his trials, and in his subsequent defense speeches Paul constantly insisted on that fact.<sup>71461</sup> The Pharisees in fact believed in the *concept* of the resurrection. A resurrection of the dead constituted a major part of their hope in God's final deliverance of his people. They were thus theologically "ripe" for the Christian gospel that Christ had risen from the dead and that this proved him to be the hoped-for Messiah. The Pharisee Paul had come to see this. Other of the Pharisees had become Christians (cf. 15:5). Even in the Sanhedrin it was the Pharisaic segment that had on an earlier occasion come to the defense of the Christians (5:34–40). In short, for Paul and for Luke, the natural fulfillment of the Pharisaic hope was in Christ. It was no accident and certainly no ruse that he made his appeal to the Pharisees in the Sanhedrin.<sup>71472</sup>

**23:7–8** With Paul's mention of the resurrection, a violent discussion erupted in the Sanhedrin (vv. 7–8). This body largely consisted of the high priestly aristocracy and the ruling elders, who were primarily Sadducees. The Pharisees were in the minority and were represented among the scribes who sat in the Sanhedrin.<sup>71483</sup> Luke explained in a narrative aside that Sadducees rejected the concepts of resurrection, angels, and spirits, while the Pharisees believed in them all. The Sadducees' rejection of resurrection is well attested. The Sadducees only accepted the books of the Law as Scripture, and they saw no reference to resurrection in these. Angels and spirits, however, are found in the Pentateuch; and the Sadducees' denial of them is not attested anywhere other than in Acts 23:8. It is most unlikely that the Sadducees

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"Act 14, 17," *ZNW* 31 (1932): 86f. It is grammatically possible, however, to argue for two separate items, the hope (of Israel) and the resurrection of the dead (which comprised a part of that hope).

<sup>14570</sup> Cf. Phil 3:5. In Philippians Paul said that he counted all that as loss for the sake of Christ. In addressing the Jews in Acts, however, he never abandoned his Pharisaic identity. Cf. 26:5.

<sup>14671</sup> For further development of this central theme, see R. J. Kepple, "The Hope of Israel, the Resurrection of the Dead, and Jesus: A Study of their Relationship in Acts with Particular Regard to the Understanding of Paul's Trial Defense," *JETS* 20 (1977): 231–41; K. Haacker, "Das Bekenntnis des Paulus zur Hoffnung Israels nach der Apostelgeschichte des Lukas," *NTS* 31 (1985): 437–51.

<sup>14772</sup> The contrasting portrait of the Pharisees in Luke's two volumes is interesting. In his Gospel they were Jesus' enemies. In Acts they are generally portrayed in a favorable light. Surely behind this difference is the fact that for the early church it was the Pharisees who were most amenable to Christianity. See D. B. Gowler, "A Socio-Narratological Character Analysis of the Pharisees in Luke-Acts," Ph.D. diss., the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989.

<sup>14873</sup> For a discussion of the Sadducees, see commentary on 4:1; for the Pharisees, see the commentary on 5:34.

rejected the existence of angels and spirits as such. To what, then, was Luke referring? He may have meant that the Sadducees rejected the eschatology of the Pharisees, which involved an elaborate hierarchy of good and evil angels.<sup>71494</sup> Or perhaps it was the idea that an angel or a spirit can speak through a human being as an agent of revelation that Luke depicted the Sadducees as rejecting (cf. v. 9).<sup>71505</sup> A final possibility is that the reference was a further elaboration of their rejection of the resurrection—they rejected an afterlife in an angelic or spiritual state.<sup>71516</sup>

**23:9–10** Whatever was intended, it soon became clear that the Pharisees were Paul’s defenders. Not only did they not find the resurrection a ridiculous idea, they were even willing to grant that God may have spoken to Paul through a spirit or an angel (v. 9).<sup>71527</sup> It is possible that they were trying to give some explanation for Paul’s Damascus road experience. The dispute at this point became so violent that Lysias had to send a messenger to bring down troops in order to prevent Paul from being torn to shreds between the two opposing groups (v. 10). Whereas Lysias’s original seizing of Paul could be seen as an arrest (21:33), this time there is no doubt the tribune served as his protector.

**23:11** Alone, under detention, the following night Paul had a reassuring vision (v. 11).<sup>71538</sup> The Lord had certainly prepared him well for the events that had just transpired in Jerusalem (20:23; 21:10f.). Still they had been particularly trying—the mob in the temple square, the arrest, the attempted scourging, the violence of the Sanhedrin. To what was it all leading? The Lord’s words assured him that there was a divine purpose in all that had happened to him. As he had borne his witness in Jerusalem, so would he bear it in Rome.<sup>71549</sup> Paul had already expressed his own desire to visit Rome (19:21). Now the visit received the Lord’s endorsement. The key word is, of course, “testify.” All Paul’s troubles the past two days had ultimately derived from his testifying to Christ before the Jews. Now his trip to Rome and all of the legal hassle in between also would be a testimony. With v. 11 the final portion of Acts is mapped out.

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<sup>14974</sup> T. W. Manson, “Sadducee and Pharisee—the Origin and Significance of the Names,” *BJRL* 22 (1938): 144–59.

<sup>15075</sup> B. J. Bamberger, “The Sadducees and the Belief in Angels,” *JBL* 82 (1963): 433–35. A related view sees the Sadducees refusing to accept angels as a substitute for the OT anthropomorphism (i.e., as mediators for God); see G. G. Stroumsa, “Le Couple de l’Ange et de l’Esprit: Traditions Juives et Chrétiennes,” *RB* 88 (1981): 42–61.

<sup>15176</sup> Marshall, *Acts*, 365. This would be much in keeping with Luke 20:36, where Jesus described the resurrection existence as “equal to the angels.”

<sup>15277</sup> Verse 9 is an ellipsis—“but if an angel or a spirit has spoken to him.” The Western text completes the statement by drawing from Acts 5:39, reading, “If it is true that an angel or spirit has spoken to him, let us not contend with God.” See E. Delebecque, “Paul entre les Juifs et Romains selon les deux Versions de Act.xiii,” *RevThom* 84 (1984): 83–91.

<sup>15378</sup> Paul had experienced such visions before, particularly at critical junctures in his career. Cf. 18:9f.; 16:9; 22:17f.; 27:23f

<sup>15479</sup> It is interesting that the words “take courage” (θάρσει, θάρσειτε) are only spoken by Jesus in the NT: Matt 9:2, 22; 14:27; Mark 6:50; 10:49; John 16:33; Acts 23:11.



**(7) The Plot to Ambush Paul (23:12–22)**

<sup>12</sup>The next morning the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. <sup>13</sup>More than forty men were involved in this plot. <sup>14</sup>They went to the chief priests and elders and said, “We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. <sup>15</sup>Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here.”

<sup>16</sup>But when the son of Paul’s sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul.

<sup>17</sup>Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, “Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him.” <sup>18</sup>So he took him to the commander.

The centurion said, “Paul, the prisoner, sent for me and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you.”

<sup>19</sup>The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside and asked, “What is it you want to tell me?”

<sup>20</sup>He said: “The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about him. <sup>21</sup>Don’t give in to them, because more than forty of them are waiting in ambush for him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent to their request.”

<sup>22</sup>The commander dismissed the young man and cautioned him, “Don’t tell anyone that you have reported this to me.”

**23:12–15** The Lord’s assuring vision to Paul was timely, for his troubles were far from over. The threat came from a group of forty zealous Jews who placed themselves under a vow to neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul (vv. 12–13).<sup>81550</sup> The Greek word used to express their oath is particularly strong (*anathematizō*). They placed themselves under an anathema, a curse, probably in some such form as “May I be cursed/ eternally damned if ...” One wonders if they died of hunger or thirst, for their vow was surely not fulfilled. Actually, the Jewish law provided for the release from a vow that was unfulfillable because of some unforeseen circumstance (Mishna, *Nedarim* 3.3). Paul’s removal under heavy Roman guard would have qualified. The forty conspirators hatched a plot to fulfill their vow, which involved the cooperation of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was to call a session and have the tribune deliver Paul to them under the pretense of giving him a further hearing (vv. 14–15). On the way between Antonia and the council chamber,<sup>81561</sup> they would ambush and kill Paul.<sup>81572</sup> It is

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<sup>15580</sup> The text has “the Jews” but obviously means only the forty of v. 13. Some Western and Byzantine texts have the easier reading “some of the Jews.”

<sup>15681</sup> The exact location of the council chamber in Paul’s day is not certain. See commentary on 4:5–7. Josephus located it just outside the temple precincts, which would make for a more likely ambush spot than if the chamber were located within the temple precincts, as the rabbinic sources have it.

<sup>15782</sup> The Western text has the men say (end of v. 15) that they would kill Paul “even if we ourselves should die for it.”

perhaps significant that it was the high priestly aristocracy and the elders whom they approached, the Sadducees on the Sanhedrin. The scribes (Pharisees), with their greater openness to Paul (cf. 23:9), are not mentioned.

**23:16–22** Little is known of Paul's family. The present passage is the sole mention of his sister and of her son. Likewise, how Paul's nephew learned of the plot is anybody's guess. He seems to have been a young man, perhaps in his late teens.<sup>81583</sup> His accessibility to Paul was not unusual. Prisoners of high rank, such as Paul with his Roman citizenship, were often given a great deal of liberty for visits from family and friends. In fact, Paul's considerable standing with the Romans is indicated by the ease with which he called the centurion over to himself and by the unquestioning compliance the latter gave to his request (vv. 17–18). He did not even tell the centurion of the plot. Lysias sensed that it was a matter of extreme importance and took the young man aside to receive the report in confidence (v. 19). Paul's nephew gave the report in detail. Verses 20–21 repeat the content of vv. 12–15. From the perspective of information, they contribute nothing new. The repetition, however, increases the dramatic effect considerably. With each new reference to the plot, the threat to Paul's life becomes more ominous.<sup>81594</sup> The dramatic effect is continued in v. 22 as Lysias continued the note of strict confidence. It was of utmost importance that the whole matter be kept strictly secret. No one was to know the tribune was aware of the plot.

#### **(8) Paul Sent to Caesarea (23:23–35)**

**<sup>23</sup>Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, "Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. <sup>24</sup>Provide mounts for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix."**

**<sup>25</sup>He wrote a letter as follows:**

**<sup>26</sup>Claudius Lysias,**

**To His Excellency, Governor Felix:**

**Greetings.**

**<sup>27</sup>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. <sup>28</sup>I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin. <sup>29</sup>I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment. <sup>30</sup>When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him.**

**<sup>31</sup>So the soldiers, carrying out their orders, took Paul with them during the night and brought him as far as Antipatris. <sup>32</sup>The next day they let the cavalry go on with him, while they returned to the barracks. <sup>33</sup>When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to**

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<sup>15883</sup> He is called a νεανίας in v. 17, which could indicate anywhere from twenty to forty years of age. The diminutive form (νεανίσκος) is used in vv. 18, 22.

<sup>15984</sup> The textual variants in v. 20 attest to the obscurity of the participle. Who was "about to" inquire is anything but clear. It could be the Jews (μέλλοντες) or Lysias (μέλλων) or the Sanhedrin (μέλλον).

the governor and handed Paul over to him. <sup>34</sup>The governor read the letter and asked what province he was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia, <sup>35</sup>he said, “I will hear your case when your accusers get here.” Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod’s palace.

Lysias decided to send Paul to Caesarea, the seat of the provincial government and residence of the procurator. The immediate occasion was the imminent threat from the forty conspirators. He probably would have made this transfer sooner or later under any circumstances. The Jews were charging Paul with a capital crime, and only the procurator had jurisdiction over such cases.<sup>81605</sup> Further, Paul was a Roman citizen, and that too placed Paul under the procurator rather than a lesser official such as himself. As commander of the Jerusalem garrison, his primary responsibility was maintaining peace and order. The mobs, the plots, all must have convinced him that Paul’s continued presence in Jerusalem was not only a danger to Paul’s own life but a threat to the general peace of the city as well.

**23:23–25** Lysias lost no time in sending Paul to Caesarea (vv. 23–24). That the military contingent was sent forth at nine o’clock at night testifies both to the urgency and to his desire to accomplish the transfer as covertly as possible in the face of the ambush threat. His concern was also expressed by the sizable troops under whose guard Paul was dispatched—two hundred foot soldiers, seventy cavalry and two hundred spearmen.<sup>81616</sup> This was nearly half the one thousand troops in the Jerusalem cohort.<sup>81627</sup> Mounds were also provided for Paul.<sup>81638</sup> Lysias then drafted an official letter to the governor.<sup>81649</sup> Such letters were required when transferring a prisoner from one jurisdiction to another. They generally contained an account of the circumstances of arrest and the charges. The latter was difficult for Lysias.

**23:26–30** Lysias’s letter begins with the formal threefold salutation of a Greek letter, giving first the sender (Lysias), second the recipient (Felix), and finally the customary word of greeting

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<sup>16085</sup> See A. N. Sherwin-White, “The Early Persecutions and Roman Law Again,” *JTS* 3 (1952): 199–213.

<sup>16186</sup> The term translated “spearmen” (δεξιολάβοι) is a near hapax, only occurring in later Greek literature from the seventh and tenth centuries A.D. Meaning literally *holding with the right hand*, it is translated “spearman” or “lancers” in the early Latin versions. G. D. Kilpatrick cites an ancient scholion in which it is said that the δεξιολάβοι were “police officers.” He argues from this that they were local Jerusalem militia and not part of the Roman cohort, thus reducing the drain on the Jerusalem garrison (“Acts xxiii, 23. *Dexiolaboi*,” *JTS* 14 [1963]: 393f.).

<sup>16287</sup> The Western text, mainly attested by the Harclean Syriac, has a lesser number—100 horsemen, 200 spearmen. (The text of Bezae is missing from 22:29 to the end of Acts.)

<sup>16388</sup> κτήνη is a general term used for pack animals as well as horses.

<sup>16489</sup> “As follows” (ἔχουσιν τὸν τύπον τοῦτον) could be taken to mean *in this manner* and to indicate that the following is the gist, not an exact reproduction of the contents. C. Hemer, however, argues that the phrase means that an exact copy follows and suggests Luke had access to the letter in the court records (*The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* [Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1989], 347f.).

(*chairein*). Felix is designated by the general word “governor” (*hēgemōn*)<sup>91650</sup> and given the deferential title “His Excellency.”<sup>91661</sup> After the formalities Lysias’s letter got down to the business at hand, explaining the circumstances of Paul’s arrest (v. 27). He stretched the truth a bit to his own advantage. The reader knows already that Lysias seized Paul in the temple square and put two chains on him (21:33). It was true that he probably saved Paul from the mob, but he certainly at that point had no knowledge of Paul’s Roman citizenship. Lysias’s account of the hearing in the Sanhedrin was less biased (vv. 28–29). One wonders how he could have understood what was going on, since the whole proceeding was doubtless conducted in Aramaic. He probably arranged for an interpreter, which was the usual practice in such circumstances. He certainly learned enough from the proceeding to realize that the whole debate involved “questions about their law” and not any infraction of Roman law. His official report to Felix flatly stated that “there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment.” The picture would not change. It was the conclusion reached by all the Roman officials right up to Paul’s appeal to Caesar. The final part of Lysias’s letter related the immediate circumstances leading to his transfer of Paul—the ambush plot (v. 30). The tribune added the further note that he had ordered Paul’s accusers to prepare their case for presentation before Felix. At the writing of the letter he would not yet have done this but surely waited until Paul was at a safe distance from Jerusalem.<sup>91672</sup>

**23:31–33** Verse 31 resumes the narrative, noting that the soldiers carried out Lysias’s orders as commanded (v. 23f.). The new information is that they took Paul to Antipatris on the first leg of the journey. Antipatris was a military station fortified by Herod the Great and named for his father Antipater. It marked the border between Judea and Samaria and lay about thirty-five miles from Jerusalem, or somewhat more than half the sixty-mile distance from Jerusalem to Caesarea. It was a natural stopping place for troops making a two-day journey, but it was a rather long march for foot soldiers to make without a stopover. Some interpreters thus suggest that the reference to the foot soldiers returning to the barracks (v. 32) should be placed earlier than the arrival of Antipatris. The picture would then be that the foot soldiers returned to Jerusalem at some point along the way to Antipatris when they had reached a safe distance from the city. With the return of the four hundred troops, this would also solve the problem of the heavy reduction of the Jerusalem garrison. However that may have been, it was the cavalry that accompanied Paul the next day the twenty-five miles to the governor’s headquarters at Caesarea,<sup>91683</sup> handing over to Felix both their prisoner and Lysias’s official letter (v. 33).

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<sup>16590</sup> ἡγεμῶν was the general term for the top-ranking official in an area. Felix was the procurator of Judea. In Luke 2:2 the term ἡγεμῶν is used of the imperial legate of Syria, an official of higher rank than procurator. In the papyri the word is used of the prefect (ἑπάρχος) of Egypt, a still higher rank.

<sup>16691</sup> Strictly the term was used for those of equestrian rank, which Felix did not hold. Note its application to Theophilus in the dedication of Luke’s Gospel (Luke 1:3).

<sup>16792</sup> In v. 30 both “sent” and “ordered” are epistolary aorists, the past tense being viewed from the perspective of the letter’s recipient.

<sup>16893</sup> For Caesarea, see chap. III, n. 145 and chap. VII, n. 111. See also L. I. Levine, *Caesarea under Roman Rule* (Leiden: Brill, 1975).

Claudius Felix, procurator of Judea from A.D. 52–59,<sup>1694</sup> plays a major role in the following chapter of Acts. A knowledge of his background and of general conditions during his administration throws significant light on the Acts narrative. Felix owed his high position to his brother Pallas, who had considerable influence in the court of the emperor Claudius. Both brothers were freedmen of the imperial family. The high procuratorial office granted Felix was something almost unheard of for a former slave and was doubtless secured through his brother's influence in the imperial court. That it was considered with disdain in some Roman circles is reflected in Tacitus's judgment that Felix "wielded royal power with the instincts of a slave" (*History* 5.9). The reference to "royal power" could be related to either his administration or to his family life. His administration was marked by the rising tide of Jewish nationalism with many insurrections, both political and religious. All were brutally suppressed by the procurator. He tended to be arbitrary in his dispensation of justice and totally lacking in understanding of or sympathy for the Jews. This only heightened the anti-Roman feelings of the Jews and proliferated the freedom movements. Felix's ambitious and pretentious nature was nowhere demonstrated more clearly than in his marriages. He had three wives. All were princesses. The first was the granddaughter of Antony and Cleopatra. The third was Drusilla, the daughter of Agrippa I (see 24:24). Felix's administrative ineptitude was bound to catch up with him sooner or later, and he was finally removed from office for his total mismanagement of a dispute between the Jews and Gentiles of Caesarea (see 24:27).<sup>91705</sup>

**23:34–35** At this point in the narrative, Luke gave no hint about Felix's shortcomings. Everything is related in formal, official language to emphasize that Paul's transferral to Caesarea was very much a protective move on the part of the Roman officials (vv. 34–35). Felix's question about Paul's native province was aimed at determining whether he had legal jurisdiction over Paul in his role as Judean procurator. During the reign of Claudius, both Judea and Cilicia were under the single provincial administration of the imperial legate of Syria. As an official within that administrative unit, Felix determined that it was within his own competency to give Paul a formal hearing. In the meantime Paul was confined to the *praetorium*, a former palace built by Herod the Great which now served as the Roman headquarters.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>16994</sup> According to Tacitus, Felix's praenomen was Antonius. According to Josephus, it was Claudius. Recent inscriptional evidence supports Josephus. See F. F. Bruce, "The Full Name of the Procurator Felix," *JSNT* 1 (1978): 33–36. The terminal point of his procuratorship is also uncertain. There is conflicting evidence in Josephus, Jerome, and Eusebius, which would place the terminus anywhere from 54 to 61. The evidence of Josephus would indicate that Festus assumed office in 59 or 60, thus placing Felix's terminus in that period. See Schürer, *History* 1:465f., n. 42.

<sup>17095</sup> For a full discussion of Felix's procuratorship, see Schürer, *History* 1:459–66.

<sup>171</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 414–477.