

Luke and Paul's imprisonment

Rome at Last

One of the more amazing circumstances reflected in the book of Acts is the manner in which Paul endeared himself to a wide variety of Roman officials. Almost without exception, these dignitaries came to respect God's ambassador to the Gentiles. One really is not surprised, therefore, at the kindly treatment Paul received in the imperial city. Rather than being housed as a common criminal, the apostle was permitted to live in his own rented dwelling, though bound with a chain, and in the company of a guard (Acts 28:16, 30; cf. Eph. 6:20).

The latter portion of Acts 28 summarizes two meetings that Paul had with Rome's leading Jews. And while some of them stubbornly disbelieved his message, others were persuaded by the things he proclaimed (Acts 28:24). This hints of the commencement of a fruitful ministry in the city. Then, abruptly, the narrative ends: "And he abode two whole years in his own hired dwelling, and received all that went in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, none forbidding him" (Acts 28:30-31).

What happened during this two-year span? Luke leaves the anxious reader hanging. Let us consider this matter from several vantages.

The Mysterious Silence

First, it is obvious that Luke knew how Paul's case ended; that is evidenced by the historian's reference to the "two whole years." Did the apostle ever appear before Caesar? Some have contended that probably he did not. It is surmised that his accusers from Judea never showed up to press their case, hence the charges were dropped. There is no evidence for this view, and it runs counter to the testimony of the angel who informed Paul, "You must stand before Caesar" (Acts 27:24).

Second, by studying the final letters of Paul — 1 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Timothy — one is able to conclude that the apostle was released from that initial Roman confinement, to further evangelize the antique world of the empire.

Third, but why would a historian, so fastidious for details, deliberately omit virtually the whole of this obviously exciting two-year period, by concluding the Acts narrative so suddenly? Various theories have been proposed by commentators, none of which really satisfies all the facts. Ultimately, the answer has to be: Luke was not writing under the impulses of a natural reporter. The superintending guidance of the Holy Spirit restrained the historical account.

One concept the Bible student must understand is the fact that biblical history is selective. It is designed to trace only that course of events essential to the balanced revelation of redemptive matters. In the composition of the Bible, Heaven was unconcerned with catering to human curiosity. This selective "silence of the Scriptures" is one of the subtle, though profound, evidences of the divine origin of the Book of Books. (For further consideration of this point, see *The Silence of Scripture: An Argument for Inspiration**.)

Some Literary “Detective” Work

While it is the case that Luke did not chronicle the events of Paul’s two-year house-arrest in Rome, there are other ways of filling in some of the blanks. For example, it is generally conceded that during this time-frame the apostle penned four epistles—Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon (though not necessarily in this sequence).

Thus, by gleaning data from these letters, one can learn something of the trials and tribulations of God’s apostle during this period. Let us briefly consider several matters relating to this two-year span.

Physical and Emotional Circumstances

First, while it is true that Paul was granted some rather unusual liberties, as mentioned earlier (see Acts 28:16, 30-31), nonetheless, he was still a prisoner. This circumstance in itself imposes considerable stress.

Hence, in his correspondence, he refers to himself as “the prisoner of Christ” (Eph. 3:1) or “the prisoner of the Lord” (Eph. 4:1), who is an “ambassador in chains” (6:20). Chains were commonly viewed as an object of shame (cf. 2 Tim. 1:16). Note the multiple references to his “bonds” or to his state as a “prisoner” (Phil. 1:7, 13, 14, 17; Col. 4:18; Phile. 1, 9, 23).

It is obvious that the apostle’s status as a prisoner was a constant reminder of the sacrifices that sometimes are a necessary component of the Christian life.

Second, there is another factor which doubtless was a source of considerable grief to this rugged soldier of Jesus—as reflected even in a letter known for its joyful tone (the Philippian epistle). It was a spiritual wound more devastating than any physical injury.

As Paul began his work in the seven-hilled city, he attracted considerable attention and his influence was staggering.

The labor of the Christian-prisoner became known “throughout the whole praetorian guard” (Philippians 1:13). The praetorian guard was a body of ten thousand specially selected soldiers in Rome.

They had unusual privileges (e.g., double pay), becoming so powerful that even the emperors had to court their favor (Robertson 1931, 438). The apostle’s influence even went beyond this group unto “all the rest,” which probably indicates that his reputation was known throughout the entire city.

Amazingly, there is even a reference to saints in “Caesar’s household,” i.e., those in and about the emperor’s palace (Phil. 4:22).

The gospel had penetrated deeply into the heart of this metropolis. Through Paul’s example, the majority of the Roman Christians were “more abundantly bold to speak the word of God without fear” (Phil. 1:14). What thrilling times these must have been.

<https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/144-pauls-two-year-roman-imprisonment>

The Coptic Church

1.The Martyrdom of Saint Luke the Evangelist

On this day, St. Luke the Evangelist and physician, was martyred. He was one of the 70 disciples mentioned in the tenth chapter of his gospel. He accompanied the Apostles Peter and Paul and wrote their account.

After the martyrdom of these two Apostles, he went through Rome preaching. Those who worshipped idols and the Jews in Rome agreed among themselves and went to Nero the Emperor accusing St. Luke of attracting many men to his teaching with his sorcery.

Nero commanded that St. Luke be brought before him. When St. Luke knew that, he gave all the books he had to a fisherman and told him,

"Take these and keep them for they will be useful to you and will show you God's way."

When St. Luke came before Nero the Emperor, the Emperor asked him,

"How long will you lead the people astray?"

St. Luke replied,

"I am not a magician, but I am an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God."

The Emperor commanded his men to cut off his right hand saying,

"Cut off this hand which wrote the books."

The saint replied to him,

"We do not fear death, nor the departure from this world, and to realize the power of my Master."

He took up his severed hand and made it reattach to its proper place, then he separated it.

Those who were present marvelled and the head of the Emperor's cabinet and his wife believed as well as many others and it was said that they numbered 276.

The Emperor wrote their decree and ordered that their heads be cut off together with that of the Apostle St. Luke; thus their martyrdom was completed.

They placed the body of the saint in a hair sack and cast it in the sea. By God's will, the waves of the sea brought it to an island.

A believer found it, took it and buried it with great honor. This saint wrote the Gospel bearing his name and the "Acts of the Apostles" addressing his words to his disciple Theophilus who was a gentile.

His blessings be upon us and Glory be to our God, forever. Amen.