

if this detail had been omitted? Yes, because the allusion is to Psalm 23: “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me *to lie down in green pastures*: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake” (vv. 1-3). This is the time for which the prophet Micah longed, when the words of Psalm 23 would become a reality and “all Israel shall be saved”.

The breaker

Having spoken of the gathering of the remnant of Israel together as a flock, Micah reflects upon the work of the Good Shepherd in 2:13: “The breaker

is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it: and their king shall pass before them, and the LORD on the head of them”. The “breaker” is a reference to the Messiah, who will go before his people with power, to destroy the enemies of the house of Jacob and break down every obstacle that stands in the way of the restoration of God’s people. He is “their king” who shall “pass before them, and [Yahweh] on the head of them”. May that day soon come, when “There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob” (Rom. 11:26).

[\(To be continued\)](#)

New series

Paul’s epic journey to Rome

Supplementary studies (1)

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Author’s note: The original series of articles entitled “Paul’s epic journey to Rome” was published in the Testimony from [January 2007](#) to May 2008. In embarking on this supplementary series of studies, there is the inevitable danger of repetition. The justification for this new material must therefore lie in its very newness, and the fact that it sheds additional light on certain aspects of Paul’s journey and the various events which led up to it.

WE BEGIN with the circumstances which brought about Paul’s appeal to appear before Caesar’s tribunal. Festus had succeeded the corrupt Felix as procurator of Judea. New to the office, Festus was glad to be able to call on the services of Herod Agrippa, the great-grandson of Herod the Great, and the last of the Hasmonean dynasty. Paul’s right to appear before the Caesar of the day (Nero) had already been conceded (see Acts 25:10,12); but Festus was at a loss to know in what terms the case should be reported to Rome. He was therefore pleased to be able to consult Agrippa.

An adherent (of sorts) of the Jewish faith, Agrippa had been sent to Rome to be educated, and he was thus familiar with both the Roman

and the Jewish worlds. This is brought out clearly in Acts 26, where Paul, conducting his defence in Agrippa’s presence, declares himself to be fortunate to be heard before him, acknowledging the fact that Agrippa was “expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews” (v. 3).¹ At the time of his father’s death, Agrippa, aged seventeen, was in Rome. He therefore had personal experience of Roman culture, and was well able to

appreciate the might of Rome. Later, when the Jews revolted against the Roman yoke, Agrippa knew—as did Josephus—the folly of such rebellion, and he strongly advised them to desist, by delivering an eloquent speech to this effect.²

1. Except where otherwise noted, all Bible references are quoted from the Revised Version.
2. Josephus recorded Agrippa’s speech at some length; and, although Agrippa’s words may have been ‘touched up’ by later editors, it is generally recognised that his speech was “designed to impress on the Jews how irrational it was to rebel. According to the arguments Josephus puts into [Agrippa’s] mouth, any other course would have been ‘a foolish one’” (see Josephus, *The Jewish War*, Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, Michigan, p. 178).

The original 'inner' Herodian harbour at Caesarea, from where Paul probably set sail for Rome, was located in the area of grass in the centre of this picture. The platform from which the photograph was taken is resting on a series of long arched rooms which served as transit areas for goods being imported and exported.

Picture: HolyLandPhotos.org



As for the circumstances of Paul's appearances before Felix and Festus as recorded by Luke (Acts 24 and 25), these have been closely examined by A. N. Sherwin-White, who comes out strongly in support of Luke's account.³ Worthy also of special notice are F. F. Bruce's comments on Paul's appearance before Felix. The apostle's case was apparently an unusual one, designated *extra ordinem*, in that it was not covered by the *standard* Roman legal practice for Roman citizens in the provinces. Bruce concludes his consideration of the subject with these comments: ". . . in this as in other respects, when we think historically and not theologically, the picture given in Acts is true to the dramatic date of the book; the case of Paul's appeal fits in with what we know of conditions in the late fifties of the first Christian century, and Luke's account of it is worthy to be treated as a substantial contribution to the available evidence".⁴ Luke's reliability here, as in the case of his record of the sea journey to Rome, need occasion no surprise when we reflect how often Luke's account of events has been vindicated.⁵

H. J. Cadbury, an expert on the early history of Christianity, makes the following comment on the book of Acts: ". . . the book itself is a first-rate source for an impression of what contemporary life was like. Not long ago no less a person than the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Hewart, made this statement to his fellow classicists: 'It is not often stated, yet perhaps it is the fact that the best short general picture of the *pax romana* and all that it meant—good roads and posting, good police, freedom from brigandage and piracy, freedom of movement, toleration and justice—is to be

found in the experiences, written in Greek, of a Jew who happened to be a Roman citizen—that

3. A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Law and Roman Society in the New Testament*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1992. Sherwin-White devotes a whole chapter ("Paul before Felix and Festus") to this issue (*ibid.*, pp. 48-70), and his comments there about Luke's trustworthiness are of particular value.
4. F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit*, The Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1977, p. 364. See also Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Indiana, 1990, pp. 130-1. In response to those who have raised problems about Luke's account, Hemer cites A. H. M. Jones, who maintains that "the right of appeal for citizens facing capital charges was absolute in cases 'extra ordinem', that is, outside the sphere of fixed, statutory offences and prescribed penalties". Hemer also observes that this distinction "applied specifically in the Julio-Claudian period", and concludes that "The work of Jones and Sherwin-White in this area suggests that much contained in the commentaries [on the Book of Acts] is seriously dated and erroneous". This view is also implicitly supported by Brian Rapske, in *The Book of Acts in its First-Century Setting, Vol. 3: Paul in Roman Custody*, The Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 1994, p. 160.
5. The accuracy of Luke's account is a major theme which there is not space to develop here, beyond the noting of one particularly interesting example out of very many. In Acts 17:6, Luke uses the Greek term *politarchs* to describe the rulers of Thessalonica (the NIV footnote translates this as "city officials"). The term, used by Luke in verse 8 also, was unknown in Greek literature; and yet in 1835 it was discovered in a Greek inscription on an arch spanning the Egnatian Way, on the west side of Thessalonica. The term has since been found in sixteen other inscriptions in the surrounding towns of Macedonia.

is, in the Acts of the Apostles’”.⁶ This is all the more remarkable in that Luke’s concern was to record the spread of the Christian gospel (cf. Acts 1:1-8). His aim was certainly not to transmit to posterity a picture of the contemporary Graeco-Roman world.

The coasting vessel and its trading activities

Once it had been officially determined that Paul should be sent to Rome to appear before Caesar, enquiries will have been made to discover what ships were available to convey him there. As the headquarters of the governor, Caesarea would certainly be expected to have in its harbour a vessel suitable for transporting Paul, along with “certain other prisoners” (Acts 27:1). Luke tells us that such a ship was found, bound for its home port of Adramyttium, situated hundreds of miles away towards the top of the northeast corner of the Aegean. It was a coaster, and therefore a much smaller vessel than the great freighters which routinely carried Egyptian corn from Alexandria to Rome. The suggestion has already been made⁷ that the vessel may well have come to Caesarea in the first place to bring foodstuffs and other necessities for the governor and his staff. But what of the possibility that the vessel was also returning home from Judea with exported goods?

We cannot be dogmatic on such a subject; and yet, obviously, while taking on board a number of passengers, including Paul, the ship would be unlikely to have returned otherwise unladen, and the skipper would no doubt have made enquiries about the opportunities for transporting goods back home. Judea itself had exportable produce;⁸ and Caesarea was not far south of Tyre and Sidon, whose exports are referred to in Ezekiel 27—a chapter well worth the student’s attention as evidence of the extent of exportable produce from the eastern seaboard of the Mediterranean.

In Ezekiel 27 the prophet pronounces the doom of Tyre, and in the process he provides valuable insight into the remarkable range and importance of its maritime commerce. The prophecy specifically mentions Judah: “Judah and Israel traded with you; they exchanged wheat from Minnith and confections, honey, oil and balm for your wares” (v. 17, NIV). Much further back, too, in the days of Joseph, the land of Canaan was producing evidence of its fertility, notwithstanding the dearth of corn that afflicted Jacob and his family there. For, when Jacob sent his sons a second time

into Egypt to buy corn, he was nevertheless able to offer the governor (not knowing this was his son Joseph) a gift of “a little balm and a little honey, some spices and myrrh, some pistachio nuts and almonds” (Gen. 43:11, NIV). These brief excursions into the past thus demonstrate the enduring fertility of Canaan, described in the days of Moses also as a “land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex. 3:8,17).

As for the size of the coasting vessel on which Paul travelled from Caesarea, it is difficult to find precise information. In addition to any cargo it might have been conveying across the Mediterranean, it was sufficiently large to be able to accommodate a reasonable number of passengers. Acts 27:1 informs us that “Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment” (NIV). We can only conjecture about the total number of passengers; but we know that they certainly included Paul, Luke (the narrator), Aristarchus, the centurion Julius and several prisoners, not to mention an appropriate cohort of armed Roman soldiers, who will have provided an armed guard during the voyage.

The vessel’s first port of call was Sidon (v. 3), having passed Tyre on the way. The ship may have spent a day or two at Sidon, quite possibly taking on board additional cargo (and passengers?). In view of the special status enjoyed by Paul, with which the officer Julius would be fully acquainted, the apostle was granted permission to disembark and to meet with some of his “friends” in the city, who no doubt ministered to his personal needs (v. 3). I have previously conjectured that the departure from Caesarea may have been hurried,⁹ and that Paul may have been affected by the haste of the embarkation; but I shall have more to say about this aspect of the short stay in Sidon in my next article.

[\(To be continued\)](#)

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6. H. J. Cadbury, *The Book of Acts in History*, A. & C. Black, London, 1955, p. 58.
 7. [“Paul’s epic journey to Rome \(3\) The voyage begins”](#), *Testimony*, Mar. 2007, p. 80.
 8. M. P. Charlesworth, in his valuable work *Trade Routes and Commerce of the Roman Empire* (Ares Publishers, Chicago, 1974), not only mentions various rivers in Judea, including the Jordan, which flowed through valleys rich in crops, but also emphasises the general fertility of the region.
 9. [Testimony, Mar. 2007, p. 79.](#)