

# Paul's epic journey to Rome

## (Acts 27:1-28:31)

### 1. At Caesarea\*

Tom Barling

*The Apostle Paul's voyage from Caesarea to Rome is described in detail at the end of the Acts of the Apostles, and has long fascinated Bible students. Brother Tom Barling has made a detailed study of this dramatic episode in Paul's life, and this first article of a new series sketches the circumstances which led to Paul embarking on his voyage as a prisoner of Rome.*

IT WAS PAUL'S appeal to Caesar, as recorded in Acts 25:11, which brought about his dramatic journey to Rome. After his appearance before Festus, who succeeded Felix as procurator (24:27), Festus solicited the assistance of Agrippa in dealing with the case, as he had much greater knowledge of the complexities of Jewish affairs. Agrippa's view of the question was unambiguous: "This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar" (26:32). In the dossier which would be dispatched by Festus to Rome, he would doubtless make it clear that Paul had committed no crime against Roman law. This fact would also be made known to Julius, who was entrusted with the apostle's security all the way to Rome (27:1). Moreover, as all concerned would know, Paul was a Roman citizen.

#### Important factors

There are two further factors that we have to bear in mind. One is that, on the occasion of Paul's earlier appearance before Felix, the latter had made a ruling that had a considerable bearing upon the way he was to be treated by the Roman authorities. The procurator instructed the centurion in charge of Paul "that he . . . should have indulgence", and that his friends should not only have free access to him but also be at liberty to minister to his needs (24:23).<sup>1</sup> As we study Paul's subsequent history, we shall discover how important this ruling was.

The other factor of which we must take account is the evidence of the changed financial circumstances of the apostle. It has been pointed out by Ramsay that an appeal to Caesar involved considerable expense.<sup>2</sup> When we come to consider Paul's arrival in Rome, and the two years before his case was given a hearing, Luke tells us he occupied his

own rented apartment, and there he received a number of Roman Jews and doubtless a steady stream of visiting brethren (28:30).

Another indirect evidence of his improved financial circumstances can be found in the delightful letter to Philemon; this accompanied the runaway slave Onesimus, who, it appears, had deserted the service of his master Philemon. He appears to have absconded with some of his master's money. For a slave to run away with nothing in his pocket would place him under the obligation to steal, conduct exposing him to arrest, and even worse. Well aware of what had happened, Paul, as he sends Onesimus back to his master, writes thus: "But if he hath wronged thee at all, or oweth thee ought, put that to mine account; I Paul write it with mine own hand, I will repay it" (vv. 18,19).

There is a further matter worthy of our attention. When during his imprisonment in Caesarea

\* References from the RV.

1. The expression "should have indulgence" (RV) is "let him have liberty" (AV), "to give him some freedom" (NIV), "should have some liberty" (RSV). What is made clear by the verse is that Paul was to be a privileged prisoner.
2. See W. M. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*, ninth edition, London, 1907: "Imprisonment and a long lawsuit were expensive" (see pp. 310-312).

Paul appeared before Felix, the latter dragged his feet, hoping (vainly, do we need to say?) that Paul would bribe him (Acts 24:26). It must be obvious that Felix would not be fobbed off with any modest sum. All these considerations, when they are given proper weight, can suggest only one conclusion: Paul's financial circumstances must have undergone a remarkable change.

What produced this dramatic development? There is no direct evidence to justify a dogmatic answer. However, there is some intriguing indirect evidence. We recall that occasion when, providentially, Paul's nephew, his sister's son, learnt of the plot against the apostle and alerted the centurion (23:16,17). This demonstrates beyond any doubt that Paul was in touch with his family, and that they were familiar with his circumstances. It may be that it was at this time, or thereabouts, that Paul received an inheritance.

We can possibly find a precious clue in Acts 9:28-30 that Paul kept in touch with his family. There we learn that with characteristic courage the converted Pharisee preached boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus in the very stronghold of Judaism, Jerusalem. The Hellenistic Jews, of whom Saul himself had been a prominent member, were outraged by this total change of allegiance, and they sought to kill him. In the interests of his safety the brethren sent him away to the security of his native Tarsus.

Surely it is unthinkable that Paul would have withheld from his own family the account of his experience on the Damascus road. His own folk knew him well, and it is surely conceivable that his sister, if not other members of the family too, at this time embraced the hope of life in the Lord Jesus. We do not know the age of the nephew whose timely intervention rescued Paul from the machinations of the Jews, but he was obviously in sympathy with his uncle and took the initiative in passing on to Paul the knowledge of the plot against him. It is the sum of these sketchy details which helps us to understand how such a remarkable transformation took place in Paul's situation: "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear" (Isa. 59:1).

### **Delayed in Caesarea**

The law's delay, due to the corruption of the governor Felix, led to the apostle's retention for two years in Caesarea (Acts 24:27).<sup>3</sup> Paul may well have chafed at this prolonged restraint upon his freedom of movement. But there is another aspect

to this matter, all too easily overlooked. The Third Missionary Journey, based for the most part on Ephesus, was a difficult and trying period in the apostle's life.<sup>4</sup> But Paul's troubles were not over when he reached Jerusalem, for there he narrowly escaped lynching. Alarmed by the dangers to which a Roman citizen had been exposed, Claudius Lysias sent the apostle under a powerful escort to safety in Caesarea (23:23). There, over a period of two years, Paul's physical powers, so sorely tried, had time to recuperate.

Moreover, in his immediate neighbourhood was an ecclesia sympathetic to him. Not long before the dramatic events in Jerusalem, he had been accommodated by Philip, one of the seven appointed to serve the Jerusalem ecclesia (6:5; 21:8), whose home was in Caesarea. We can be sure that Philip and others in the town would take advantage of the freedom of access to Paul and visit him. Then there was the presence of Luke, so lovingly and deeply devoted to him. The occurrence of "we" in Acts 21:8 and 27:1 supports the conclusion that Luke remained in contact with the apostle during the full period of two years he was in Caesarea.

Thus, when all the relevant factors are given due weight, we can conclude that Paul was given ample time to recover from the trials he had endured, and to be ready to face new challenges. Festus, well aware of the prolonged delay in dealing with Paul's case, would be relieved when Paul made his appeal and the decision was made to send Paul to Rome. As soon, therefore, as Festus had received Agrippa's advice, he acted.

### **Caesarea**

The journey to Rome would be a long one. Many considerations militated against the idea of travel by land, long, tedious and arduous at this time of the year (we shall discover it was at a late season). Inevitably, then, the journey was to be made by sea. There were other prisoners who were awaiting transport to Italy (27:1). There is no indication of their number, nor of the reasons for their inclusion in the party. They were all entrusted

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3. The venality of Felix in expecting a bribe does not show him in a favourable light; he fell foul of the Jews and was relieved of his office.

4. The evidence of various passages shows Paul's Ephesian ministry was an especially trying period for him; see 1 Corinthians 15:32; 2 Corinthians 1:8,9; Acts 20:18,19.

**Right: Caesarea, showing buildings from the Crusader and Muslim eras. The breaking waves in the background show that this is not a natural harbour. Hence Herod built large breakwaters, the remains of which are under the sea.**

**Below: Remains of a quay in the inner harbour of ancient Caesarea.**

(Pictures: Tony Benson)



to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to a cohort called “the Augustan”.

We remember that a cohort has been mentioned earlier in Acts, for Cornelius was a centurion in the so-called Italian cohort (10:1). Caesarea was the centre of the imperial authority in the region, and cohorts were understandably stationed there. Apparently these units could be called upon to carry out whatever duties the governor might assign to them.<sup>5</sup> In this case Julius and his men were to provide an escort for Paul and the other prisoners.

Inevitably, Festus having decided to send the company by sea, enquiries would be made to discover what ships were in harbour and what were their destinations. The haven in Caesarea was one of Herod’s most grandiose achievements. It was largely an artificial harbour, for the coast of Judea did not boast many natural havens. There had been a modest harbour there before, called Strato’s Tower. Under Herod this had been up-

graded on a massive scale, and in honour of the emperor he called it ‘Sebastos’, the Greek term for ‘Augustus’ (see 25:21, AV).

Josephus has provided us with an impressive account of the harbour’s creation. He informs us that twelve years were devoted to its construction, that great stones were sunk, “of above fifty feet in length, not less than eighteen in breadth, and nine in depth, into twenty fathoms deep; and as some were lesser, so were others bigger, than those dimensions”.<sup>6</sup> It was suspected Josephus had been guilty of gross exaggeration, but modern archaeological research has vindicated him. This is particularly true of R. L. Hohlfelder, himself involved in archaeological activity in Caesarea. He brings the story of work in Caesarea up to 1989, and in the same article he pays a tribute to Josephus, declaring, “We are fortunate to have not only his description of Herod’s city at its inception but also an account of the building of the Outer Basin of Sebastos as well—a literary description that is unique in ancient texts”.<sup>7</sup> In his study, *Trade Routes and Commerce of the Roman Empire* (a work invariably worth consulting), M. P. Charlesworth comments, “This harbour was as large as that of

5. In connection with the designation “Augustan” in Acts 27:1, F. F. Bruce has these remarks: “The term ‘Augustan’, that is, ‘His Imperial Majesty’s’, was a title of honor bestowed on several cohorts of auxiliary troops” (*The Book of the Acts*, revised edition, Grand Rapids, Michigan, p. 477).
6. See *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book xv. ch. ix. 6, pp. 331,332 (in Whiston’s translation, Edinburgh, no date).
7. Article on Caesarea (*Anchor Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 1, Doubleday, 1992).

Athens, gave a depth of twenty fathoms of water and was protected by an immense mole".<sup>8</sup>

Understandably, Caesarea, with its double role as the imperial headquarters in Judea and an important port, was still playing a vital part in Jewish life and the hinterland generally. When, therefore, Festus made his enquiries as to what vessels were tied up in the harbour, he could be

reasonably assured that one boat at least would satisfy the requirement of transporting the prisoners westwards, towards Italy.

(To be continued)

8. Cambridge, 1924, p. 42.

Two-part article

## Armageddon (1)

Geoff Henstock

*Armageddon is one of those highly emotive names with which many people are very familiar but which often is misunderstood. We sometimes see Armageddon used in newspapers or in popular penny-dreadful novels and movies, but most people who use the name have only a vague idea of what it means. This two-part article explores the context of the only reference to it, in Revelation 16; then considers both the idea that it refers to a literal place and the idea that it is symbolic of the judgement of the nations; and finally expounds the Old Testament background to both ideas.*

**T**HE NAME Armageddon occurs only once in the Bible, in Revelation 16, within the context of the sixth vial. The vials are a series of visions about events leading up to the return of Christ. It is important that we note that Armageddon is part of the sixth vial, because Christ returns while the sixth vial is being worked out. Although the name Armageddon is used only once, however, the events to which it relates are discussed in many prophecies, and there are remarkable similarities between those prophecies and the things symbolised in this particular vial.

### Kings of the east

Revelation 16:12 speaks of the drying up of the Euphrates. Since at least the days of Joseph Mede in the seventeenth century, this has been interpreted as relating to the drying up or contraction of the Ottoman Empire, which took place from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. God needed to shrink the Ottoman Empire so that "the way of

the kings of the east might be prepared". Who are these kings of the east?

Rotherham translates this phrase as "the kings who were from the rising of the sun". Young's Literal Translation renders it as "the kings who are from the rising of the sun". John Richter suggests, "the way of the kings from the rising of the sun". These translators are more accurate; they help us to see that the kings to whom the passage refers are Christ and the saints when Christ returns to establish God's Kingdom. The imagery links us to Christ, "the Sun of righteousness" who shall "arise with healing in his wings" when he returns to the earth (Mal. 4:2).

### Several symbols—one vial

Each component of the sixth vial is significant, as is the juxtaposition of various symbols within the one vial. Brother L. G. Sargent in *The Christadelphian* drew attention to the fact that the froglike spirits of militant national self-determination had a particular relationship with the Ottoman Empire.<sup>1</sup> In fact, as recent world events testify, they continue to have an impact on the territory formerly occupied by that empire.

The Ottoman power had to be dried up so that the events ushering in the return of Christ could proceed. This is the subject matter of Revelation 16:13,14. Without going into the imagery in too much detail, this picture of the froglike spirits bringing instability into the world refers to the explosion of nationalism in the last two centu-

1. Vol. 78 (1941), p. 348.