

“. . . preaching repentance and remission of sins in my name.”

- 6 **Principle:** In Colossians 3:17 Paul lays down a general principle: “whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” That comprehensive word “whatsoever” must surely include baptism.

## Conclusion

It seems to be very likely that the original text of Matthew 28:19,20 was this: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations in my name, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

## Exposition

# Paul’s epic journey to Rome

## Supplementary studies (6)

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*Paul travelled widely in the Roman Empire. The extensive network of roads and sea routes that were effectively policed by the authorities made this possible; thus those who had been in Jerusalem at Pentecost having arrived from far were able to return home taking the gospel with them. They would receive continuing support through visits of faithful brethren and by letters from the apostles.*

“IN THE HISTORY of the early church, as recorded in the New Testament, there are two features which seem worthy of remark: the rapidity with which the Christian communities were formed, and the constant intercourse between them.” This is the opening statement in Caroline Skeel’s admirable work, *Travel in the First Century after Christ*.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, if it is true that Paul (and others) could not have carried out their missionary work but for the network of roads and the sea lanes of the Roman Empire, it is likewise true that Paul’s great work serves to illustrate admirably how well these facilities could be exploited in the Lord’s service.

### The Roman postal service

Skeel also calls attention to the Roman postal service, which was so necessary for the cohesion and functioning of the Empire: “The system of provincial government as established by Augustus could not have been carried out year on year had not communication with Rome been frequent and rapid. The sending out of proconsuls and *legati*, of financial agents and officials of various grades, to say nothing of the changes in the disposition of the troops and fleets, all necessitated an

elaborate system of communication. Hence the establishment by Augustus of the Imperial Post, which according to Suetonius was intended for the use of the Princesps, his servants and messengers, or for those to whom he granted special permission.”<sup>2</sup>

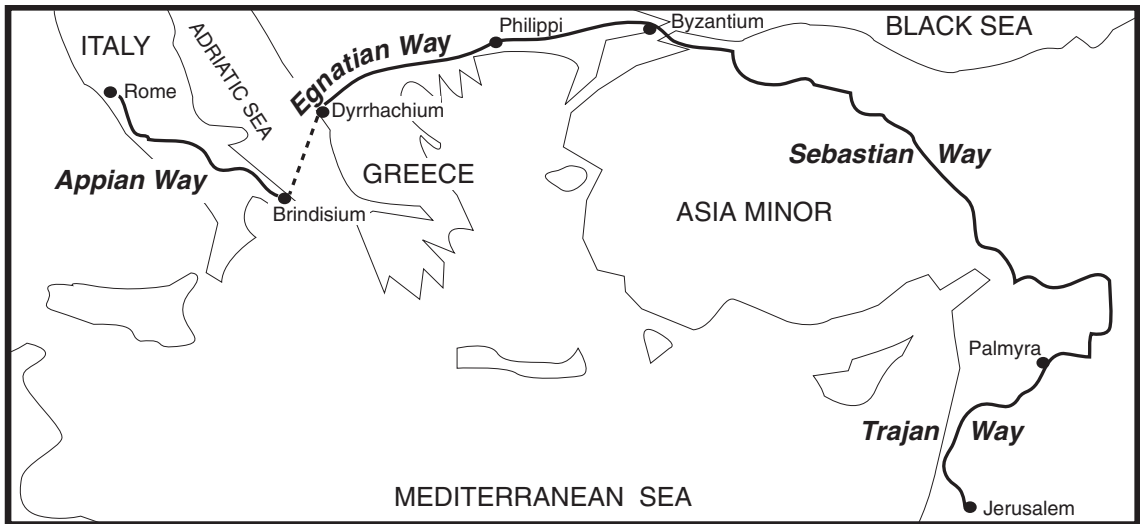
This interesting mention of the imperial postal service shows that it was reserved for the emperor and his servants. It was not available to the ordinary individual, and certainly not to the members of the early church. Yet the more we study the latter, the more we come to appreciate that the church was an empire within an empire, and that it possessed its own resources, some of which, indeed, were never available to the emperor or his agents.

As for Paul, he possessed his own postal service. Thus in Romans 16:1,2 we note: “I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church that is at Cenchreae . . . for she herself also hath been a succourer of many, and of mine own self.”\* Phoebe was doubtless a fine sister, and Paul could trust her to carry his letter to the Romans safely to its destination. Without attempting to draw up a complete list of Paul’s emissaries, we must mention also Tychicus, who, in the company of Onesimus, was entrusted with three letters (Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon), which

1. C. A. J. Skeel, *Travel in the First Century after Christ* (Cambridge, University Press, 1901), p. 1.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

\* Scripture quotations from the RV, except where otherwise noted.



**The Romans created a vast network of land and sea routes, just some of which are shown in this map. Many of them would have been travelled by Paul and his companions, and other early Christians, as they made their way around the empire.**

were all duly conveyed to their destinations in the Lycus valley (see Ephesians 6:21, Colossians 4:7-9 and Philemon). In this last case, Tychicus is not expressly mentioned; but the various occurrences of the name of this faithful brother, if they are pursued through the New Testament, are worthy of attention, for they provide important insights into the way in which trusted brethren and sisters could, and did, furnish invaluable links between the Christian communities in the early days.

### **Divine resources**

While the human links must be honoured for their faithful service, we must not, however, overlook the fact that the Lord God Himself had at His disposal resources which were utterly beyond the reach of any emperor. This important fact can be so easily overlooked that one demonstration of its truth must be cited, even if it appears at first sight out of place in an article concerned with travel.

The events of the Day of Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2, are, in fact, highly relevant here, and they wonderfully illustrate the resources which the Lord God has at His command. Falling as it did in the month of May, when conditions on land and sea were favourable to travel, the Feast of Pentecost attracted Jews and proselytes to Jerusalem in great numbers. They came from all over the Roman Empire, and even from beyond it; Luke is careful to record this fact (see Acts 2:8-12).

As a result of the witness borne by Peter and heard by those who had been attracted by the

phenomenon of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, about 3,000 were baptised (v. 41). Understandably, these converts wished to be informed about the Lord Jesus, whose saving work they had endorsed by their baptism, and this much is indicated by Luke, who says that “they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers” (v. 42). They would thus learn about the Lord, his life, his death, resurrection and ascension to heaven, and the Kingdom to come.

Eventually, those who had travelled from near and far, and who, after their baptism, formed the nucleus of the early church, returned to their homes. They were so many couriers, bearing the Good News. It was thus that the Lord God ensured that the message of salvation was widely diffused.

### **“Into all the world”**

We can form no realistic estimate of the total result of the Day of Pentecost, but there could have been converts from widely separated parts of the empire who returned to their homes with the Good News and with varying degrees of information about matters of the greatest interest to disciples. Some may well have committed to writing what they had learned—a reflection which could shed light on the opening of Luke’s Gospel: “Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us



**The Appian Way—one of the Roman roads that Paul and his companions travelled.**

by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word” (Lk. 1:1,2, NIV). We are now in an area where direct information is lacking, but where there is enough evidence to form tentative conclusions.

We can understand that the Twelve would be dismayed by the departure of their Lord to heaven, and why they might initially feel inadequate to carry out the commission to go into all the world with the gospel (Acts 1:8). However, as we have already seen, it was not long before their experience on the Day of Pentecost provided them with all the necessary reassurance that the Lord was still with them.

God’s ways are so often beyond our understanding. The conversion of the arch-persecutor Paul of Tarsus provides dramatic evidence of this. At first, because of his deep attachment to the faith of his fathers, Saul was a relentless enemy, showing no mercy to any who believed in the Lord Jesus, whether male or female (see Acts 8:3; 9:1; 22:4). As a consequence of Saul’s relentless persecution, many fled from Jerusalem, some to Syrian Antioch (11:19), to where Barnabas—by a supreme irony—was later to bring the Apostle Paul himself (v. 26). It was from Antioch, too, that Paul and Barnabas were commissioned by the Holy Spirit to embark on what is popularly called the First Missionary Journey (13:1,2). Who could possibly have foreseen the sequence of events which, particularly through the travels of the apostle, were to lead to the expansion of God’s dominion within the borders of the Roman Empire?

### **Religious motives for travel**

When we come to form some notion of the motives for travel within the Roman Empire, religion true and false must be reckoned among them. We have already reminded ourselves of the consequences of the Day of Pentecost, which served to enlarge the worship of the true God. As for the heathen deities, the cult of Artemis (“Diana of the Ephesians,” Acts 19:28) well illustrates how a heathen deity could attract worshippers from far and near.

During the apostle’s long ministry in Ephesus, the local cult of Artemis was seriously undermined by Paul’s preaching. Demetrius, speaking to his fellow silversmiths, serves to demonstrate the extent of the Artemis cult: “And ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: and not only is there danger that this our trade come into disrepute; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana be made of no account, and that she should even be deposed from her magnificence, *whom all Asia and the world worshippeth*” (vv. 26,27). Souter<sup>3</sup> has this to say: “The Ephesians were proud of the goddess not only because she was theirs, but because her worship brought countless visitors from every part of the Empire. This of course was good for trade.” The Day of Pentecost at Jerusalem and

3. A. Souter, in: *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*. Edited by J. Hastings, Volume 1 (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1915), p. 295.

the cult of Artemis in Ephesus are thus two admirable instances involving large-scale travel for religious motives; and there were no doubt others also.

### Reasons for individual travel

When we turn to consider individual travel, the reasons and motives are perhaps too many to enumerate. However, during the summer months, when the skies were normally clear and the headlands stood out in bold relief (for the sea-voyager had no compass or sextant), there was one special destination many travellers would long to see, and that presents no difficulty for us to identify: Egypt. Lionel Casson, with his specialised and extensive knowledge of the ancient world, had this to say: "Egypt was a tourist's paradise, an exotic way of life, exotic monuments and, on top of all this, relatively easy travel."<sup>4</sup> We have only to reflect that in the first century A.D. the pyramids and the Sphinx were already ancient monuments. There was also a much more recent object of interest at the very gateway to Egypt: the lighthouse at Alexandria, the Pharos, which became one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world.<sup>5</sup>

### Concluding reflection

We conclude this article with a brief reflection on the Apostle Paul, who was among the most travelled persons in the world of his time, and who carried, wherever he went, a torch which showed the way to eternal life. As Paul travelled the roads and voyaged on the seas, he had one single guide book: the Scriptures (Rom. 15:4). As for his personal guidance and how he should serve his Maker, Paul had only one guide: the Lord Jesus Christ himself (Phil. 1:21).<sup>6</sup>

([To be continued](#))

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4. Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (London, Allen & Unwin, 1974), p. 257.
  5. In modern French, the Greek *pharos* has given the word *phare*, which means both 'lighthouse' and 'traffic lights'.
  6. What might appear a notable and surprising omission from this article on travel in the Roman Empire is the absence of any mention of the works of Sir William Ramsay, so the omission is to some extent made good here. Ramsay did much to establish the book of Acts as a reliable historical document, and his most popular work, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*, is easy to obtain as it went through so many editions.