



Laurent de La Hyre, Saint Paul Shipwrecked on Malta, 1630, oil on canvas, 105.4 x 161.9 cm, Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

ACTS 22–28

PAUL'S LAST WITNESSES AND ROMAN IMPRISONMENT

LYNNE HILTON WILSON

Introduction

This section starts with Paul in Jerusalem worshipping at the temple in conjunction with Pentecost. He returned to Jerusalem to report his third gentile mission to Church leaders. These five chapters record Paul's arrest and eventual journey to Rome. Luke fills the account with Paul's healing, testifying, and missionary experiences, paralleling the lives of Peter and the Lord.¹ We find foundational truths and admirable examples in Luke's retelling of Paul's last journey to Rome. Paul faced tribulations with good cheer, exemplifying missionary discipleship and bravely enduring trials. For us readers today, understanding Paul's life through the book of Acts will make his epistles easier to follow.

Table 1. Time line of Act 22–28*

Date	Location	Scripture
58 or 59 (Pentecost)	Jerusalem	Act 20:6; 21:17
58–60	Caesarea	Act 24:27
60–61	Journey to Rome	Act 27:9; 28:11
61–63	Rome (while under house arrest)	Act 28:30

*Adapted from John W. Welch and John Hall, *Charting the New Testament* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002), 15-2.

Acts 22

Paul speaks on the fortress steps to the crowd around the temple—Act 22:1–23

Act 22:1 (BLB). “*Men, brethren, and fathers.*” Paul began, just as Stephen had, before the Sanhedrin (Act 7:2). Paul often addressed both men and women as he started sermons, but here, no women or children are included, perhaps signifying that none had joined the mob in chasing Paul.

Act 22:3. “*I . . . am a Jew, born in Tarsus, . . . brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel . . . zealous.*” This passage gives some of the best biographical information on Paul’s early days. Luke recorded Paul’s words as a secondhand source, but as his travel companion, Luke was probably there listening to Paul.²

Paul introduced himself as a former student of the well-known Jerusalem school of Gamaliel, the grandson and protégé of Hillel (the father of rabbinism).³ Both of these great teachers were honored as the highest authorities among the Pharisees as strict observers of the law of Moses and the ten thousand oral laws (Act 5:34). Paul had the best education a devout, wealthy Pharisee could want. Paul’s alliance to this great teacher probably calmed down the Pharisees in the audience (at least momentarily).

Luke recorded that Paul was born in Tarsus (which he repeated four times: Act 9:11; 11:25; 21:39; 22:3). We see evidence for this as Paul was at home in both the Hellenistic diaspora and Israelite Jerusalem. He was a skilled orator and writer, which fits into the Tarsus educational

Tarsus, the largest city in the Cilician province, became a Roman city and the residence of the Roman proconsul in 66 BC. Tarsus was a city of world commerce. The Cydnus River and harbor facilitated sea trade. Land trade grew with Roman highways that ran both east-west and north-south through Tarsus.

Tarsus also boasted the best schools of rhetoric in the Roman world. Paul’s sermons and letters demonstrate that he was a mighty orator and writer, so we assume he studied (or possibly just learned from listening) there.

Luke recorded that Paul was a tent-maker or leatherworker (Act 18:3). Tarsus was also known for producing goat hair and processing goat-hair tents.

scene.⁴ He also wrote beautiful Hebraic poetry—Philemon and Galatians were each entirely written in a perfect chiasmus. This evidence confirms Luke’s secondhand biographical witness.

Act 22:4 (BSB). *“I persecuted this Way.”* Again we see the early Christian Church referred to as the Way, meaning that Jesus is the way back to the presence of God.⁵ As Paul retold his conversion experience and vision from two decades earlier, we find slight variations from the other two accounts recorded in Acts.⁶ (Minor changes speak to greater historicity than word-for-word duplication.) As an example of the changes, this retelling is given in first person. Also, Act 9:7 states Paul’s companions “saw no man,” and Act 22:9 adds that they were conscious of the light but disagreed as to what they heard. Yet, all agree on the significant reality of the place, meaning, and time of the vision. (We see similar differences in Joseph Smith’s accounts of his First Vision.)

Act 22:11–13. *“I could not see for the glory of that light. . . . And one Ananias . . . said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight.”* In this retelling, we hear little of Ananias’s experience of learning to not tell the Lord what to do but to receive instruction from Him.

Act 22:16. *“arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”* Paul’s message is centered on Christ. He uses meaningful titles that open our appreciation and understanding of the God we worship: Jesus of Nazareth, the Just One, the Lord, and the God of our fathers. (Luke recorded that in his speech Stephen used the title “Just One” and that Peter used the other

Table 2. Comparison of the accounts of Paul’s vision on the road to Damascus

Act 22:9–10	Act 26:13–14, 16–18	Act 9:6–7
<p>And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. . . .</p> <p>What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.</p>	<p>A light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking. . . .</p> <p>But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou has seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee . . . from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light.</p>	<p>And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.</p> <p>[Paul] trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.</p>

titles found in verses 14–16.) Also, Paul taught the need for us to receive Jesus’s cleansing and to repent. He explains that with greater knowledge comes the responsibility of greater witnessing.

Act 22:17–18 (NIV). “*When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I . . . saw the Lord.*” Paul wanted to share the message of his next vision and left out the three years between it and the previous vision (according to Act 11:30 and Gal 1:18, Paul did not go to Jerusalem for three years after his conversion). This is the only record in Acts of Paul’s second vision, in which he saw the Lord in the temple and received more instruction. This may have been the time when he was ordained an Apostle (although we do not know whether he was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve).

Act 22:21 (NIV). “*the Lord said to me, ‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’*” The timing of this instruction (mentioned here for the first time in Acts) perfectly precedes Paul’s first mission to the Gentiles as an Apostle (compare Act 13:2). Paul’s life uniquely prepared him for his mission. I presume the same can be said for all of us. It is also worth noting that Paul continued to regret his part in persecuting the Saints—especially that he had stood by and watched the stoning of Stephen (Act 7:58).

Act 22:22 (BLB). “*Now they were listening to him until this word. . . ‘he is not fit to live!’*” The offensive word was *Gentiles*. The very thought that God would send a Jew to the unclean was blasphemy. It triggered a ballistic reaction, and the crowd went wild again. In their rage, they flung off their cloaks, tossed handfuls of dirt into the air, and reassumed their mob mentality, eager once again to kill Paul.

Paul and the Roman tribune—Act 22:24–30

Act 22:24 (BSB). “*the commander ordered . . . that Paul be flogged and interrogated.*”

Claudius Lysias’s actions seem inconsistent. He protected Paul from the riot and brought him into the Antonia Fortress, but he then ordered that Paul be scourged. Roman whippings could be deadly, even though they had become a Roman sport.⁷ It is also unclear whether Paul’s claim to be a citizen in Act 21:39 was understood by his guards to mean that he was a citizen only of Tarsus (not Rome) or whether they had just forgotten his claim. Some details are obviously missing.

Act 22:25 (BSB). “*But as they stretched him out to strap him down, Paul said . . . ‘Is it lawful for you to flog a Roman citizen without a trial?’*” The soldiers had tied Paul’s hands together and prepared to strip his back bare for the torture. Shortly before this episode, Paul claimed that five times he had endured thirty-nine lashes from Jewish thongs (2 Cor 11:24 NASB). But Paul could interrupt the Roman torture because of his protection as a citizen.

Act 22:27. “*Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea.*” The centurion told Paul’s claim to the tribune (chief captain), who then asked Paul how he received his Roman citizenship. One could receive citizenship in several ways:

- by being born in Rome or being born of citizen parents
- by being given it as a gift from Caesar
- by purchasing it at a remarkably high cost

Claudius Lysias had spent a lot of money to purchase his citizenship and assumed Paul was not wealthy enough. Paul was probably not dressed in the citizen's toga, and very few Roman citizens lived in Jerusalem. However, Paul represented the rare one percent of Roman citizens in the diaspora who were freeborn. This meant that Paul inherited his citizenship from his father or an earlier ancestor.⁸

Act 22:29. *“the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.”* Claudius Lysias was rightly worried since he had misused his power. Paul's Roman citizenship granted him rights that stretched from his social and financial life to political and legal protection.⁹

Act 22:30 (BSB). *“wanting to learn the real reason Paul was accused by the Jews, released him and ordered . . . the whole Sanhedrin to assemble.”* The next day Claudius Lysias released Paul from the Roman jurisdiction and took him to the Jewish governing body, the council, or Sanhedrin.

Acts 23

Paul before the Sanhedrin—Act 23:1–11

Act 23:1 (NIV). *“My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.”* Paul was not new to this setting and did not appear to be shy or anxious about his trial. He had apprenticed with the Sanhedrin at the time of the stoning of Stephen and had interacted with them for a few years afterward (Act 8:1–9:1). The experiences from his earlier life had prepared him (compare D&C 122:7).

Act 23:2 (BSB). *“At this, the high priest Ananias ordered . . . to strike him on the mouth.”* Paul was too bold for his audience, and Ananias had Paul slapped for bragging. Under King Herod, the office of the one reigning high priest was changed from a lifelong appointment based on bloodlines to frequent appointments for

The Sanhedrin, at the time of the New Testament, was the ruling body or supreme court of the Jews. At its height, it comprised the high priest, seventy-one chief priests, scribes, elders, and political aristocrats who were knowledgeable of the law. It decided important issues, including those regarding maintaining peace with Rome. It also represented both Sadducees and Pharisees. The group met in Jerusalem in the chamber of hewn stone next to the temple sanctuary. Mosaic writings also referred to a body of seventy ruling elders working beside Moses and Aaron, the high priest (Num 11:16–17, 24–25; Ex 18:21–22). Over the centuries and under different rulers, the council's numbers, responsibilities, and powers changed.

political expediency.¹⁰ We can see evidence of this in the record.¹¹ This Ananias is not the same as the Ananias previously mentioned.

Act 23:3. *“God shall smite thee, thou . . . commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?”* Paul cited a Jewish curse from Deu 28:22 (“The Lord shall smite thee”) and an instruction from Lev 19:15 (“Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment”). Luke included this conversation, in part, to show that Paul knew the law very well and honored it.

Act 23:5 (NIV). *“Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: ‘Do not speak evil about the ruler.’”* Paul did not recognize the high priest, possibly because a new one had taken office since Paul had affiliated with the high priest and Sanhedrin members over twenty years earlier (Act 9:1). I admire Paul’s immediate humility once he realized he was wrong and that he did not become defensive. He even quoted a scripture that condemned his fault: “Thou shalt not . . . curse the ruler of thy people” (Ex 22:28).

Act 23:6 (BSB). *“Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and others Pharisees, called out . . . ‘I am a Pharisee. . . . It is because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.’”* Paul seized the opportunity to turn the situation into a missionary discussion. These two major groups within Jewish leadership, the Sadducees and Pharisees, date to the second century BC, and animosity between them lasted until the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 when the Sadducee party was disbanded. In his typical parallel fashion, Luke included a similar scene in his Gospel when Jesus addressed the same problem of the Resurrection (Lk 20:27).

Act 23:9. *“if . . . an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.”* The Pharisees’ conclusion sounds similar to the one given by their leader Gamaliel earlier in Act 5:34.

Act 23:10 (ESV). *“when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to . . . bring him into the barracks.”*

Sadducees (“righteous ones”) formed a tight circle consisting of lay nobility, chief priests, priests, and aristocratic men who saw themselves as guardians of the tradition and supporters of the temple and high priest. They held to the literal interpretation of the Torah and had a penal code, scribes, and dietary laws. They held leadership positions at the time, even though they were not in the majority. As Luke recorded, they did not believe in the afterlife or angels.

Pharisees (“separate ones”) accepted both the written and oral laws—attributing both to Moses. They interpreted the law differently than the Sadducees did and had their own traditions for food, Sabbath observance, ritual purity, and tithes. They held anti-Hellenization views as well as their own perspective of free will and fate (Providence). Josephus mentioned there were six thousand Pharisees. And as Luke records here, they believed in the Resurrection and angels.

The Roman chief captain (or tribune) Claudius Lysias carefully protected Paul—at the risk of losing his position—especially now that he knew Paul was a citizen. The soldiers returned Paul to the Antonia fortress or “castle” (KJV).

Act 23:11. “the night following the Lord stood by [Paul], and said, Be of good cheer.”

The NIV reads “good courage,” and the CEV has “Don’t worry!” That night Paul saw his sixth recorded vision (see my notes on Act 18:9 for a list). This vision comforted Paul and directed him toward the right path. It demonstrates how God protects his covenant people, how He opens doorways when it appears impossible. The Lord will fight His servants’ battles until their missions are complete.

The plot to kill Paul—Act 23:12–22

Act 23:12 (NIV). “some Jews formed a conspiracy . . . with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul.” Those who made the conspiracy “laid themselves under anathema (curse),” meaning that they called for heaven’s punishment if they did not fulfill their oath.¹² Luke records that the group was made up of “more than forty men.” The number forty was used both as a concept of many and as a representation of a purification period (Lev 12:3–4). These forty may not have all been members of the Sanhedrin, but it seems as though they were present at Paul’s hearing.

Act 23:15 (NIV). “you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of . . .” The band of murderers came to the chief priests (who were usually Sadducees) with their plan. (The Pharisees were probably not involved because they had just supported Paul in the Sanhedrin council.) They worked out a plan to kill Paul the next day.

Act 23:16 (BSB). “when the son of Paul’s sister heard about the plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul.” Paul had an influential relative in Jerusalem, which was another miracle—God put people in the right place at the right time. Paul’s nephew had some way of knowing about the conversation between the Jewish leaders. I think it is significant that he sought to protect his uncle. Does this mean Paul’s extended family became Christian believers too or that Paul’s conversion had not antagonized his family? In either case, the nephew was allowed to tell Paul, and Paul “summoned one of the centurions” (BLB) to take his nephew to report to Claudius Lysias. We get a feel for the privileges of a Roman citizen—or perhaps those granted Paul because of his personality—that allowed a prisoner to advise a centurion.

Act 23:22 (BSB). “the commander dismissed the young man and instructed him, ‘Do not tell.’” We learn that Paul’s nephew was a young man, which phrase referred to a different age bracket than it does in modern usage. At the time of the New Testament, a young man could be any male under thirty or, if they were in the military, under forty. Some biblical scholars argue that in the Old Testament, the phrase referred to someone under sixty.¹³ Priests had to be thirty to serve in the temple, and that was also the age at which men in the Dead Sea community were considered mature. The Mishnah claimed that thirty was the age of authority.¹⁴

Paul sent to Felix at Caesarea—Act 23:23–26
Act 23:23 (NIV). “*he called two of his centurions and ordered them, ‘Get ready a detachment.’*” Claudius Lysias called an enormous group of guards—four hundred foot soldiers (half of which were armed with spears) and seventy horsemen. Paul received protection to travel approximately seventy miles from Jerusalem to Caesarea.¹⁵

The group was scheduled to leave under the cover of darkness, at nine at night, to aid their protective assignment. Horses were used almost exclusively for military purposes. Paul himself was allowed to ride horseback as the soldiers traveled from Jerusalem to Caesarea, where the Roman governor Felix lived. (Previously, Pilate held the position Festus here holds.)¹⁶

Caesarea was initially known as Stratton’s Tower when the Romans conquered it in 63 BC. King Herod renamed it Caesarea Maritima. In 22 BC, he began building a deep-sea harbor that was the largest artificial harbor in the world at the time (100,000 square meters). He also built storerooms, markets, baths, an aqueduct, and an elaborate palace jutting out into the sea. For over six hundred years, it became the capital of the Roman government in Palestine. The great Jewish war against Rome began there in 66 AD.

Claudius Lysias’s letter to Felix—Act 23:26–30

Act 23:26. “**Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix.**” The title “excellent” is used for several Roman officials, including Luke’s patron, Theophilus (Lk 1:3; Act 1:1). Legal propriety of the time required Roman officials to send a letter of explanation accompanying their appeal. The message has five parts:

1. formal opening (verse 26)
2. details of Paul’s arrest (verse 27)
3. summary of the earlier investigation (verse 28)
4. Claudius Lysias’s opinion on the case (verse 29)
5. rationale for the appeal to Governor Felix (verse 30)¹⁷

Act 23:31 (BSB). “**the soldiers followed their orders and brought Paul by night to Antipatris.**” Halfway between Jerusalem and Caesarea, the detachment stopped for the night. Antipatris was rebuilt in 9 BC by King Herod and renamed after his father (in the Old Testament it was named Aphek).¹⁸ It was on the main international highway, the Via Maris, and strategically guarded the mountain pass to the east and a river to the west.

Act 23:32 (BSB). “**The next day [the soldiers] returned to the barracks and let the horsemen go on with him.**” Now that the worst danger of the trip had passed, the four hundred foot soldiers returned to Jerusalem while the seventy horsemen continued on to Caesarea.

Act 23:34–35 (BSB). “*The governor read the letter . . . he said, ‘I will hear your case when your accusers arrive.’*” The governor read the letter, then ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod’s praetorium. Felix was curious to learn that Paul’s hometown was Tarsus of Cilicia. He decided to hold off on bringing Paul to trial until the prosecutors arrived. Paul’s wait in the praetorium turned out to last a long time.

Marcus Antonius Felix served as the Roman procurator of Judea approximately between AD 52 and 59. The historians Tacitus and Josephus described his brutal rule. He owed his position to his influential brother Paullus but lost it due to his incompetence and immorality.⁴²

Acts 24—Paul before Governor Felix, ca. AD 58–60

Tertullus prosecutes Paul—Act 24:1–9

Act 24:1. “*After five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus.*” The high priest, Ananias, hired a lawyer or rhetorical professional to argue against Paul for a fee (like our modern attorneys). The name Tertullus is Latin and suggests that the lawyer was possibly a Roman citizen. The speech followed Roman legal conventions as seen below, so we assume that he studied Roman rhetoric (or that Luke wrote the speech out in that fashion).¹⁹

Proem, or exordium

Act 24:2–3 (NIV). “*We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you . . . most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude.*” Tertullus flattered Felix, crediting him with Palestine’s peace and prosperity, and then apologized for the inconvenience of a minor, tedious case. The KJV’s “clemency” is also translated as “be kind enough to hear us briefly” (NIV) or “indulge us” (NEB).

Refutation

Act 24:5. “*we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.*” Tertullus’s false information portrayed Paul as a rabble-rouser from the sect of the Nazarenes. This was a title Jews used for Christians. Even though the witnesses agreed with Tertullus, Paul refuted their claims in his defense.

Epilogue

Act 24:8 (BSB). “*By examining him yourself, you will be able to learn the truth.*” The climax of Tertullus’s prosecution implied that Lysias had acted unwisely and wasted Felix’s time and that Felix would soon recognize Paul’s faults.

Paul's defense and testimony—Act 24:10–21

Act 24:10 (NASB). “**Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defense.**” Paul’s rebuttal refutes Tertullus’s attacks and devotes time to the proof of his mission. Paul’s other sermons and epistles demonstrate that Paul also knew rhetorical style but employed it without the flattery and flourishes that Tertullus had. Paul’s opening proem (or preamble) is simple and respectful: “Twelve days ago, I went up to Jerusalem to worship. Yet my accusers did not find me debating” (Act 24:11–12).

Shortly before this experience, Paul wrote to the Corinthians expressing that he despised the type of rhetoric Tertullus used that was full of deceit, stylistic excess, manipulation, and elaborate performance (1 Cor 2:4; see Col 2:3–4). Likewise, revelation given during the Restoration teaches that power and influence should be accompanied “only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; by kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile.”²⁰

Act 24:14 (NIV). “**I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way.**” After he denied the charges against him, Paul testified that he believed in the Way (by which he meant Christianity; see Act 9:2). Judaism was one of the ten legal foreign or imported religions in the empire. Paul claimed to “serve the God of our fathers, believing withal things throughout the Law and that have been written in the Prophets” (24:14 BLB). Judaism was known and legal, so by claiming he held to these beliefs, he could expect to be protected. He described his pure motives: “I exercise myself” or “I do my best” and “take pains” and “strive always” (JB, NAS, RSV, NIV). The difference was that he saw the fulfillment of the law in Jesus, and most Jews did not.

Act 24:17. “**Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation.**” In his epistles Paul references gathering offerings for the poor in Jerusalem.²¹ Luke also documents this repeatedly in Acts, accounting also for the years of Paul’s travels away from Jerusalem (Act 11:29).

Act 24:18–21 (NIV). “**I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. . . . There was no crowd with me . . . nor . . . disturbance. . . . I stood before the Sanhedrin . . . “It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.”**” Paul points to facts that could be confirmed by Lysias or other eyewitnesses. Paul included—by using Tertullus’s argument against him—that the Jews trivialized and wasted Felix’s time.

Felix holds Paul in custody—Act 24:22–27

Act 24:22 (BSB). “**Felix, who was well informed about the Way, adjourned.**” Felix knew about the Way, or Christianity, either due to his political position within Roman intelligence or because he potentially had spies in Jesus’s crowds. These spies had already reported that the disciples were not troublemakers, so the Romans left them alone. Whatever Felix knew, he was no longer worried and agreed to postpone the trial until Lysias arrived.

Act 24:23 (BSB). *“allow him some freedom and permit his friends to minister to his needs.”* Paul remained in Herod’s palace under a loose guard. Felix permitted him to receive family and friends, as well as food, drink, and clothing. Luke does not mention missionary work occurring at this time; rather, he focuses his story on Paul testifying before Felix.

Act 24:24 (BSB). *“After several days Felix returned with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess.”* Paul’s second opportunity to testify of Jesus as the promised Messiah to the Roman procurator came because Felix’s wife wanted to hear more. Her Jewish lineage may have made her curious about Christianity. She could have been the source of Felix’s “perfect knowledge” about the Way (Act 24:22). This time Paul did not defend his case but chose to teach faith in Christ.

Drusilla was a daughter of Herod Agrippa I. Her beauty and familial political ties secured her marriage to King Azizus of Emesa in Syria. However, Felix fell in love with her and, through considerable court-ing, won her away. She was the first of Felix’s three wives. She was Jewish by birth; however, her actions demonstrated that her beliefs and practices did not follow the Mosaic law.

Act 24:25 (NIV). *“Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come.”* Probably because the more private audience allowed it, Paul moved from faith to morals. In light of the couple’s previously adulterous relationship, Paul’s discussion on the need for righteousness, temper-ance, and God’s coming judgment sounds like a call for repentance. Paul must have spoken by the power of the Spirit because “Felix trembled.” Similarly, John the Baptist had scared Herod Antipas when he had called him to repentance, and Jesus had upset the procurator Pilate. Paul also startled Felix enough for him to stop the discussion—“Go away for now,” he said.²²

Luke describes Paul as unpretentious but highly trained in rhetoric. This as well as his easy addresses to Claudius Lysias and his other interlocutors weaves a picture of a highly competent, socially at ease, upper class man, comfortable with powerful authorities. Peter, on the other hand, would seem to inhabit a different cultural niche, casting additional light on the contrast between them as well as on the scope of Christ’s appeal.

Act 24:26. *“hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul.”* Here we see Felix’s motives. Luke recorded that Felix was willing to break Roman law to take a bribe. This detail also sheds light on Paul’s wealthy background—a monetary bribe might even have been feasible. We are left to wonder whether Felix heard Paul speak again or was too afraid of the powerful Jews to release him. Luke explains that no action was taken against Paul and the case became a stalemate.

Act 24:27 (NIV). *“When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus.”* This can be interpreted as the maximum detention for a citizen to be imprisoned before mandatory re-lease. But, like his predecessor Pilate, Felix wanted to show the Jews a favor. There must have been other issues in Felix’s governance that raised Rome’s awareness of his poor leadership because Nero had Felix removed in about AD 59 or 60. This episode provides another historical date that we can attach to Paul’s life and New Testament history.²³

Acts 25—Paul before Festus and King Agrippa II, ca. AD 60

Paul before Festus—Act 25:1–12

Act 25:1 (NIV). “*Three days after arriving in the province.*”

Once in office, Porcius Festus wasted no time before touring his Judean jurisdiction. Luke records that he went up to Jerusalem.²⁴ While there, he heard the charges against Paul. In this formal setting and during the first month of his new office, Festus would have addressed only the most pressing issues. That Paul’s case was on this list is evidence either of its priority to the Sanhedrin or of how strongly the chief priests wanted to kill Paul. Luke includes the Sanhedrin’s plot to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem so they could lie in wait “in the way to kill him” (Act 25:3).

Act 25:4–5. “*Paul should be kept at Caesarea . . . go down with me, and accuse this man.*” Even though Festus was new in his office, he did not capitulate to the Jewish leaders’ wishes and kept Paul protected in Caesarea. Festus stayed in Jerusalem for no more than ten days and then encouraged the Jewish leaders to come to a trial against Paul in Caesarea if they wished.

Act 25:6. “*the next day sitting on the judgment seat [Festus] commanded Paul to be brought.*” The day after Festus returned to his new home in Caesarea, he brought Paul out for a pretrial hearing. This also speaks to the social significance of the case. Christianity was a big threat to the Jews at this time. By attacking Paul, who spread it around the empire, the leaders hoped to have a better chance of stopping it entirely.

Act 25:8. “*Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any.*” Luke summarizes the broken record of false accusations and skips to Paul’s defense to the governor. By personally bearing witness, Paul could convey extra meaning through the Spirit. Instead of being a court hearing, this became a missionary moment. Festus, the new ruler wanting to befriend the Jews, suggested that Paul go to Jerusalem for a Sanhedrin hearing.

Act 25:10. “*Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat.*” Paul’s request for an appeal to Caesar’s tribunal may sound like an easy way for Paul to save his life, but the Caesar at the time was one of the cruelest to ever reign. Paul would have known that the emperor had banned Jews from Rome and hated Christians. Paul acted in a way to fulfill the prophecies he had received about speaking before kings (Act 9:15). When a Roman citizen appealed to Caesar, he received a Roman guard to transport him. His housing, travel, and needs until the trial would all have been paid for by Rome. All this was within Paul’s citizenship rights.

Porcius Festus took over the procuratorship, or governor’s office, in about AD 60 and served until his death two years later. He came from a family of senators in Rome and received his appointment by Nero Caesar. History remembers Festus as serving conscientiously, a fact which the book of Acts confirms.

Nero Claudius Caesar Drusus Germanicus reigned over the Roman Empire from AD 54 to 68. Evidence shows that during his early rule, Nero was moderate and helpful, even tightening up on the excesses of tax collectors. Yet as his reign lengthened, Nero became publicly brutal and sexually licentious. He killed his mother and his wife to marry another more beautiful woman (whom he later also murdered). He started a fire in Rome so he could build a larger palace, known as the gold house (AD 64). To create a scapegoat for the fire, he ordered the brutal execution of Christians. He was passionate about chariot races and used the wealth of the empire to buy more popularity. When Britain, Spain, and Gaul revolted against him, Nero committed suicide. The early Christian fathers interpreted the number 666 from the beast in Revelation as an acronym for Nero's name.

Act 25:12. *“Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, . . . unto Caesar shalt thou go.”* The appeal may have been an embarrassment to Festus. One of his first cases, if not his first case as the tribunal, was appealed. But after confirming with his Roman council, “a board of assessors” to ensure the proceedings were legal, Festus accepted Paul's request. Paul's appeal allowed him to remain in Roman custody and away from Jewish hands. More importantly, the Lord had also forewarned Paul that he would testify in Rome. His appeal to Rome fit into the inspiration from God to fulfill that assignment. Luke highlights the drama of the scene with the parallel structure of Festus's response.

Paul's defense before Festus, Bernice, and King Agrippa II—Act 25:13–27

Act 25:13 (NIV). *“A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus.”*

Political decorum dictated that within the first month of a new governor's arrival to his post, the Jewish royalty, in this case King Agrippa II and his sister Bernice, give an official welcoming visit. This visit overlapped with the preparations for Paul to leave for Rome. Before he could set sail, the governor had to write up an account of his case and secure a ship, supplies, and other

Herod Agrippa II (AD 18–92) was raised in Judea and educated in Rome. He was seventeen when his father (Agrippa I) died. In AD 50, at age 31, he received his uncle Herod II's territory and jurisdiction over the Jerusalem temple (and he later received portions of Galilee, Perea, and Lebanon). He repaved the streets of Jerusalem in white marble and gave the capital, Caesarea Philippi, the new name Neronia. He sided with Rome during the Jewish revolt in AD 66 and assisted Titus's conquest of Jerusalem. He moved to Rome and lived there until his death in AD 92.

Bernice, the sister to King Agrippa II, was twice a widow. She first married her uncle Herod Chalcis, then a wealthy merchant. She chose to live with her brother, and history rumors that the two had an incestuous relationship. She also had an affair with Titus Flavius Vespasianus when he came to Palestine and even followed him to Rome as his mistress, but she returned to live with her brother before Vespasian became Caesar.

travelers. Agrippa II and Bernice's visit became providential—a momentous missionary opportunity unfolded in Caesarea.

Act 25:14. “Festus declared Paul’s cause unto the king.” During Bernice and Agrippa II’s visit, Festus brought up Paul’s imprisonment as it appears to have been a topic of much discussion. Previously, Agrippa II’s father had also tried to stop Christianity when he had had James (the son of Zebedee and brother of John the Beloved) killed. His uncle Herod Antipas had beheaded John the Baptist, and his grandfather, King Herod, had killed the boys under two in Bethlehem.

Act 25:22 (NIV). “I would like to hear this man myself.” After Festus explained his predicament—that the Jews’ “peculiar religion” had led to debates over whether Jesus was alive or dead (Act 25:19 NEB)—Festus “was at a loss how to investigate such matters” (Act 25:20 NIV). Festus perhaps felt that having a Jewish opinion on the matter would help him know what to write to Caesar about the case. The KJV rendered “Augustus” for the word *emperor*, but Augustus had died in AD 14 and Nero reigned at this time. These titles were tricky because every new emperor took on Caesar Augustus’s name in addition to their own. Other English translations read “Emperor.”²⁵

That Roman emperors took on Augustus’s name became another point at which Augustus and Jesus were in juxtaposition. But, in the case of the Lord, all who take on Jesus’s name become kings and queens. Luke also uses this scene to illustrate another parallel between Jesus’s trial and Paul’s, as both men were taken from the Roman authority (Pilate and Festus) to the Jewish authority (Herod Antipas and Agrippa II).

We are able to date much of the New Testament text through links with Roman history, as table 3 illustrates.

Act 25:23 (NIV). “Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the high-ranking military officers and the prominent men of the city.” Luke describes some of the elaborate displays of pomp as the king entered the judgment hall. Fredric Farrar added even more to the colors and atmosphere that would have accompanied the occasion: Agrippa II “would doubtless appear in his scarlet paludament with his full attendance of lictors and bodyguard, who would stand at arms behind the gilded chairs which were placed for himself and his distinguished visitors. Bernice [would be] blazing with all her jewels, and he in his purple robes, and both with the golden circlets of royalty around their foreheads, and attended by a suite of followers in the most gorgeous appeal of Eastern pomp. It was a compliment to the new governor to visit him with as much splendor as

Table 3. Roman emperors and New Testament references to their reigns

Date	Name	Scripture
27 BC–AD 14	Augustus	Lk 2:1
AD 14–37	Tiberius	Lk 3:1
AD 37–41	Caligula	
AD 41–54	Claudius I	Act 11:28
AD 54–68	Nero	Phlp 4:2
AD 68–69	3 short terms	1 Pet 5:13
AD 69–79	Vespasian	Rev 1:9?
AD 79–81	Titus	Eph 6:20?
AD 81–96	Domitian	2 Tim 4:16; Rev 1:9?

possible.”²⁶ Three of those in attendance would have been the military leaders of the five groups of one thousand soldiers stationed in Caesarea.²⁷

Act 25:25–26 (NIV). *“I found [Paul] had done nothing deserving of death. . . . I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him.”* Both political leaders were deferential and acted with much flattery to keep the peace. Festus, the new Roman governor, tried to ingratiate himself to Agrippa II possibly because the Herods had acted as Roman spies. Festus carefully laid out the situation: he was embarrassed about sending Paul to Nero without his having committed any real crime.

As Christians, we see this gathering as an opportunity for Paul to testify to King Agrippa II of Jesus as the Messiah, thereby fulfilling the prophecy spoken by Ananias approximately twenty-five years earlier that Paul would “bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings” (Act 9:15). Paul’s arrest opened remarkable positive opportunities, just as many challenges in our own lives do.

Acts 26

Paul’s defense—Act 26:1–8

Act 26:2 (BSB). *“King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today to defend myself.”* This is the fourth and last of Paul’s speeches recorded in Acts, and it is the third of his defenses (Roman law allowed citizens to defend themselves). The first was in Jerusalem, the second was before the Roman procurator Felix, and this third defense was before Festus (Felix’s successor), King Agrippa II, and Bernice. The latter two knew of and gave verbal allegiance and support to Judaism.

Paul was happy because he was more interested in testifying than in proving his innocence, and this gave him the opportunity to defend Christianity (compare Act 24:5–6). Even though he stood before the group

in chains or some type of bonds, he had the freedom of movement to “stretch out his hand” in the manner of a classical Greek orator.²⁸

Act 26:4–5 (NIV). “*I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem . . . as a Pharisee.*” Not confusing Paul’s home of Tarsus with his place of education in Jerusalem requires a careful reading of the KJV.

The Pharisees’ fundamental tradition was to “be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a fence around the Law.”²⁹ Their fence around the law became the ten thousand oral laws. Josephus added, “The Pharisees passed on to the people certain regulations handed down by former generations and not recorded into the Law of Moses.”³⁰ Paul claimed the Pharisees were the strictest sect. That is true if we compare them only to the Zealots and Sadducees, but the small groups of Essenes at the time lived an even more extreme version of the Mosaic law.

Act 26:6–8. “*I stand and am judged for the . . . promise [of] our twelve tribes . . . that God should raise the dead?*” Paul purported that his case was theological, not political. He cut through all the false charges of the Jews and expressed the real issue, which was the Resurrection of Jesus. A belief in the Resurrection would lead to accepting Jesus as the Son of God and the promised Messiah. Because Agrippa II and Bernice were raised with Jewish teachings, they should have known the stories of Elijah and Elisha raising the dead. The biblical background would have made the case of God raising Jesus more understandable. This was the promise that their ancestors had sought “earnestly” (RSV, NIV, NAV) or “with intense devotion” (JB). Typically in the New Testament, the word *Jews* refers to all Israelites. Here Paul specifically referred to the twelve tribes (he was not from Judah but from Benjamin).

Third account of Paul’s conversion—Act 26:9–23

Act 26:9 (BSB). “*I too was convinced that I ought to do all I could to oppose the name of Jesus.*” This is Luke’s third account of Saul’s persecution of the Saints.³¹ In Gal 1:13, Paul explained that he felt it was his duty to persecute the Christians with zeal (compare Phlp 3:6; 1 Tim 1:13). His investigation, interrogation, and sentencing of Christians fulfilled Jesus’s prophecy in Jn 16:1–2: “These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service” (see also Mt 23:34).

Act 26:11. “*compelled them to blaspheme.*” The KJV wording may mean that Paul made the Christians renounce their faith to save their lives. At the time of the KJV translation, the word *strange* meant “foreign,” which is the rendering in most other English modern translations.

Act 26:12. “*I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests.*” This verse is probably more correct than Act 9:1–2 in identifying Saul’s authority and directions. According to this verse, that authority initiated with the chief priests, not the one reigning high priest as Act 9:1–2 claims. The three parallel accounts of Paul’s vision on the road to Damascus are compared in my notes on Act 22:4–10. (I will only point out the differences below.)

Act 26:14. *“I heard a voice speaking . . . Saul, Saul . . . it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”* This is the second account that mentions a prick, or goad, a device used to control large animals like oxen (compare Act 9:5). In this context, the word suggests that Paul resisted previous spiritual promptings (Act 26:15).

Act 26:16 (BSB). *“I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen from Me and what I will show you.”* Significantly, all three accounts mention Paul seeing the Lord. In this setting, Paul included more about his commission to preach than in other accounts of his conversion. His difficult missionary charge included the Lord’s promise of future personal trials. The Lord also promised to protect him from the Romans or Gentiles (also meaning “nations”) on his mission. Either Paul understood that call differently because the thought of associating with Gentiles was repulsive or Paul combined multiple visions in this retelling. Peter had not yet received the vision to take the gospel to the Gentiles by the time of Paul’s first vision (Act 10:15). The Lord placed Paul’s commission to teach the Gentiles in perfect proximity to Peter’s vision to open missionary work to them.

Act 26:18 (BSB). *“to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those sanctified by faith in Me.”* Jesus’s message was the hope of forgiveness for Paul as much as for his converts. The Lord’s message promised sight, light, forgiveness, and inheritance. This spectacular gifts requires humility. The inheritance comes through sanctification, or the process of purification. Repentance and forgiveness prepare us for sanctification, which leads to more faith. It creates a beautiful cycle.

Act 26:19. *“I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.”* Paul later wrote of repentance as the way to salvation (2 Cor 7:9–10). He described it as not only a change of behavior but also a confession of and dependence on Christ as our Redeemer, which then opens the way to becoming a servant of God.

Act 26:20. *“they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.”* Different translations of this verse confirm that repentance requires turning to God and doing good works:

- “Demonstrate their repentance by their deeds” (NIV)
- “Do deeds worthy of a return to God” (ABPE)
- “Performing deeds in keeping with their repentance” (ESV)

Act 26:22 (NIV). *“I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen.”* Paul is referring to the titles of two of the three portions of Jewish scripture: the Law, Prophets, and Writings. What he referred to as Moses, or the Law, included the Old Testament’s first five books—that is, the Pentateuch. The Writings included the Psalms, histories, and the like. Since Isaiah was the most accessible scroll from the Prophets at the time, it is not surprising that Paul quoted from Isaiah (42:6; 49:6). Christians read the Old Testament for types and shadows of the promised Messiah, and the Book of Mormon is also replete with examples of this outlook.

Festus's and Agrippa II's perspective—Act 26:24–32

Act 26:24 (NIV). “**Festus interrupted Paul's defense. ‘You are out of your mind, Paul!’ he shouted.**” Festus's remark about Paul having gone mad implies that Paul was passionate or emotionally moved as he recounted his testimony. Roman administrators looked for legal issues of fact and were notoriously practical; Festus was likely the same. Paul's heartfelt approach would have been bizarre to Festus but not necessarily to King Agrippa II and Bernice.

Joseph Smith spoke about Festus's (and others') assumption that Paul was out of his mind after hearing his testimony:

[Paul] made his defense before King Agrippa, and related the account of the vision he had when he saw a light, and heard a voice; but still there were but few who believed him; some said he was dishonest, others said he was mad; and he was ridiculed and reviled. But all this did not destroy the reality of his vision. He had seen a vision, he knew he had, and all the persecution under heaven could not make it otherwise; and though they should persecute him unto death, yet he knew, and would know to his latest breath, that he had both seen a light and heard a voice speaking unto him, and all the world could not make him think or believe otherwise.³²

Act 26:27–28 (NIV). “**King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? . . . ‘Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?’**” King Agrippa may have known and even believed the prophets (although, sadly, his beliefs did not dictate all his actions). But Luke only recorded his confession that he was almost converted. The Greek word behind the KJV “almost,” *oligos*, actually meant “few, little, small, as in a segment of time” (as the next verse's first phrase confirms). It is clearer in other translations:

- “In a short time, you think to make me a Christian!” (RSV)
- “A little more, and you are sure to make me a Christian.” (AB)
- “In a little thou dost persuade me to become a Christian!” (YLT)
- “Can you persuade me in such a short time to become a Christian?” (BSB)

Elder Neal A. Maxwell did not think Agrippa's remark was flippant: “He was seriously touched.”³³ No historical evidence exists that Agrippa ever converted to Christianity (at least in mortality).

Act 26:29 (BSB). “**I wish to God that not only you but all who hear me this day may become what I am, except for these chains.**” Paul's wish is the climactic ending of his testimony. In God's eyes, Paul was not on trial—his judges were (and we, the readers, are too).

Act 26:30–32. “**the king rose up, and . . . they talked . . . This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.**” The trial ended when the king stood. After the hearing, the two leaders talked privately and agreed that Paul had done nothing wrong. This scene adds two

more declarations of Paul's innocence. Yet, the Lord wanted Paul to testify in Rome, so we look forward to hearing him witness before Caesar. However, the book of Acts ends before that hearing.

Acts 27—Paul's Voyage to Rome, ca. AD 61

Act 27:1–2 (NIV). *“Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment. We boarded a ship.”* Paul and company left via Herod's massive artificial harbor of Caesarea. We are told that two of Paul's Christian companions, Luke and Aristarchus, joined him on the two-thousand-mile voyage (Act 19:29; Col 4:10).

Paul's new Roman guard, Julius, who was one of the emperor's special centurions, proved himself an honorable man and trusted Paul enough to let him visit friends (probably Christians) at their first stop in Sidon (a hundred miles north of Caesarea).

Act 27:6–7. *“the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy . . . we had sailed slowly many days.”* In those days, ships preferred to sail near coasts in case of storms or other trouble. Only rarely did sailors intentionally sail out into the deep sea. On the island of Crete, Paul's group changed ships and joined a large grain ship from Alexandria en route to Italy with supplies for Roman bread.³⁴ They inched along the island but were then blown out to sea.

Act 27:9. *“sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them.”* In the ancient world, traveling across the Mediterranean Sea in winter was avoided because of dangerous storms. The fast mentioned in this verse is the Day of Atonement. That is the only Jewish celebration for which everyone fasts. It falls in the autumn, often in conjunction with the Feast of the Tabernacles. Unfortunately, Paul's warning to the captain went unheeded.

The storm—Act 27:13–21

Act 27:14–20. *“there arose against it a tempestuous wind . . . neither sun nor stars in many days appeared.”* The ship crashed into an island called Clauda (modern Gavdos) and needed repairs, but because of the quicksand, the captain sailed away. After three more days of fierce storms and without the ability to navigate by the stars or sun, the crew lightened the boat and threw cargo and tackle overboard. The storm continued for many more days before the ship crashed again.

Paul's seventh vision as recorded in Acts—Act 27:22–26

Act 27:21–22. *“Paul . . . said, Sirs . . . I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship.”* Paul attempted to help the crew's morale since everyone was physically and emotionally exhausted—to the point of losing all hope. After enduring days of the storm and fasting from food, Paul had a vision and shared it with the group. He began by providing evidence of his trustworthiness—he had given good advice to not sail so late in the season. Then, he shared

what the angel of the Lord had told him (Act 27:42). What did Paul mean by “the angel of God, whose I am and whom I serve”? Was the angel the Savior? The angel reaffirmed that Paul would testify before Caesar.

Act 27:25. “be of good cheer: for I believe God.” Paul’s visions include the direction to keep up spirit or take courage (Greek *euthymeo*). Though the boat would crash “upon a certain island,” the group could stay there all winter. Even though the crew were all seasick, starving, in pain, and hopeless and had lost thousands of pounds of grain, supplies, equipment, and the ship, the Lord’s message was clear—“Be of good cheer.” It is more than a message; it is a commandment. Thirteen times in the scriptures, the Lord commands, “Be of good cheer.” Surprisingly, most of those commands are given during devastatingly difficult times.³⁵ Why then? Why can we not just sit beside the sorrowful sufferer and show empathy? God teaches us how to develop joy, which helps us endure.

Because Paul believed God, he could always find hope and happiness in an eternal perspective. Christians, too, can trust His promises. We can trust that He loves us. We can believe that He will provide for us eternally. If we can learn to see trials as God sees them, we can adopt an attitude of cheer and “take courage” (Act 27:25 ISV, CSB, BSB). Christians can transform our discouragement, fear, or helplessness into cheer through focusing on our belief in God. This foresight becomes an empowering tool that can in turn help us develop strength, perspective, and hope to overcome fear of all kinds. This hope then provides us with the courage to act. God gave Paul (and us) a life-changing tool—to believe and trust God, who helps us to see life from an eternal perspective so that we can be of good cheer.

Fourteen-day storm—Act 27:26–37

Act 27:27–28 (NIV). “*On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea, when . . . the sailors sensed they were approaching land . . . [they] took soundings.*” Luke’s detailed record reveals God’s miraculous rescue. The sailors discovered they were in 120-foot-deep water and sank anchors, hoping to avoid the rocks before morning. The angel’s prophecy was about to be fulfilled.

Act 27:30 (BSB). “*Pretending to lower anchors from the bow, [the sailors] let the lifeboat down into the sea.*” Paul saw the exhausted sailors heading out to land and warned the centurion, “Unless these men remain with the ship, you cannot be saved.” Paul gained Julius’s trust, it seems, and his soldiers stopped the plot by cutting the ropes. Paul uttered another prophecy that would soon be fulfilled.

Act 27:33. “*This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing.*” Paul continually urged his fellow travelers to eat with him, and at daybreak they did. (The word for the KJV “meat” means “food, or nourishment.”) All 276 passengers were safe. Paul turned this into an opportunity to praise the Lord and prayed in thanks. Luke recorded, “Then were they all of good cheer.” To avoid running aground, the sailors lightened the ship by throwing out their wheat.

Act 27:39. “*they discovered a certain creek with a shore.*” Next, the crew raised the sail and moved toward an unknown sandy beach. The ship got stuck in a sandbar as the waves crashed into the

back end of the boat. As everyone abandoned the ship, Julius intervened to stop the soldiers from killing the prisoners (which was the protocol to prevent prisoners from escaping at such a moment). Everyone swam or floated on broken boards to shore.

Acts 28

Shipwreck and winter in Malta—Act 28:1–10

Act 28:1–2 (NIV). “*Once safely on shore . . . [the] islanders showed us unusual kindness . . . [and] built a fire . . . because it was raining and cold.*” This incident also speaks to the pagan belief that those who survived shipwreck were innocent.³⁶ The island that Paul and the group landed on was named Melita (Latin for Malta).³⁷

Act 28:3–5. “*a viper . . . fastened on [Paul’s] hand. . . . And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.*” A poisonous snake came out of the sticks that Paul gathered to help with the fire. This scene fulfilled Jesus’s prophecy that “they shall take up serpents

. . . and they shall recover” (Mk 16:18). Yet, no one there knew that prophecy. The superstitious locals first saw the episode as a sign of Paul’s wickedness, and then when the bite had no ill effects, they saw it as a sign that Paul was a god.

Act 28:7–8 (NIV). “*Publius, the chief official . . . welcomed us to his home . . . for three days. His father was sick. . . . Paul . . . , after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him.*” The “chief man,” Publius, was a Roman ruler, not a local. This may have been why of all the 276 shipwrecked people, Paul had the honor of staying in Publius’s estate until other housing could be prepared. Julius, the Roman official in charge of Paul, was probably entertained at Publius’s home too. One act of kindness was answered by another as Paul healed Publius’s father from dysentery through God’s priesthood power.

Act 28:9. “*others also . . . were healed.*” The Lord again blessed Paul with the gift of healing to help several islanders (and hopefully fellow boat passengers).³⁸ Luke describes how Paul won the love of several locals, but he does not mention that he preached the gospel to them. I assume he did (possibly through an interpreter). It seems as though they had a grand going away party, complete with giving food and supplies for the voyage.

Paul’s arrival at Rome—Act 28:11–16

Act 28:11–13. “*after three months we departed in a ship . . . we fetched a compass, and came to . . . Puteoli.*” Luke records all the stops of the voyage. The group joined another Alexandrian

Malta, an island south of Sicily, was colonized by Phoenicians in about 1000 BC. It fell to Carthaginian control in 500 BC and then was conquered by Rome in 218 BC. It became an important stop on the Mediterranean trade routes. The locals spoke Punic, not Greek.

grain ship and sailed north sixty miles to the island of Sicily and then traveled up the west coast of Italy to Puteoli, due west of Naples. It was a significant port where grain ships unloaded their cargo for Rome. Paul visited with a Christian family there for a week. The text refers to Castor and Pollux, which were the zodiac sign and the patron gods for sailors. The two were twin brothers.

Act 28:15. *“when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us . . . Paul . . . thanked God, and took courage.”* News of Paul’s arrival reached Rome before Paul did, and a group of Saints traveled forty miles south along the Appian Way to Appii, where they gathered at a forum. Their lodgings must have been remarkable enough for Luke to record its name: the Three Taverns. Luke did not record their conversations, but I imagine the local Christians probably updated the Apostle on the latest Roman-Jewish-Christian relations.

Act 28:16 (ESV). *“when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier.”* Once in Rome, Julius, the centurion from Caesarea, turned the prisoner Paul over to the captain of the guard, who kept Caesar’s personal garrison. Paul was not kept in the usual prison but was allowed to live in private quarters with only one soldier as his guard. (If Paul’s reference to a chain in verse 20 is literal, he could have also been secured in the space by chain, but that is not likely for this first Roman imprisonment.) House arrest allowed Paul to have visitors and to come and go to some degree. He may have been in the military barracks of those imperial guards stationed in Rome to guard the emperor.³⁹

When adding up all of Luke’s *we* passages, we find that Luke appears to have shared about a dozen years of missionary service with Paul (Act 16:10–28:15). Other New Testament references also show Luke as Paul’s companion.⁴⁰ Luke may have stayed with Paul during those two years in Rome and written his Gospel or the book of Acts, or perhaps he may have been too busy as a missionary to stay the full time (Act 28:30).

Paul preached under Roman Guard, AD 61–63—Act 28:17–31

Act 28:17–19. *“Paul called the chief of the Jews together: . . . there was no cause of death in me. . . . I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar.”* True to Paul’s fashion, after only three short days in Rome, Paul invited the local rabbis and synagogue leaders to get to know him. Paul wanted to make sure they understood his side of the story. Wisely, he emphasized the indisputable common ground they shared without touching on any of the controversial points. He also used this opportunity to fulfill his call to testify in Rome. He again started to preach first to the Jews before he taught the Gentiles.

Act 28:22. *“we desire to hear of thee . . . as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.”* Somewhere the Jewish communication link failed to pass on information of Paul’s imminent arrival in Rome to the Jews there. These Jews’ golden question opened a wide door for Paul to share his beliefs.

Act 28:23. *“he expounded and testified the kingdom of God . . . from morning till evening.”* What an opportunity for Paul—a full house wanting to know more about the sect of Christianity! Paul’s

first Jewish audience must not have been offended because more people came. This scene speaks of Paul's knowledge of the messianic scriptures as no scrolls would have survived the shipwreck, nor were scrolls provided under his house arrest (remember, scrolls were as expensive as a second home; usually each community shared only a few scrolls). Paul's masterful oration and debate skills kept his audiences rapt all day long. This skill and the Spirit of the Lord became a powerful combination, and many converted.

Act 28:25–28 (NASB 1995). *“The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah . . . “the heart of this people has become dull” . . . salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen.”* Paul sounded discouraged when more of the Jews did not believe. As a warning to them, he recited Isa 6:9–10. He publicly announced to the Jews that they had had their chance and that he would now go preach to the Gentiles.

Act 28:31 (NIV). *“He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!”* As he had in Caesarea, Paul had a two-year captivity in Rome with “complete freedom” to preach (JB). Phlp 4:2 describes the missionary work Paul did among the guards while on house arrest: “All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household” (NASB). Paul’s guard (or guards) would have heard him preach and could have carried the Christian message through the ranks of Caesar’s staff and household. We also learn in studying the texts of Paul’s epistles that Paul wrote Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians during these two years in Rome.

Despite the fact that Paul’s life and mission were not yet at their end, Luke abruptly closes the book of Acts here. It appears that Luke was not finished with his work.⁴¹ Paul had not testified to Caesar, nor were Peter and Paul dead. Yet, considering Luke’s style of highlighting the Lord and His Apostles in the most positive light possible, perhaps this is where Luke chose to end the text. Paul had followed the Lord’s direction from the time of his first vision, and the book of Acts ends with some successful missionary experiences.

If biblical scholars, archeologists, or Vatican librarians never find a second ending for Acts, we can still appreciate Luke’s choice to end at this climactic answer to the Lord’s command, “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses . . . unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Act 1:8). Luke’s thesis fits nicely within this opening and closing.

Endnotes

1 In addition to seeing parallels between Jesus, Peter, and Paul, we also note more parallels with Alma the Younger in the Book of Mormon. The Prophet Joseph Smith also quoted the Apostle Paul often and found solace in the experiences the two shared. “Both began their service to the Lord through a life-changing vision. Both were true to the vision they received and acted with unrelenting faith and courage to fulfill their missions, bearing testimony to a skeptical world (see JS—H 1:24–25). And both sealed their testimonies with their blood as witnesses to the gospel they had so fervently preached throughout their lives.” David Rolph Seely and Jo Ann H. Seely, “Paul: Untiring Witness of Christ,” *Ensign*, August 1999.

2 Act 21:15–17; Jurgen Becker, *Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 34. Paul’s personal writings do not include that he was tutored under Gamaliel nor that he was born in Tarsus. However, we do have other secondhand sources who claim the same thing. The early church father Jerome suggested that Paul’s ancestors “emigrated from Galilean Gishala.”

3 Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1983), 21–22. Piecing the patchwork of Paul’s biography together leaves one to question how Paul could have been taught in Jerusalem without knowing more about Jesus’s ministry. However, if his education from Gamaliel was in about AD 20, that was well before Jesus became popular in Jerusalem. This timing fits into the Mishnah’s outline of a young man’s path in life: “Thirteen to religious duties, fifteen to Talmud.” Furthermore, Paul’s epistles are filled with arguments that reflect rabbinical biblical interpretation.

4 The ancient historian Strabo recorded that Tarsus excelled in rhetoric: “That facility prevalent among the Tarsians whereby [one] could instantly speak offhand and unceasingly on any given subject.” Strabo, *Perseus Under Philologic*, 14.5.14.

5 See my earlier commentary in Act 9:2 for how the Way points to temple texts.

6 Compare Act 9:1–2; 22:3–10; 26:9–16.

7 See my earlier commentary on scourging in Jn 19:1.

8 Christopher R. Little, *Mission in the Way of Paul* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2005), 7–8. Two theories are often purported. The most esteemed was that “according to traditions preserved in Jerome and Photius, Paul’s parents were carried off as prisoners of war from the Judean town of Gischala to Tarsus. . . . What would have happened to Paul’s family” was possibly working as slaves, going through manumission, and over time, Saul’s ancestors were given citizenship before they moved to Tarsus. The second theory purports that Paul’s father may have been one of those from Tarsus who helped Octavia and Anthony during the civil war. As a thank you after Octavia won, he probably awarded those key men with citizenship. We do not know for sure, as no record remains of who was rewarded citizenship.

9 John W. Welch and John Hall, *Charting the New Testament* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002), 15-4.

10 As a review, the organization of the Mosaic priesthood in the New Testament was divided into the following offices:

- a. The one reigning high priest
- b. Chief Priests: The captains of the temple
 - Cultus: the leaders of the 24 weekly sections or “courses” or “companies” and of their daily course
 - Custody of the Temple: Temple overseers
 - Temple finances: three treasurers
- c. The Priests: 24 weekly courses, ~7,200 priests who served at the altar, to light the incense, etc.
- d. The Levites: 24 weekly courses, ~9,600 who served as musicians, guards, custodians, butchers, etc.

11 Frederick F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 3. From the time of King David, the high priest descended from the Aaronic family of Zadock (960–171 BC). In 171 BC, a priest named

Menelaus, who did not belong to the Zadokite line, bribed the king who made him high priest. From then on, the high-ranking chief priests vied from the position of high priest, which changed on the ruler's whim. The list of reigning high priests varies slightly with different sources, but approximate dates for the New Testament are: 3 BC, Joshua son of Sie; AD 6, Joazar son of Boethus; AD 6–15, Ananus son of Seth (who participated in Jesus's trials, also spelled Annas); AD 15–16, Ishmael Fabus, or Phiabi; AD 16–17, Eleazar; AD 18–37, Joseph Caiaphas (son-in-law to Annas and participant in Jesus's trials); AD 37, Jonathan son of Annas; AD 37–41, Theophilus son of Annas; AD 41–43, Simon Kantheras; AD 43, Matthias son of Annas; AD 44, Elionaisus, son of Kantheras; AD 44–46, Josephus son of Camydus; AD 46–58, Ananias son of Nedebeus; AD 58, Jonathan.

12 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1997), 722.

13 Cornelia B. Horn and John W. Martens, *Let the Little Children Come to Me: Childhood and Children in Early Christianity* (Washington, DC: Catholic University, 2009), 100–101. Frank E. Gaebelein, ed., *Ephesians through Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 374.

14 *Mishnah*, Avoth 5:21; for the full list of age denominations see the note to my commentary on Act 18:3.

15 For more on Caesarea, see my comments on Act 10:1.

16 Archeological evidence of Pontius Pilate's position was found in Caesarea, as his name was engraved on a first-century cornerstone of an old Roman building. Titus Kennedy, *Excavating the Evidence for Jesus: The Archaeology and History of Christ and the Gospels* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2022), 86.

17 Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 726.

18 Josh 12:18; 1 Sam 4:1; 29:1.

19 *The Apostle Paul, His Life and Testimony: The 23rd Annual Sperry Symposium* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 1994), 69–72.

20 D&C 121:41–42; see Alm 31:5; Mose 6:31–32, 7:13.

21 1 Cor 16:1; 2 Cor 8:4–6; 9:2; Gal 2:10.

22 Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 740.

23 Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 440. “The time of the beginning and end of his administration cannot be accurately established” and some historians use AD 59 as his start date. After his death, Luceius Albinus was the procurator from AD 62 to 64.

24 For more on why one always ascends to Jerusalem see Lk 2:4; Act 18:22.

25 As discussed in Lk 2:11, Caesar Augustus used the title “son of god” for himself on ancient coins, he claimed to be the prince of peace and he used his birthday for the starting of the calendar.

26 Frederic Farrer, *Life of Christ* (NYC, NY: Dutton, 1887), 699.

27 Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 752.

28 Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 755.

29 *Mishnah*, Avoth 1:1. The Jews fenced in the Law of Moses with ten thousand commandments that became known as the oral laws or the oral Torah. They systematized these laws as a buffer zone to protect their Torah.

30 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 13.297.

31 See parallels in Act 22:4–5; 8:1–3; 9:1.

32 Andrew F. Ehat and Lindon W. Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Smith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1990), 14.

33 Neal A. Maxwell, “Taking up the Cross” (BYU devotional, January 4, 1976), 255, speeches.byu.edu; see Adam Clarke, *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia, PA: Thomas, Cowperthwaite, 1838), 440: “Every circumstance in the case proves them to have been the genuine effusion of a heart persuaded of the truth; and only prevented from fully acknowledging it by secular considerations” (Act 26:28).

34 Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 234. Caesar had promised bread and circus for all Romans. The food stuffs came from their colonies.

35 Mt 9:2; 14:27; Mk 6:50; Jn 16:33; Act 23:11; 27:22, 25; Alm 17:31; 3 Ne 1:13; D&C 61:36; 68:6; 78:18; 112:4. Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Learning the Language of the Lord: A Guidebook to Personal Revelation* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2018), 184, 186.

36 Craig S. Keener, *Acts* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 613.

37 Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 782.

38 Just as he did in Acts 14:8–10; 19:12.

39 Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 788.

40 Col 4:11; Phlm 1:24; 2 Tim 4:14.

41 Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 211–316. In 1 Timothy and Titus we read of another Pauline visit to Asia Minor, Greece, Crete, and possibly Spain (1 Tim 1:20). In AD 96 Clement of Rome recorded that Paul reached the boundaries or limits of the west, suggesting Spain more than Rome. The Muratorian Fragment also says Paul visited Spain. The fourth-century historian Eusebius recorded of this time in Paul’s life, “Having, therefore, made his defense at the time, it is recorded that the apostle again journeyed on the ministry of preaching, and, having set foot for a second time in the same city was perfected in his martyrdom.” George Ogg, *The Chronology of the Life of Paul* (Eugene, OR: Methodist Publishing, 2016), 186. I agree with many scholars who propose that Paul was set free after his two years and then preached the gospel for a few more years before a second Roman imprisonment. Paul’s second Roman imprisonment sounded different from the first as we read of the dark terms in 2 Timothy. This fits in with the timing of more serious Christian persecutions (after Rome’s great fire in July AD 64, which, Tacitus claimed, Nero blamed on the Christians). Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.4, <https://livius.org/sources/content/tacitus/tacitus-on-the-christians/>.

42 Joshua Yoder, *Representatives of Roman Rule: Roman Provincial Governors in Luke–Acts* (Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2014), 137, 277.