

Acts 27

Unto Cesear We Go!

Read Acts 27:1-5: We are focused on the growth of the church; but the Roman Empire was undergoing significant worldwide changes. It is odd to think that God would orchestrate the rise and fall of nations in ways that are perfect for his Kingdom. Christianity was probably the last thing on the minds of Roman citizens. It is amazing to consider that the church affairs actually were inadvertently controlling the Roman Empire. Today, we see some crazy and destructive news headlines; but again, God is using all the good and the bad to ultimately bless us all.

This chapter is about Paul's journey from Cesaria to Rome. The actual court case appeal before Ceasar was almost a non-event. I am not even sure that Paul's accusers showed up to prosecute him in Rome. We tend to focus on the final destination; and disregard the journey. How often is the final leg of the journey anticlimactic? God's ways are not our ways. Are our daily faith steps in route to the day's responsibilities? It really seems that all of the events that influence our lives are baked into our destiny. I might have been upset over the amount of wasted time in jail.

One thing that Americans could learn from the Romans was that bringing a false claim against a citizen of Rome was a crime itself. The malicious accuser could be punished with the same penalty as the accused. Wouldn't having that risk keep the frivolous and malicious lawsuits down?

We should shift gears and consider what Paul was getting into. Paul was to be escorted the entire way to Rome by a centurion named Julius, who was a member of the Augustan Cohort, otherwise known as the Praetorian Guard. Access to Cesar and the rights of each Roman citizen were very tightly controlled. On one hand, Paul was a victim of malicious and envious accusations from the Jewish religionists. On the other hand, Paul was the only protected Roman Citizen Apostle for Christ suited for such a mission.

What was the Praetorian Guard, besides a Secret Service escort to the capital? Rome had a specialized branch of the military dedicated to protecting the capital and the Cesear from insurrections. These details were not laid out in scripture, but

they were tied to major events in the world at that time. Acts 27 was written in 57-58 AD. Nero was the Emperor from 54-68 AD.

Claudius Cesear married Nero's mother Agrippina, and Claudius adopted Nero. Agrippina poisoned Claudius and put her son forth as the next Cesear! Then she proceeded to exert some control over Nero herself. Nero became emperor at 16. That means that Nero was only 19 when Paul arrived in Rome. Nero was a terrible emperor. His mother's influence kept his reputation and public perception out of scrutiny early on; but he fell into lavish living and extreme tyranny as the power of his seat went to his head. There seems to be something built into human beings that tilts as you get beyond having any accountability.

Initially, Nero brought about tax reductions, the promotion of the arts and various much needed infrastructure projects. He began by recognizing that public acceptance was a necessity. As he grew to enjoy having control, he took his allies for granted. Rome had developed a very-specific system for the perpetuation of the empire.

After a few years Nero became paranoid and cruel. He developed visions of grandeur and projects for self-satisfaction. He desired to demolish the palace and historically significant buildings in Rome. This disregard for Roman history and his excessive expenditures enraged the Senate. He mismanaged multiple Roman protocols, and he fostered a lot of fraud and created tiers of poor governance.

Nero became incensed when his architectural plans were denied. He needed a way to force his re-creation of Rome the way he wanted it; despite the opposition of the Roman loyalists and Senate. So he burned down Rome. He blamed it on the Christians. This gave him the ability to rebuild it the way that he wanted. Various historians make mention of this such as Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio.

The Praetorian Guard could only offer Nero so much protection as various Roman Generals returned from the field to displace this ridiculous Emperor. They were fighting battles abroad, while Rome was burning. Nero was overthrown in 68 AD, and Galba became emperor. Galba was overthrown in 69 AD. Otho became emperor and was overthrown in 69 AD and Vitellius became emperor. Vitellius was overthrown in 69 AD and then Vespasian became the emperor.

Christian persecution began in 64 AD and continued for over 240 years. Many years later, Gallias allowed Christians to practice their faith in 311 AD.

Christianity got its notoriety from Nero's desire for a scapegoat.

Paul was faced with his plea before a very self-absorbed, immature and completely distracted Cesar. Nevertheless, Paul was given access to unlimited visitations, despite being chained to a Roman soldier. Paul used a lot of imagery of the Roman soldier as he wrote from prison once again. He wrote Romans and Philippians and 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus as a guard was literally chained to his body. Paul had a prison ministry that seemed to greatly impact the staff.

Paul addressed the members of the Imperial Household in Philippians. It was his way to convey to the church that certain workers in Cesar's service were likely to visit churches as part of their new-found faith. Likewise with Cesar's own household. Similarly, a church had now started in Rome as a result of Paul's visit!

Paul had a non-eventful trial and was subsequently released in 63 AD.

Read Acts 27:6-13: Luke wrote Acts, and it is interesting how much detail was given to this treacherous journey on the high seas. It reminds me of Jonah. Aristarchus (of Thessalonica) was on board as a companion of Paul. They transferred to another vessel in Lycia. The Mediterranean becomes dangerous as you get to the end of September. The grain barge captain wanted to make his delivery despite the bad timing with oncoming weather.

Read Acts 27:14-26: The weather hit them very hard; and they began to think that they would all die. Paul converted a number of Romans in Rome and along the way in his journeys. This was much like Jonah, where men were in fear of their life, yielding to Paul's connection with God to get them through it. They threw out their precious cargo and ships tackle to save their lives. That is an awful lot of grain to throw out.

An angel met Paul in the storm and confirmed that Paul would stand before Cesar. The angel also spoke of the common grace that would be extended to all on board.

Read Acts 27:27-44: Paul has their attention now. This is like a foxhole conversion. The sailors are doing exactly what Paul suggests now, especially after he told them that sailing further was a mistake. God had told Paul that whoever

was in his party would be saved; but no promises to those who go their own way. 276 people is quite a crew. Paul knew he was going to stand before Cesar. There is a common grace that applies to those who are connected to us. The same concept applies to the church. We are called to fellowship with other believers. The statistics on Lone Ranger Christians are not good.

Any prisoner lost would result in the death of his Roman guard. That is why they would rather just kill the prisoners than to let them escape on the island. Paul had a connection with Julius, the centurion, who stopped his men from killing anyone. They all landed safely.