

13. Journey to Rome (3Q 2018—The Book of Acts)

Biblical material: Acts 27, 28; Rom. 1:18–20.

Quotes

- Rome will exist as long as the Coliseum does; when the Coliseum falls, so will Rome; when Rome falls, so will the world. *Venerable Bede*
- Rome has grown since its humble beginnings that it is now overwhelmed by its own greatness. *Livy*
- Ancient Rome was as confident of the immutability of its world and the continual expansion and improvement of the human lot as we are today. *Arthur Erickson*
- How is it possible to say an unkind or irreverential word of Rome? The city of all time, and of all the world! *Nathaniel Hawthorne*
- Wealth conquered Rome after Rome had conquered the world. *Italian proverb*
- Rome's just a city like anywhere else. A vastly overrated city, I'd say. It trades on belief just as Stratford trades on Shakespeare. *Anthony Burgess*

Questions

What do you think Paul's thoughts would have been on reaching Rome? We have no record of his appeal to Caesar in Scripture, but can we imagine what he would have said? Why didn't Luke go on writing—what was the end of the story? How can we make these historical events relevant and applicable to us today?

Bible summary

Acts 27 details Paul's journey to Rome, a rough time that included a terrible storm and shipwreck. Yet even here Paul is witnessing, and saving lives! Acts 28 recounts the time on Malta as they passed the winter before continuing on to Rome. Again Paul shows his commitment to his loving Lord, healing Publius' sick father. Finally Paul arrives on the Italian mainland, and begins his journey up the Appian Way, where he is met by fellow Christians on the way. There under house arrest in Rome Paul witnesses to the Jews, and some believed. Paul was there two years, "He spoke of the kingdom of God, and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ very boldly. No one prevented him." Acts 28:31 FBV. And then the curtain falls...

Comment

The Book of Acts seems to end in mid-sentence. We're left hanging, wondering what happens next. Why did Luke stop here?

Many explanations have been given, like missing pages, or some other interruption. Perhaps Luke thought he had given enough information at that point to be useful to the wider Christian community. For whatever reason, his book ends at this point, and only odd pieces of tradition give us any more information.

But perhaps the best thing to do now is to leave Paul still preaching in Rome and ask ourselves how we sum this up.

At first sight, Paul's commission to work for the Gentiles is very surprising. He himself admits he was a 'Pharisee of the Pharisees,' with all that this implies. So it must

have been very difficult for him to accept, as a very rigorous law-keeping Jew, that the message of the gospel was to go to the Gentiles as well...

Yet it was also *because* of Paul's rigorous training in logic and disciplined thought that led him to conclusion that salvation was not exclusively for the Jews. This had been clear in the Old Testament, as Paul very well knew. Now he needed to apply those principles to his present situation, and go beyond the common ideas and prejudices of the time.

As we think of Paul's experience, and the experience of hostility from his fellow-Jews, it's perhaps not surprising that it should become clear to Paul that the gospel was to go to the Gentiles as well. This really was a seismic shift in perspective—the more so for a 'Pharisee of the Pharisees'!

Paul's contribution to the early church was immense. While he shared responsibilities with others in leadership, and he travelled with Barnabas and Silas, it was Paul whose dynamism made the difference. His journeys, his preaching, and his letters really contributed to the spread of the gospel and the establishment of so many churches.

Paul says we are created to be like God. Think of what that means for a minute. Then consider what Paul immediately identifies as a hallmark of this recreated self: honesty and truthfulness. That is so important in God's universe—it comes to the top of the list! No anger, because that gives the devil access. No stealing, no bad speaking; no bitterness, slander, malice. Kindness and compassion are what matters, with an attitude of forgiveness, remembering how God has forgiven each of us. Such changes in thinking and behavior do not come "naturally" to us, we come to God himself for healing so that we can become "like God in true righteousness and holiness." This is our message to the world!

Ellen White Comments

At last the travelers reach Appii Forum, forty miles from Rome. As they make their way through the crowds that throng the great thoroughfare, the gray-haired old man, chained with a group of hardened-looking criminals, receives many a glance of scorn, and is made the subject of many a rude, mocking jest.

Suddenly a cry of joy is heard, and a man springs from the passing throng and falls upon the prisoner's neck, embracing him with tears and rejoicing, as a son would welcome a long-absent father. Again and again is the scene repeated, as, with eyes made keen by loving expectation, many discern in the chained captive the one who at Corinth, at Philippi, at Ephesus, had spoken to them the words of life.

As the warm-hearted disciples eagerly flock around their father in the gospel, the whole company is brought to a standstill. The soldiers are impatient of delay, yet they have not the heart to interrupt this happy meeting; for they too have learned to respect and esteem their prisoner. In that worn, pain-stricken face, the disciples see reflected the image of Christ. They assure Paul that they have not forgotten him nor ceased to love him; that they are indebted to him for the joyful hope which animates their lives, and gives them peace toward God. In the ardor of their love they would bear him upon their shoulders the whole way to the city, could they but have the privilege. {RH, December 7, 1911 par. 6}