
Paul's Journey to Rome: Proclaiming Jesus Everywhere

SCOTT HOEZEE

Every once in a while, we hear about some legal battle that goes on and on for months, if not years. Trial after trial, verdict after verdict, judgment after judgment; and then there is an appeal made to a Court of Appeals, and after that, perhaps another appeal to some federal court, and ultimately things make it to the Supreme Court or whatever the highest court of the land may be called in a given nation. Justice can be slow in coming. Today on *Groundwork*, we will see no less than the Apostle Paul in such a prolonged series of trials; but in the case of Paul, that turns out not to be a bad thing at all. Stay tuned.

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And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is the final part of our five-part series on the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul. Program one was on the first missionary journey, and then program two wasn't really on a journey but it was on something that informed the subsequent journeys, which was the Jerusalem Council. Then in the third program, we picked up the second missionary journey; and in the previous program, we looked at the third one; and all of that, of course, Darrell, takes up the second half of the book of Acts; and we are going to be covering a lot of events today.

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So, after the third missionary journey, Paul seems to find himself in a lot of legal trouble, Scott. He is going around to these different officials; so, the story kind of shifts, where it is usually these interpersonal communications or these letters to these places where he had visited...churches he had planted. Now, there is a different focus in this episode.

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Yes; and so, we are going to be moving from the end of Acts 21—we are going to catch that in just a second—all the way to the end of the book, which is Acts 28, which is a lot; we are not going to be able to get everything in here in this program, but we are going to do a good overview of how the book of Acts comes in for a conclusion. The setup of everything you just referred to, Darrell, is at the end of Acts 21. He is in Jerusalem. This is after that third missionary journey. After he goes up to the temple in the company of some Gentile believers, things go badly. So, let's hear it.

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Yes; and so, we are going to be moving from the end of Acts 21—we are going to catch that in just a second—all the way to the end of the book, which is Acts 28, which is a lot; we are not going to be able to get everything in here in this program, but we are going to do a good overview of how the book of Acts comes in for a conclusion. The setup of everything you just referred to, Darrell, is at the end of Acts 21. He is in Jerusalem. This is after that third missionary journey. After he goes up to the temple in the company of some Gentile believers, things go badly. So, let's hear it.

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It says: ^{27b}Some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, ²⁸shouting, "Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place." (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple.) ³⁰The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. ³¹While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. ³²He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. ³³The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains.

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So, there it is. This is the start of what is going to set up the whole rest of the book of Acts. Paul is arrested by the Romans; but actually, Darrell, it is a good thing the Romans did intervene, or it sounds like that frenzied crowd might well have beaten Paul to death. But having been taken into custody, at this point, at the end of Acts 21, Paul is never really going to be let out of custody again, at least not through to the end of Acts; and indeed, as we noted in the introduction a few minutes ago, he is just going to kind of keep moving up through the legal system; and the result is that Paul is going to give five major speeches. The first in Acts 22, a speech to the crowds in Jerusalem; then second, Acts 23, a speech to the Jewish Sanhedrin in Jerusalem; third, in Acts 24, a speech to the Governor Felix; fourth, in Acts 25, a speech to the governor who replaced Felix, which is Governor Festus; and finally, in Acts 26, he will give a speech to King Agrippa.

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Indeed; and it is basically the same speech with minor variations, and we are not really going to read... we cannot read all five of those speeches, but they are basically all the same, right? He recalls when he was a persecutor of the Church, and then the Damascus Road conversion and how God totally changed it around so Saul would become Paul and Paul would become the one to build up the very Church that Saul had tried to destroy. So, as you just said, Darrell, it is a great irony...it is a great example of the grace of God. Paul has to give an account for himself, and in the end, he manages to preach the gospel.

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Oh, it is really powerful. So, you know, in the situation where he was beat within an inch of his life, if that situation wasn't intervened into by the Romans, then he wouldn't have had the opportunity. So, it is really interesting how even though God didn't cause the persecution that he was experiencing, God still got the glory out of it because he was able to tell his story and able to share the gospel in every situation.

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Exactly; you know, nobody calls Paul's travels through the Roman legal system the fourth missionary journey, but in a way it is, right? As you just said, Darrell, it is a wonderful testament to how God can use even bad circumstances to his good purposes after all. I think that is something we all need to know and celebrate also today when we face difficult times in our lives as Christians or in the Church.

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The crowd listened to Paul until he said this (and he was talking about the resurrection). Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!" ²³As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, ²⁴the commander ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and interrogated in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. ²⁵As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't been found guilty?" ²⁶When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. "What are you going to do?" he asked. "This man is a Roman citizen." ²⁷The commander went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" "Yes, I am," he answered. ²⁸Then the commander said, "I had to pay a lot of money for my citizenship." "But I was born a citizen," Paul replied. ²⁹Those who were about to interrogate him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he was about to put a Roman citizen in chains.

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Yes; so, it is really interesting how Paul was able to use that card right there in the middle of the situation: Did you know I was a Roman citizen? We have a separate legal system you’ve got to move me on to. You cannot do this here to me because what I am as a Roman citizen. I was born a Roman citizen; and so, Paul is really using that situation to create another situation that is going to get him into a trial in a different place; and they have to take their hands off of him because the Roman government trumps their government.

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Right; but...so they thought Paul was just some random Jew...some follower of the Way, as the early Church was called; but now suddenly he pulls out his drivers license and says, you know, “I am a Roman citizen.” So, I’ve got rights; I’ve got rights; and eventually, in the next chapter, which we will look at shortly...but in Acts 25, after appearing before the Sanhedrin, and the Governors Felix and Festus, we will see in a little bit that Paul is going to appeal his case directly to Caesar, which is again going to force them to bring Paul to Rome; which actually was fine by Paul, because he had been wanting to go to Rome for a long time; and now he can go on the government’s nickel, right? He will get to Rome after all, thanks to the Romans. So again, kind of a funny irony that God is using this difficult situation for more and more and more opportunities that Paul can proclaim the gospel.

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So, coming up in just a moment, we will pick up on some of what all happens in Chapters 23-26. So, stay tuned.

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Segment 2

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And Darrell, before we dive into some final details of Paul before Governor Felix, we should note that after Paul spoke to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, the Romans learned that there was a very serious plot to murder Paul. So, under the cover of darkness, the Romans whisked Paul out of Jerusalem. They take him to Caesarea, where in Acts 24, Paul once again gives kind of that same speech that we referred to earlier in the program; and following his proclamation of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, we hear these words from Acts 24.

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²²Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. "When Lysias the commander comes," he said, "I will decide your case." ²³He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs. ²⁴Several days later Felix came with his wife, Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁵As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you." ²⁶At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him. ²⁷When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.

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But Felix and Paul spend a lot of time together, and it is quite a journey for Paul. If you think about this, he was the guy who used to try to stamp out the Way, and now he is like the main person who is championing the Way, and beat within an inch of his life *because* of the Way. So, he is on the front lines, sacrificing his life and being persecuted for the very way that, ironically, he was going to be the one trying to destroy before his conversion.

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Exactly; I did think what you just noted there, Darrell, is interesting. So again, we noted in the first part of this program, Paul gives five full speeches in the final chapters of Acts, and they are all kind of the same speech; and yet, every time, Luke repeats it. And yet, here we have two whole years, and we don't get a clue as to what they talked about. You do wonder, right? Did the seeds that Paul planted in Felix's heart...did they ever sprout...did they bloom? We don't know, but that certainly was a long time to spend there with Felix; but again, it just gives him the opportunity of a lifetime to proclaim the gospel to no less than the leaders of the empire; and I think that is amazing; but let's now move on the Acts 25.

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⁶After spending eight or ten days with them, Festus went down to Caesarea. The next day he convened the court and ordered that Paul be brought before him. ⁷When Paul came in, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him. They brought many serious charges against him, but they could not prove them. ⁸Then Paul made his defense: "I have done nothing wrong against the Jewish law or against the temple or against Caesar." ⁹Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?" ¹⁰Paul answered: "I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. ¹¹If,

however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!" ¹² After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: "You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!"

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Exactly; and they all know he is innocent, but nobody has the courage to let him go. They just don't want to stir up trouble; and so, Felix knew it; Festus knew it; and coming up in just a minute, we are going to see that King Agrippa knew it, but nobody set him free; and now that he has appealed to Caesar, they actually cannot set him free. They have to grant his request to bring him to Rome. But anyway, we can move on, Darrell, maybe into Acts 26.

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So again, for Paul all these legal procedures...all these, you know, de facto trials...for Paul, they have just become virtual pulpits, right? He just proclaims the gospel; and again, the key leaders, and Agrippa, particularly in this case, who was the king, they are all kind of intrigued with the gospel, but they also can see clear as day that Paul hasn't done anything wrong. Yes, he has ticked off his fellow Jews because they don't want him talking that Jesus was the Messiah; but, you know, a dispute over theological doctrine isn't something that the governor really wants to get involved with, and just because you have a doctrinal dispute, doesn't mean you should be put to death. But there it is; that is the dynamic here. I do like, you know, when King Agrippa says: Well, you think you can make me a Christian that fast? And Paul says: I would love it if that happened! I would love it if you became a Christian and every single person in this room. I mean, Paul just could not be stopped. He is just so enthusiastic for Jesus.

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DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it is really powerful; and when he speaks to Felix* it feels like Felix* is paying attention and closely listening, and they have these talks for a couple of years; and he gets to Agrippa and it seems that he is even closer to receiving the truth of the message that Paul is giving in the gospel, but no one is actually converting to the faith in these; and no one is actually setting him free. So, Paul has no choice but to expedite this prolonged legal battle. He appeals to Caesar, so we will see what happens when it comes up next, in the next part of this segment...or the next part of this episode...with the closing chapters of Acts; so stay tuned.

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Segment 3

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SCOTT HOEZEE

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DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

And Darrell, we have no space in what is left of this program to read all of Acts 27 and Acts 28, but we urge you all to do that. You know, Luke, Darrell, as we know, is a great storyteller; and his account of the harrowing sea journey that ultimately resulted in a shipwreck on the shores of the island of Malta is just gripping stuff. It is just a great story. So, we cannot read the whole thing here, but for our listeners we would say read it, because it is just a cracking good story.

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DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; Luke is an historian, and even though he wasn't like physically with them in that situation, he gathered all the facts and gave us the most detailed story that he could; and so, we want to talk a little bit about what happens. We are going to give you a brief overview of it: Paul takes first one ship and then another; and then they end up traveling during the winter season, where it gets really dangerous; but we can listen to a little bit of this in Acts 27.

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Yes; Luke is an historian, and even though he wasn't like physically with them in that situation, he gathered all the facts and gave us the most detailed story that he could; and so, we want to talk a little bit about what happens. We are going to give you a brief overview of it: Paul takes first one ship and then another; and then they end up traveling during the winter season, where it gets really dangerous; but we can listen to a little bit of this in Acts 27.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁹Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Day of Atonement (so, winter). So Paul warned them, ¹⁰“Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to the ship and cargo, and to our own lives also.” ¹¹But the centurion instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and the owner of the ship. ¹²Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbor in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest. ¹³When a gentle south wind began to blow, they saw their opportunity; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. ¹⁴Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the Northeaster, swept down from the island. ¹⁵The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along.

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DARRELL DELANEY

So, you have this storm that they are caught in, and that sounds like a really bad situation. I mean, it really is, but it gets worse from there. In the midst of all this, the ship will begin to run aground and be taken apart by the sea. As we pick up in verse 33, it says: Just before dawn Paul encouraged them all to eat. “For the last fourteen days,” he said, “you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food—you haven't eaten anything. ³⁴Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.” ³⁵After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. ³⁶They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

So, Darrell, there is really no missing the symbolism here, and Luke knew exactly what he was doing in framing this part of the story the way he did, because, Darrell, in the New Testament whenever bread is involved, we know that, in this case, Paul said to take, to give thanks, to break, to give. That is the Lord's Supper. That is, in essence, a sacramental meal taken by all who were onboard the ship. Whether they knew

Jesus was in the midst of them or not, he was. It was a life-giving meal just before the ship is utterly destroyed and everybody onboard either had to swim ashore or float ashore on pieces of the wreckage; but Darrell, what a great reminder...a remarkable reminder, really...of the presence of Christ in all the moments of our lives, including most especially some of the most difficult moments of our lives, Jesus is there.

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DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; I was just going to pick up on that. Whether your storm is physical or whether your storm is metaphorical, you still have the presence of Christ in the midst with you. So, it is very encouraging to see that Paul, in the midst of this storm, is able to give thanks, honor God, and have this sacramental meal. It is something that we can do in the middle of our challenges and our problems; and allow us to focus on the one who is in complete control of every situation, being Jesus.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; it is funny because Paul is technically the prisoner here, right? Paul is not in charge of anything here, the captain is...the pilot is...the centurion is. Paul is not in charge of anything, and yet, he takes charge of everything, and he becomes the center of the story: taking care of the sailors, taking care of everybody on the boat. Well, they do shipwreck—they founder—the waves literally take the boat apart; and so, they stay for the balance of the winter on the island of Malta, where the shipwreck took place; and then after three months on Malta, Paul at long last sets sail for Rome, and he arrives there. Then we are going to arrive in Acts 28.

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DARRELL DELANEY

It says: They replied, "We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of our people who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. ²²But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect." ²³They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. He witnessed to them from morning till evening explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the

Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus. ²⁴Some were convinced by what he said but others would not believe.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, we are getting very close to the end, and you know, it would be easy to go past this, Darrell, but isn't it amazing, not so many years since the Day of Pentecost, where it was just that small band of disciples in Jerusalem, and now here we are some years later, and these people can say, and be accurate: People everywhere are talking about this sect! In other words, the Church. They are talking about the people of the Way...Jesus' people. So, isn't that amazing how the Holy Spirit has grown the Church so much in just those years since Pentecost, that it can literally be said: People everywhere are aware of this Jesus person. They don't all like him; they don't all believe him; but wow; what a testimony to the spread of the gospel.

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DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, it goes right back to Jesus' commissioning, when he says: Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to obey everything I command you; and then he said in Acts Chapter 1: ^{8b}You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. This is proof that the gospel is going to the known ends of the earth, and many people are responding to it, whether positively or negatively, they know about it and they are acknowledging it in different ways.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, exactly; and now, we get to the last two verses of Acts, the whole book at Chapter 28: ³⁰For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. ³¹He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!

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The end. That is a lovely vignette, but you know, a while back when we did a series on Acts here on *Groundwork*, we said: You know, you turn the page because you think there has got to be an Acts Chapter 29. I mean, what happened next? Did he ever get to talk to Caesar? Was he ever released from captivity? Did he ever make it clear over to Spain, as we knew Paul wanted to do? Or was it shortly after those two years in Rome that one day they hauled Paul out of town and lopped off his head, as tradition said happened to Paul? We don't know. Luke doesn't tell us; he just ends it.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

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DARRELL DELANEY

You don't get the end; you don't get an epilogue; and I think that the reason why could be because Luke wanted us to be part of the next part of this iteration of the continuing works of Jesus through the power of his Spirit. So, Jesus prayed in John 17 for the believers who would come to believe thanks to the apostles' message; and that includes Paul, that includes us; and so, maybe Luke is including us in the next chapter, if there is a next chapter.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; don't worry about what happened to Paul, dear reader; what are you doing? I mean, the story continues through you. So, I think you are exactly right. When a book ends kind of open-endedly like that, it shines a spotlight on the reader. It is a daunting challenge for us to follow Christ, to proclaim him in word and deed every day, but as we saw in these stories and throughout the missionary journeys, God is with us all the way. Thanks and praise be to him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; don't worry about what happened to Paul, dear reader; what are you doing? I mean, the story continues through you. So, I think you are exactly right. When a book ends kind of open-endedly like that, it shines a spotlight on the reader. It is a daunting challenge for us to follow Christ, to proclaim him in word and deed every day, but as we saw in these stories and throughout the missionary journeys, God is with us all the way. Thanks and praise be to him.

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Printed on June 17, 2026