

# 7. Paul's Arrest and Trials

## I. Jerusalem

### A. James's Concern

Paul arrived in Jerusalem after an absence of c. 5 years. James and the elders glorified God at Paul's report about his ministry among the Gentiles. But they had a major concern: there were thousands of Jewish believers, all zealous for Torah; they had been told that Paul was teaching the Jews of the Diaspora not to keep Torah. Solution: pay the expenses for four men who had taken a Nazirite vow, and purify himself along with them. Paul did so, perhaps using funds from the collection; they purified themselves and announced when they would return to the Temple to complete the process (7 days).

Chronology	
Arrest in Jerusalem	AD 57
Detention in Caesarea	57-59
Journey to Rome	Fall 59
Detention in Rome	60-62
Arrest under Nero	64/65
Detention in Mamertine	65-68?
Death in Rome	66-68?

Witherington, *New Testament History*

### B. Riot by the Jews

Men from Asia saw Paul in the inner courts of the temple, and assumed that he had brought Trophimus, an Ephesian Gentile, with him beyond the Court of the Gentiles.

Temple Courtyard: Court of the Gentiles > Court of the Women > Court of Israel > Court of the Priests.

Gentiles were allowed into the outer court of the temple, the Court of the Gentiles. They were kept from going further by a low wall (Heb סֹרֶג *sôreg*, Gk δρυφακτος, 5 ft, 1.5 m high), beyond which 14 steps led up to the platform (הֵל *hel*) which was holy space. At each entrance around this wall tablets in Greek and Latin warned Gentiles to proceed no further: "No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death." Rome allowed the Jewish authorities to kill anyone who broke this prohibition, even if a Roman citizen. Two copies of this Soreg inscription have been discovered: an intact one (disc. 1871, in Istanbul's Archaeological Museum), a partial one (disc. 1936, in the Israel Museum).

The Asian Jews stirred up a mob, which laid hold of Paul, dragging him out of the temple. "Immediately the gates were shut" (Acts 21:30); in Luke's eyes this is the end of the temple.

### C. Intervention by the Romans

Over the north-west corner of the temple loomed the Antonia Fortress, built by Herod the Great. A cohort (600) of Roman troops was stationed here to maintain order. Paul was saved from lynching by the intervention of the military tribune (χιλίαρχος) in charge of the cohort, Claudius Lysias, probably a Greek who had bought his Roman citizenship during the reign of Claudius. The tribune tried to find out why the Jews were trying to lynch Paul.

The tribune assumed that Paul was "the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the desert" (21:38). In 54, a self-proclaimed Jewish prophet came from Egypt to Jerusalem and led followers out to the Mount of Olives, promising that at his command the city walls would fall and they could enter and kill the Romans. The terrorists (σικαριοι *sicarii*) were assassins who killed Roman collaborators with a dagger (*sicarius*) in crowds. Felix defeated the uprising and the Egyptian fled. The tribune was astonished when Paul addressed him in Greek.

**D. Defense before the mob**

After receiving permission from the tribune, Paul addressed the mob in Aramaic, urging them to listen to his defense (ἀπολογία). Paul told the story of his conversion, which Luke has already narrated (9:1-19). The crowd listened until Paul said that God had sent him to the Gentiles.

**E. Interrogation by scourging**

The tribune again apprehended Paul, ordering him to be taken inside the Fortress to be interrogated by scourging. The scourge (Lat *flagellum*, Gk μάστιξ) was a set of leather thongs, embedded with sharp metal and bone shards, attached to a wooden handle. Roman citizens were legally exempt from the *flagellum*. The tribune was alarmed to find he had bound and nearly scourged a Roman citizen who was his superior.

**F. Defense before the Sanhedrin**

Still trying to find out why the Jews were so upset with Paul, the tribune arranged for Paul to appear before the Sanhedrin. Taking advantage of the rivalry between Pharisees and Sadducees, Paul pitted them against each other over the issue of resurrection. The tribune again had to rescue Paul.

**G. Sent to Caesarea**

Paul's nephew warned Paul and then the tribune of a plot against Paul's life. The tribune sent Paul to Caesarea under heavy protection (2 centurions, 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen). At Antipatris (35 miles from Jerusalem, 27 from Caesarea), the soldiers turned back, while the cavalry escorted Paul to Caesarea. They took with them a letter from the tribune to the governor, explaining that Paul was a Roman citizen and seemed without guilt under Roman law.

**II. Caesarea**

Caesarea was the seat of the governor (AD 6-41 prefect, AD 44-66 procurator) of the Roman province of Judea, who was under the authority of the imperial legate of Syria.

**A. Felix**

Antonius Felix, procurator AD 52-59, was a freedman of emperor Claudius' mother Antonia. He owed his position to his brother Pallas, also a freedman of Antonia, who had great influence at Claudius' court. Felix "exercised the power of a king with the mind of a slave" (Tacitus, *Histories* 5.9). His third wife was Drusilla, a Jewess, the youngest daughter of Agrippa I. In 59 Felix was recalled, due to his heavy-handed response to Jewish-Gentile strife in Caesarea.

**B. Festus**

Porcius Festus (60-62) was a much better governor than Felix. He died in office. The newly-arrived Festus, on a familiarization trip to Jerusalem, refused the Jewish leaders' request to bring Paul to Jerusalem, instead summoning them to Caesarea. After a brief hearing in Caesarea, Festus wanted to take Paul to Jerusalem in order to earn favor with the Jews. It was in order to avoid this fate that Paul appealed to Caesar, who was Nero (r. 54-68). Herod Agrippa II, son of Herod Agrippa I, ruled parts of Galilee and Perea from Caesarea Philippi. His

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sister and consort Bernice was later mistress of Titus who became emperor. His youngest sister Drusilla was married to Felix. When Agrippa came to Caesarea to pay his respects to the new governor, he showed an interest in Paul. Festus arranged a hearing. He needed to send a letter to Caesar, specifying the charges against Paul, and hoped Agrippa could help him understand the issue.

At his hearing before Agrippa, Paul again told the story of his conversion, the third telling in Acts.

### C. Sent to Rome

Paul was sent to Rome under the guard of the centurion Julius. Accompanying him were Aristarchus of Thessalonica and Luke, who had presumably spent the previous two years in Caesarea and Jerusalem researching.

## III. Rome

### A. First imprisonment

For two years Paul was under house arrest in his own rented home, under the watch of the praetorian guard. Paul was held pending the arrival of his accusers from Jerusalem, or of written charges against him. If his accusers failed to appear, he would have been automatically released. The whole imperial guard became acquainted with Paul (Phil 1:13).

Aristarchus was also in custody, and Epaphras joined them. With them were Luke, Mark and Demas.

### B. The Prison Epistles

Paul wrote four Captivity Epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon; the last three are from Paul and Timothy. Some scholars argue that Paul wrote these letters while imprisoned in Ephesus or in Caesarea Maritima (57-59). There is no evidence of an Ephesian imprisonment. The majority opinion is that they were written while Paul was under house arrest in Rome (60-62) pending his trial before Caesar.

#### 1. Colossians & Philemon

Epaphras of Colosse had heard Paul in Ephesus, and returned to start three churches in the Lycus Valley: Colosse, Laodicea, Hierapolis; he was now Paul's fellow prisoner. The Colosse church met in the home of Philemon. Philemon's slave Onesimus had run away to Rome where he had met Paul and come to faith. Paul was sending him back with Tychicus the letter-carrier, urging Philemon to receive him as a brother. Paul had never visited these churches, but hoped to do so on release (Philemon 22).

#### 2. Philippians

Founded by Paul on his second journey. Epaphroditus had brought gifts from the Philippian church to Paul, who was now sending him back with a letter. Though the Philippian church brought Paul much joy, all was not well: two women, Euodia and Syntyche, had fallen out,

#### 3. Ephesians

Probably not written to Ephesus ("in Ephesus" 1:1 is missing from the earliest manuscripts); either a circular letter to the churches of Asia, or the otherwise-unknown letter to Laodicea (Col 4:16). It is not an occasional letter, but does share much in common with Colossians, which is an occasional letter.

Tychicus is the letter-carrier.

**C. Nero**

r. 54-68.

Mother: Agrippina (sister of Caligula, r. 37-41) poisoned her second husband and married her uncle Claudius (r. 41-54) who had executed his third wife; he adopted Nero. She schemed to elevate Nero and probably poisoned Claudius; Nero became emperor. Agrippina tried to control him, but he relied on his tutor Seneca and the Praetorian Prefect Burrus who had a benign influence on him. In 59 he had Agrippina killed; by this time Nero had severed ties with Burrus and Seneca. He descended into madness and paranoia.

64: Great Fire of Rome; widespread rumors that Nero started it to clear way for new building. He blamed Christians as a scapegoat and killed many. In 68 the Senate declared him a public enemy; he committed suicide.

**D. Second imprisonment**

Paul was probably arrested during the persecution following the fire. He was imprisoned in the Mamertine, under much harsher conditions, and was executed sometime late in Nero's reign.

**E. The Pastoral Epistles****1. 1 Timothy**

Written by Paul at freedom, perhaps in Macedonia (62-64).

Addressed to: Timothy in Ephesus. Timothy, son of a Greek father and Jewish mother in Lystra, was converted during Paul's visit to that city on his first journey. He joined Paul and Silas on their second journey, and accompanied Paul to Jerusalem with the collection at the end of the third journey. He co-authored six letters with Paul (1 Thess, 2 Thess, 2 Cor, Philem, Col, Phil) and delivered 1 Cor. Paul considered him a spiritual son (1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2). He endured at least one imprisonment (Heb 13:23).

**2. Titus**

Written by Paul at freedom (62-64), while on his way to spend the winter at Nicopolis (3:12).

Addressed to: Titus in Crete. Titus, a Gentile, had been one of Paul's co-workers for 15 years: accompanying him on his second visit to Jerusalem (AD 49, Gal 2:1), delivering his third letter to the Corinthian church (AD 55, 2 Cor 7), returning to Corinth to supervise the collection for Jerusalem (2 Cor 8). After his release from house arrest in Rome, Paul must have taken Titus with him to Crete, where he left Titus to finish organizing the church (Tit 1:3). Paul wanted Titus to spend the winter with him in Nicopolis (3:13); presumably he did so, later continuing into Dalmatia (2 Tim 4:10). Paul considered Titus a spiritual son (Tit 1:4).

**3. 2 Timothy**

Historical setting: Paul is imprisoned again in Rome (c. 65), a more restricted custody in the Mamertine prison. His first hearing had gone favorably (4:16-17).

Addressed to: Timothy, presumably still in Ephesus. Paul asks him to come to Rome, bringing Mark with him, so they and Luke can be with him during his final days.

Greetings to: Priscilla and Aquila (returned to Ephesus from Rome), the household of Onesiphorus (who had sought out Paul in Rome).

Greetings from: Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, Claudia, all the believers in Rome.

News of: Some former co-workers have abandoned Paul: Phygelus, Hermogenes and others in Asia;

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Demas abandoned Paul in Rome and went to Thessalonica; Alexander. Others have remained faithful though scattered: Crescens went to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia, Tychicus to Ephesus, Erastus stayed in Corinth, Trophimus sick in Miletus. Luke is still with Paul.