

CHAPTER FOUR

The Church of the Messiah Goes Worldwide

There was no great difficulty in travelling across the countries of the Roman empire at the time. The *Pax Romana* meant that there was “*peace on land and sea, the cities prosper by good laws, unity and welfare,*” although there were always the local exceptions where bandits, runaway slaves, or marauding guerrillas, would attack travellers. The Greek language was used everywhere, even more than the Latin of the Romans, and Saul and Barnabas spoke both fluently, as well as the Hebrew and Aramaic used by Jews everywhere. There was also the universal currency, the *denarius*, which had the same value everywhere. Finally, Saul had the inestimable privilege of Roman citizenship which gave him the advantage of being subject to Roman justice over the unpredictable local customs and laws.

On the excellent Roman highways threading their way across the empire there was regular passage of official four-wheeled vehicles, private chariots, horses and mules. The imperial regular post travelled at over twenty miles a day, and special imperial couriers twice as fast. Sea travel was limited in the Mediterranean region from March to November, in order to escape the wind and tide hazards of sailing in the winter months. There were no passenger ships as such, for all shipping carried freight; but there was always room for passengers in the many sailing vessels plying between the busy Mediterranean ports. It took about twenty-five days to travel

from Alexandria to Puteoli in Italy, the disembarking port for Rome; but it took about double that time on the return journey because of the prevailing winds and other maritime conditions.

It was the spring of A.D.45, and they had to wait around the great harbour of Seleucia, with its massive piers almost a half-mile in length encircling the fifty-acre anchorage, until they could find a ship to take them to Cyprus. Travelling so early in the year meant that the hundred-mile journey was subject to the last of the winter storms, and they had a rough voyage. They were glad to disembark finally at Salamis, with its dominant Temple to Jupiter in the circle of enclosing hills.

Cyprus, next to Crete the largest of the Greek islands, was heavily inhabited and very productive in corn and wine, as well as being rich in minerals. The island had been invaded many times over the centuries, it had been strongly Hellenized by the Greeks since the time of Alexander, had been a base for the wide-ranging maritime nation of Phoenician traders, and by the Romans in B.C.58, and recently it had been colonized by a large number of Jews. Its beautiful location had been described as *"an exquisite emerald in a setting of sapphire and silver."*

Augustus Caesar had given the copper mines of Cyprus as a gift to Herod the Great, in exchange for half their proceeds, and many Jews had gone there to work in the mines, as well as being administrators and merchants. The Romans had made it a province, with a pro-consular administrator, who at that time was Sergius Paulus, a member of a patrician Roman family with a long history of public service, whose headquarters were further along the southern coast, at Paphos.

After they had preached in the synagogues of Salamis, with no great signs of interest, Paul and Barnabas left for Paphos. On the way they stayed over where there were communities of Jews, in Citium, the birth-place of Zeno the Stoic, and in Amanthus, one of the shrines of *Venus* or *Aphrodite*, the presiding goddess of Cyprus, celebrated by Homer in the lines:

*"Idalian Aphrodite, beautiful,
Fresh as the foam, now bathed in Paphian wells."*

Aphrodite's Bay at Paphos lay in a sweep of blue sun-shimmering water, ringed by mighty rocks, and it was from these lovely waters that she was supposed to have been born "*floated in her pearly shell, a laughing girl.*" Yet in the Temple of Aphrodite in Paphos, where no blood was offered but where incense from a hundred altars ascended in worship, the image in the adytum was no exquisite statue, but a rough, truncated cone of white marble resembling the phallic symbols of the pagan Phoenicians and Assyrians. Here, emperors and kings had come to worship at the shrine; and, as her temples also had the right of asylum, there were gathered crowds of amnesty-claiming criminals of all kinds.

The Temple of Aphrodite was located in "Old Paphos", but, following an earthquake, Caesar Augustus had donated money and subsidies to build and maintain a new city, known as "New Paphos", several miles to the north-west of the temple. It was at New Paphos the Roman Procurator, Sergius Paulus, had his provincial seat. He had a reputation for being "*a wise, clever and discerning man*", with knowledge of science and philosophy beyond his peers, and with an interest in religion. His wide interests had led him into studies of astronomy and astrology and, through them, to cultivate the company of numerologists, sorcerers and magicians. He had in his court a notorious Jewish magician, Bar-Jesus, who—because he did not wish to draw attention to his Jewish origin and arcane practices—was also known as *Elymas*, the Sorcerer. It was a common practice among Roman officials to have a resident clairvoyant of some kind, and there was also at Paphos a famous Jewish renegade school of sorcery claiming descent from Moses, Jamnes and Jambres.

Saul and Barnabas made no issue of the blatant pagan worship in Paphos, restricting their preaching and teaching of the Christian gospel to the synagogues, or to the open streets like the Stoic teachers. The Stoic teachings were widely known through the writings and oratory of Seneca, the philosopher and historian; and some of the things he said were similar to what Saul was preaching, so there was genuine public interest in what Saul had to say. Saul pointed out that the god of Seneca and the Stoics was only an unknown force, derived from inflexible natural causes and effects,

leaving man to struggle through life in his own strength. Seneca's god did not hear, let alone answer, prayer, and was unable to deliver men and women from their guilt and bondage recognized in their daily "self-examination."

When Sergius Paulus heard of the public debates between Saul and Barnabas and the Stoics, and was mystified at the garbled reports brought to him of the teachings of the Jesus believers, he sent to them and invited them to bring their message to the Roman court. When Saul and Barnabas arrived at the proconsul's residence they found the noted sorcerer Elymas prominently in attendance. They had heard about him and his malign influence, and Paul knew that the renegade Jew would be a bitter opponent of all that he had to say. Paul suspected that he was an elitist gnostic disciple of Philo and Pythagoras from the fact that he had chosen the professional name of *Elymas*, an Arabian word meaning "wise", or "learned."

Saul was accustomed to hecklers of all kinds, so he had no fears about the opposition from *Elymas*, but the meeting with the Roman proconsul was too important to be side-tracked into a debate about magical hocus-pocus. He suspected that Sergius Paulus was possibly searching for the truth, and was genuinely interested in the intellectual and spiritual challenge presented by them in his city. So Saul sought special help in prayer from the Holy Spirit as he and Barnabas laid before the Roman proconsul the essential truths of the gospel of the kingdom of God.

Then, without warning, he shattered the courteous silence of the listening court by addressing *Elymas* the Sorcerer scornfully:

"You son of the devil and enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun."

The stunned *Elymas* shook his head as if to clear a mist from his eyes; then, in panic, he rubbed them with his hands and called out to those near him for help, for he could not see. When the uproar had subsided, and the blind *Elymas* had been led away, Saul explained to Sergius Paulus the significance of his action. If *Elymas*

was, as rumour had it, of the sorcery school claiming descent from the magicians Jamnes and Jambres who had withstood Moses before Pharaoh of Egypt, then he, Saul, had concluded that he could treat *Elymas* with the same contempt as Moses had done the magicians of his time. These people were always performing some new occult diversion, but never arriving at any concept of the truth, for they were incapable of understanding it when they saw it. It was all dangerous game-playing with arcane phenomena, without knowledge of the underlying divine or demonic principles. The patrician and intelligent Roman Proconsul was impressed by the teaching of Saul and, after some further discussion, he became a convinced believer in Jesus as the true Messiah.

Following on the meeting with Sergius Paulus, Saul and Barnabas had a long conversation, with John Mark an interested listener. Barnabas had noted a difference of approach by Paul when addressing the Roman proconsul. Previously, it had been Saul's custom, when introducing himself, to say, "*I am Saul, a Jew from Tarsus*" but, to Sergius Paulus, he had said, "*I am Paul, a citizen of Tarsus*", indicating his Roman authority and name. Barnabas, knowing Paul, knew that it was neither inferiority nor pride behind the change, and he was interested to know Paul's reason.

Paul described to Barnabas how he had been acutely conscious of the Holy Spirit in the encounter, and how he had been praying for special guidance - as Jesus had promised would be given to those who had to speak before governors and kings. His introductory remarks had come to him in that way; but, on reflection, he discerned the purpose of God to have been for him to stress the difference between his personal choice of Jehovah as a free-born citizen of Tarsus, and not just the traditional religious inheritance of the Jew. Also, more importantly, he had a sudden insight into the future possibilities of presenting the gospel to Roman officials elsewhere, and, ultimately, in Rome itself. So, from now on he would be "*Paul of Tarsus*."

Paul went on to describe to Barnabas how he had become increasingly conscious of the passage of time. He was now forty-four years of age, with a vision to establish the worldwide Church of the

Messiah in his lifetime. That left him - given the expected seventy years of life - some twenty to thirty years in which to accomplish this considerable task. He had no clear idea how this could be done, but, if it was to be done at all, it would have to be accomplished by God. As David had said, when fleeing from Saul, yet knowing he was to be king of Israel: *"God fulfils his purpose for me."*

Barnabas and John Mark were unhappy with such extremism, although willing to be guided by Paul as they had no better alternative to offer. It just seemed enough to visit any communities where there were Jews and "God-fearers" willing to receive and listen to them, and to let God do the rest. To preach the gospel worldwide in one's lifetime was difficult enough; but to seek to establish a worldwide kingdom of God, a perfect Church of the Messiah committed to perfecting all men and women everywhere such as Paul envisaged, just did not seem possible to them. That was not a realistic vision; it was an impossible dream.

John Mark argued that neither Jesus nor his disciples had ever talked of such a possibility as Paul described. It meant no less than a group of totally devoted believers sharing the same Pauline vision in every village, every town, every city, every region, every nation, all working to the same end of making all their neighbours into perfect people approved of God in their lifetime. If the greatest empire the world had known at that time, the Romans, had not been able to make even a part of the world into good citizens, how could a handful of Jewish disciples produce a world of perfect people?

Paul just shook his head impatiently, and then dropped the subject. John Mark was too young, still more intellectually curious than spiritually visionary, and so not equipped to conceive let alone appreciate such a cosmic vision. Barnabas had the spirit, the intelligence and the commitment, but his temperament was that of the builder, not the explorer. And such a world-conquering task needed explorers—Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel; or Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Alexander, Julius Caesar. These were men who saw kingdoms where none existed—and set out to build them; some with God, and some without God. Paul of Tarsus had been given the task of building the greatest kingdom of all, the worldwide Church of the Messiah.

This first missionary journey took Paul and Barnabas—John Mark left them after Perga—from Antioch and Cyprus to Paphos, Perga, Pisidium Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe; and then they visited the churches established in these places on a return journey to Antioch after two years of travel.

Two years later, in AD 50, Paul left Antioch on his secondary missionary journey, this time with Silas instead of Barnabas. They visited the churches which Paul and Barnabas had established earlier as far as Derbe, and there they recruited a devout son of a Jewish family, called Timothy, to join them as a learning companion. After visiting Iconium and Lystra they travelled on to Troas and crossed the Aegean Sea to Neapolis, half-way to Paul's ultimate goal of Rome. From Neapolis they visited Philippi, Thessalonika and Berea, preaching and establishing groups of Jesus converts into churches of the Messiah. The reception they received varied from enthusiasm to imprisonment, beatings and even threatened death.

Because Paul was the chief target of the anti-Jesus Jews he went on alone from Berea to Athens, the cultural capital of Greece. There he engaged the leading philosophers of the time regarding their "*unknown God*", comparing this ignorance with his own personal experience of a living God, but with little success. Athens was doomed to die of its own incurable intellectual disease—hubris. To the Athenians God was simply man on a divine scale. So Paul left for Corinth, five hours to the north by ship from Athens, to Cenchræa the port of the land-channel leading to its twin harbour, Lechaëum, across the isthmus.

Corinth, the then capital of Southern Greece, was situated eight miles away along the valley of Hexamili, and Paul made his way there on foot. The old Greek city had been destroyed by the Romans two hundred years before, its inhabitants massacred and its many treasures plundered and carried away to Rome. A hundred years later, Julius Caesar ordered the city to be rebuilt from its foundations, in honour of the goddess for whose worship it had been famous. Since that time it had grown in fame and wealth.

Towering two thousand feet above the sea the Temple of *Venus*

Paudemus, served by a thousand priestess courtesans, dominated the Acropolis on the Acrocorinth, garrisoned by four hundred soldiers and fifty dogs. In the city below merchant Jews, Phoenician traders, Greeks attracted by the famous Isthmian Games held every three years, retired and active Roman soldiers, gladiators and athletes and charioteers of every description, and sailors of every nationality, made up a heterogeneous population of some three hundred thousand citizens—and almost five hundred thousand slaves. Magnificent buildings of marble and porphyry, adorned with gold and silver ornamentation, towered over wretched ghettos of wood and straw housing the poor. In the market-place were rich Babylonian carpets and tapestries, Phoenician fruits, Libyan ivory, Egyptian papyri, Arabian balsam, Cilician goats'-hair, and Phrygian slaves.

Paul entered Corinth a sick, tired, lonely, preacher-artisan. The road from Lechaem on the west led straight into the central market-place of Corinth, through the great marble arch of Prophylaeum. Beyond, the colonnaded street stretched past the busy shops to the Temple of Apollo. The "*Temple of the Hebrews*" was beside the Prophylaeum, its name boldly inscribed in Greek letters on the lintel. The house next door belonged to a Roman citizen called Gaius Titius Justus, a "*God-fearer*", who, on being informed of Paul's arrival, promptly offered him lodgings.

After a few days to recover his health Paul asked Justus about possibilities of work at his trade of tent-maker, and Justus told him of two wealthy Jews who had arrived in the city from Rome where they had been expelled in the recent anti-Jewish crisis. Their names were Aquila and his wife Priscilla, and they had a prosperous tent-making business, with branches in several cities throughout the empire.

Paul was thrilled to meet with them, not only because of their mutual tent-making interests but also because they were both devout Jesus believers who, in their business travels, knew what was happening spiritually in many places in the Mediterranean region. They informed him that there had been a large Jewish community in Rome of about ten thousand, and their leaders had been influential

enough to persuade Claudius Caesar to allow them to remain, and to banish the “trouble-making” Christians instead. But because of the confusion surrounding the true meaning of the term “*Christos*” used to describe Jesus as Messiah believers many still remained in Rome. And, because they had been accustomed to leaving Rome in their business enterprise, Aquila and Priscilla had not been hindered.

Paul was delighted to be with them for both had a wide knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures and a devout commitment to Jesus as Messiah. They invited Paul to move in with them and it was physical and spiritual refreshment for Paul after the turmoil of the past months. His happiness was complete a few months later when Silas and Timothy arrived in Corinth to join him. They brought exciting news of the great spread of the gospel among the multiplying churches of Macedonia; and they also brought with them gifts for Paul which permitted him to stop his manual work and devote himself to full-time teaching.

Paul, Silas, Timothy, Aquila and Priscilla now formed a formidable core of Messianic witness in the city. Erastus, the city treasurer, and Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, became believers in Jesus, as well as the Roman “God-fearer”, Gaius Titius Justus, whom Paul had met on his first arrival in the city. These were baptized by Paul, together with another influential believer, Stephanus, and the Roman legionaries Quartus and Tertius, and the freedmen, Achaicus and Fortunatus.

Then there were the many influential women, such as the wealthy Chloe, who sent her slaves to carry letters from Paul to outlying places; Phoebe, the deaconess; Mary, Tryphena and Tryphosa, and Persis “the well-beloved”. And there were the poor and the sick, the slaves and the outcasts, too—“*fornicators, adulterers, perverts, homosexuals, thieves, extortioners, drunkards, revilers.*” Paul preached and taught and baptized tirelessly, until he decided to hand over the baptizing to Timothy and Silas. He had no desire to become a religiously authoritarian figure above the others. God was the God of the poor and despised as well as the rich and attractive.

Paul’s emphasis in Corinth was on the demonstrated power of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the efficacy of

this same power to transform and keep believers whatever the temptations and circumstances. He went right to the crux of contemporary Greek thinking by challenging their whole conception of the universe, their many deistic legends and hubristic assumptions of "*wisdom*". He taught that the "*foolishness*" of Jehovah, the Christian's God, in requiring that His Messiah-Son should die by crucifixion as a Jewish "*blasphemer*" and Roman "*criminal*", was only a mystery and unacceptable to those filled with pride and disobedience. To those who could accept this divine "*wisdom*" it was the revealed mystery of being made righteous with the righteousness of the risen Messiah. God had chosen the foolish to confound the wise; God had chosen the weak to confound the strong; God had chosen the invisible to confound the visible; God had chosen the despised to confound the mighty—in order that no human pride could boast in His Presence. This was the record of divine history: to transform imperfect creatures into perfect children of God through His grace and love.

The response in Corinth to this presentation was tremendous, especially among the poorer classes of Corinthian pagans, and it became necessary to establish a church of the Messiah separate from the synagogue. Paul had been cautious about any open breach with the synagogues, recalling what had happened so recently in other places, but he had a vision in which Jesus appeared to him and said: "*Do not be afraid to speak out, and do not keep silent, for I am with you. No man shall be able to attack you or harm you, and I have many followers in this city.*"

In his vision to Paul in Corinth Jesus also instructed him to give more importance to the bread-and-wine communion observance, and so Paul instructed the church to give the communion and baptism the central priorities in their spiritual commitment as a church. When the believers gathered together in any one place as a church group for worship, those who were rich usually bringing food for themselves should not neglect to share this with the poor in what was a "*love-feast*". This followed the practice of the Jewish Christians celebrating the annual Passover at the time appointed, and then following this with "*the Lord's Supper*." Paul now made the

observance of bread-and-wine communion a regular practice—“*as often as you can*” - with an associated practice of prior moral self-judgment to be observed by every individual who partook of the sacramental bread and wine.

This prior self-judgment, he made clear, was the personal responsibility of the individual and not the church—not even the elders of the church. The aim was a personal understanding and appreciation of participating in the act of identifying one’s self with the Messiah in his death, and one’s worthy acceptance by God into the Spiritual Body of believers. No other individual was to adjudge acceptable worthiness, or to provide absolution for sins committed. If unworthiness in any form were present when the individual partook of the bread and wine then the consequent judgment was administered by God: the individual was chastised by a divine visitation of sickness in some form, and even by death.

It was inevitable that Paul’s rising influence in the city should provoke the Judaisers into the similar reaction as elsewhere. They sent a delegation to the patrician Roman Governor of Corinth, Lucius Junius Annaeus Novatus Gallio. The Governor was the brother of Lucius Annaeus Seneca, the great Roman Stoic philosopher and tutor of Nero, who had dedicated two of his books to him.

Seneca had been in disgrace from A.D.41 until 49, when he was recalled from banishment and made praetor in A.D.50. His older brother, Gallio, had caught fever in Achaia at the time of his appointment, and after an extended sea voyage to recover his health he had only recently arrived in Corinth to become Governor. Claudius Caesar wrote to him as “*my friend Lucius Junius Gallio*”, and he was widely regarded as one of the most able men of his time. The Corinthian Judaisers hoped that if such an eminent Roman could be persuaded to condemn Paul and his teachings they could bring his spreading influence in the empire to a quick end.

Gallio had taken up his appointment in Corinth a year or so after Paul’s arrival there, so he knew little or nothing about him. The Judaisers’ formal complaint was that this Paul was persuading people to worship Jehovah, Israel’s God, contrary to the *Law of*

Moses. With this charge they hoped to have Paul cut off from Traditional Judaism and declared *religio illicita*. In Rome at that time one Furius Scribonianus had been sentenced to exile for having consulted magicians as to how much longer Claudius Caesar was likely to reign, and all soothsayers had been banished subsequently from Italy, so the threat to Paul was serious.

The official hearing against Paul took place at the *Bema*, or judgment-place, in the central square, with Gallio surrounded by his imperial retinue in military and civil splendour. He listened patiently to the Judaisers' charges for a while, in keeping with his well-known reputation as "*no mortal is so agreeable to any one person as this man is to everybody*." Then he abruptly dismissed them, informing Paul that there was no need to speak in his own defence. Gallio said dismissively,

"If you Jews were making a complaint to me about some misdemeanour or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you. But since it involves questions about words and names and your own Law—settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things."

Gallio knew from the reports from Rome and elsewhere that these Jewish religious quarrels could cause endless trouble unless dealt with quickly and firmly. Once he had established that there was no offence against the State or Caesar he made his judgment—there was no case against Paul or the Jewish Christians.

It was a popular decision and, to the shouted approbation of the crowds in the market-place, the new ruler of the synagogue, Sosthenes, who had replaced Crispus when he had left to join Paul and who had initiated the charges against Paul, was grabbed and beaten while Gallio watched indifferently and without interference.

From Corinth Paul wrote his two *Letters to the Thessalonians*, and *his Letter to the Colossians*, to correct various misrepresentations regarding the subject of the second coming of Jesus. These concerns had arisen because of the deteriorating political situation in the Roman empire, with imperial intrigues in Rome, famine in the eastern Mediterranean, and threats from "barbarians" beyond the imperial boundaries. These accumulating disasters seemed to

indicate to the Thessalonian Jesus believers that the prophecies of Jesus regarding the “*signs in heaven and earth*” preceding his return were about to take place. Paul’s *Letters* were directed to calm their fears and to observe the truths he had committed to them.

After some months in Corinth Paul sailed for Syria in company with the wealthy husband and wife, Aquila and Priscilla, who were using their wealth and business to visit churches of the Messiah in Asia Minor and teach from their extensive knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures. It was now early in the year A.D.52 and Paul wished to fulfil a vow he had taken because of the favourable judgment of Gallio, and this vow he wished to discharge in the Temple at the Feast of Passover in Jerusalem in April. The vow, the temporary vow of a Nazirite, involved letting his hair grow, and abstaining from all wine, and then having his hair shaved and observing the required purification rites at the Temple. However, a Jew of the Dispersion could have his hair shorn before then, so long as the hair itself was offered with the appropriate sacrifices in Jerusalem. There is no explanation given from Paul as to why he considered this Old Testament observance necessary.

It was an extra pleasure for Paul to have the company of Aquila and Priscilla as far as Ephesus, where they were to travel in connection with their business interests. In Ephesus, while the ship unloaded some cargo and loaded others, Paul had time to address the synagogue. The elders were so impressed that they urged him to return soon for a longer visit and he agreed to do so. Paul went straight to Caesarea on the ship, then on to Jerusalem, to observe his vow, then left immediately afterwards for Antioch to report his four years of momentous activities to the church.

Another earthquake had struck Antioch the previous year, following on one ten years before which had almost destroyed it, and which was only saved from ruin through the help of Caligula Caesar providing immediate financial help and ongoing subsidies. These catastrophes, together with a series of inexplicable major fires, caused many to wonder whether the gods were displeased with the citizens of Syrian Antioch for some reason. Even the Olympic Games, which Augustine Caesar had instituted in the city and

ordered to be held every four years with official financial support, had been cancelled due to financial malpractices. There was restlessness and discontent apparent everywhere, among all classes, at the deteriorating circumstances which seemed to be spiralling beyond everyone's control.

The worldwide chaos did not cause Paul any worry; if anything it encouraged him in his vision of expanding and implanting the kingdom of God in the hearts of men and women everywhere. He was aware only that more than half his life had gone, and that he was spending prodigally what life he had—which could only be justified by his profound belief that God would keep him alive until his work was accomplished. The recent sea voyage had been especially difficult and dangerous, with two very bad storms; the second of which had seen the vessel break up, and they had to take to the sea holding on to the wooden planks until they were picked up a day later by a passing ship.

When Paul had left Corinth for Jerusalem he left Silas behind to consolidate the spiritual work, as he had done in Berea when Paul left there. Luke and Titus were in Philippi, and Timothy had returned to his home in Lystra. Barnabas and John Mark were in Cyprus, Peter had gone to Babylon, and some of the other apostles had left for more distant places. All had taken to heart the final injunction of Jesus to carry the gospel to the far ends of the earth. Rabbinical Judaism was dying, but the *New Covenant* Jesus doctrine of the kingdom of God was dynamically alive.

In Paul's opinion the much reduced nation of Judea/Israel was finished, the people about to suffer one of their periodic catastrophes from God for their rejection of His divine provisions. They had rejected and killed the only two true prophets to visit them in over four hundred years - John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth—and they were careering downwards to spiritual and national disaster. Neither Temple priests nor arrogant rabbis could do anything but bewail the lost glories of the past. On his way to crucifixion Jesus had warned the weeping women that a worse fate was looming for them, and Paul could see the signs everywhere.

Claudius had sent yet another Procurator, Claudius Felix, to

Judea, and had conceded the former territory of Herod Philip to the young Herod Agrippa II. Agrippa had given his sister Drusilla in marriage to King Azizus of Emesa on condition that he was circumcised, to keep the favour of the Jewish leaders. His other sister, Mariamne, had a daughter, Berenice,—named after a third sister of Agrippa—notorious for an early marriage to her uncle and incestuous relations with her brother. Claudius Felix became infatuated with Drusilla, and their affair became the scandal of Jerusalem.

This, together with his ruthless campaign against the Jews, brought Claudius Felix into conflict with the high priest Jonathan. In the ensuing vendetta Claudius Felix conspired with a friend of Jonathan, called Doras, to hire a group of the terrorist Sicarii to enter the Temple ostensibly to worship, but when Jonathan appeared they killed him in the Temple Court. The Jews were enraged at this callous desecration. About the same time a Jew claiming to be the Messiah arrived from Egypt and called people to gather with him on the Mount of Olives, and he would demonstrate how the walls of Jerusalem would fall miraculously at his command and the Jewish people could take command of the city. When Claudius Felix heard of this he sent a troop of legionaries who slew four hundred people, and took two hundred captives, but the pseudo-prophet escaped in the confusion.

The Roman actions gave fresh impetus and public support for the Zealots and Sicarii revolutionary movements, in a vicious cycle of attacks and responses which exacerbated fanatical rage in ruling circles in both Rome and Jerusalem. In Rome, the new wife of Claudius Caesar, Agrippina, was emulating her debauched and sinister predecessor, Messalina, with a series of murders aimed at clearing the way for her son, Nero, to be the next Caesar. She had begun by spreading innuendoes of incest against the young man to whom Octavia, the daughter of Claudius, was betrothed, and by replacing him with Nero. She then accused her beautiful rival, Lollia Paulina, former wife of Gaius Caligula, of being in league with the devil and had her sent to exile and death. Other women followed and Agrippina even antagonized Claudius against his favourite son,

Britannicus, who was an epileptic, and had him promote Nero instead as his heir.

In A.D.52 Nero was married to Octavia, and he was regarded as the true heir of the Caesars. Seneca was rumoured to have predicted that Nero would become as savage a monster as Caligula, if not worse, and all Rome feared for the future. There were reports from Rome of superstitious dread signalling some great calamity. The standards and tents of the soldiers were enveloped in mysterious flames; a rain of blood had occurred in several places; the doors of the Temple of Jupiter had been swung open by unseen hands; a terrifying comet, followed by destructive pestilence, had occurred.

To Paul, all of this was just "*signs of the times*" foretold by Jesus and the prophets, the "*things which must shortly come to pass.*" The national, regional and international deterioration meant that his vision and task demanded even more commitment, more urgency. If the Roman empire collapsed into the terrible darkness of anarchy, and the Jewish people collapsed in internecine destruction, then it was imperative that the kingdom of God, the kingdom of light, should triumph over the encroaching Satanic kingdom of darkness. Some form of witness to the eternal Light and Truth of God must be established before the long-dark night of horror engulfed the world. He, Paul, had ever before him that goal of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ in Rome itself—to Caesar himself!—and seeing a dynamic centre of church witness in the capital of the empire. As Paul discussed his experiences with the elders of Antioch they concluded that what it required to fulfil the great cosmic commission was courageous messengers with a personal experience of their Lord, and a willingness to go anywhere in the world at His command, with the great message of salvation for all.

A few weeks later Timothy arrived in great distress to report to Paul and the Antioch elders that there was serious trouble in the churches of Galatia. After Paul had left in his recent visit some militant Judaizers had arrived and had insisted the Galatian churches keep the observances that were simply recommendation in "*the Jerusalem letter*". That is, they demanded circumcision, and keeping the ritual laws of Moses, in order to inherit the promises of

God. These Judaizers also attacked Paul personally, saying he was not an apostle in the full sense, and was subject to the other apostles and Jerusalem leaders.

Paul was furiously angry at these accusations and activities creating divisions in the Galatian churches. The elders of the Antioch church agreed that he should write a strong letter denouncing these Judaizers, and send this letter by the hand of Timothy. Meanwhile, he should prepare for another personal visit to follow on the letter.

Paul's *Letter to the Galatians*, he hoped, would put a stop once for all to the constant attempts at ritualizing by the rabbinical Judaizers. He emphatically condemned the Galatian churches for rejecting God's word, God's grace and God's Son to follow a barren, legalistic "gospel" – which was not in any way "good news", but a travesty of it. "Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!" May God's curse fall on all those who proclaimed such, he expostulated. He went even further in his wrath, denouncing circumcisers: "As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!"

But then Paul went on to present his elucidation of God's revealed "secret truth of the gospel" through him. How, although he and they were bond-slaves of Jesus the Messiah, yet at the same time they were recipients of God's redemptive freedom from an intolerable yoke of bondage to sin and Satan - freedom of life, freedom of thought, freedom of the individual from all external restrictions and regulations, freedom for all to work out their own salvation before God alone.

"You were called to freedom", Paul told them passionately; but freedom to do the right under the direction of God, not freedom to do anything or everything, right or wrong. It was a contingent freedom, not an absolute freedom. God's blessings were always contingent upon obedience as Jesus had declared: "If you keep my word . . . If you abide in me, and my words abide in you . . . If you are my disciples indeed you will know the truth and the truth will make you free."

The rabbinical *Traditions* were an unacceptable incubus imposed on God's chosen people in defiance of God's commands, as Jesus

himself had demonstrated in his face-to-face irrefutable confrontations with them. There was little difference between rabbinical Judaism's rituals and those of the heathen; no essential difference between observing the full moon in the synagogue on holy days, and pagans observing it in the Temple of Men; no significant difference between the circumcision of the Judaisers and the mutilations of the priests of Cybele. The superiority of the *Pentateuch*, *Psalms* and *Prophet* Scriptures derived from their being a divinely prophetic precursor of the good things to come—through the person and work of Jesus the Messiah.

With the *Letter to the Galatians* on its way in the hands of Timothy, Paul made preparations to leave on his own third missionary journey. This time he was travelling without any companions. God had not indicated anyone from Antioch and, as he was going to Ephesus, he hoped to meet up with some of his former companions there.

Again he travelled overland, through Tyana and Nazanzus and Parnassus to Ancyra in Galatia. From Ancyra he went through the regions of Galatia and Phrygia, systematically visiting the former churches and their offshoots, clearly and categorically presenting the issues he had covered in his *Letter to the Galatians*, delivered to them by Timothy. When he felt he had sufficiently recovered the churches in Galatia from the seductive depredations of the rabbinical troublemakers he left the mountains of Phrygia for the coastal city of Ephesus.

Ephesus lay one mile from the sea, at the mouth of the River Cayster which wound through green meadows carrying graceful swans and a profusion of wildfowl. The city was situated on the lower slopes of the hills, Coressus and Prion, which rose out of the fertile plain; but the famous Temple of Diana, or Artemis, was a mile outside the city on the north-eastern plain. It was the political capital of proconsular Asia, the greatest city of Asia Minor, and was called "*the light of Asia*". It lay at the confluence of the three great river basins of the region, Hermus, Cayster and Meander, and was also the meeting-point of great highways which led northwards to Sardis and Troas, southward to Antioch and Magnesia, and inland

to the whole continent. The harbour was always crowded with ships, its rivers and seas filled with fish, its market-places overflowing with produce from all places.

The dominating feature of the city was the “*Great Theatre*” in the centre, from which roads ran in all directions. The main road, known as the *Arcadiane*, led from the port to the Theatre, a magnificent wide, marble-paved thoroughfare lined by equally splendid buildings. Another street ran from the Theatre to the *Magnesian Gate*, lined with honorific statues on pedestals and passing a magnificent library. To the south-west of the Theatre was the *Hellenistic Agora*, a huge square surrounded by porticoes and public halls, and ornamented with many sculptures and statues in marble and bronze. To the north-west of the theatre was the *Roman Agora*, with open spaces, public buildings, and many sculptures and statues. The city had a long history of devotion to the mother-goddess figure. The original deity was a primitive nature virgin-goddess and was adapted to that of the later *Artemis/Diana*. The representation was a figure with many breasts, swathed below the waist in grave-clothes. It was believed that the city was twice saved through the intervention of the goddess, between 700-500 B.C.

Ephesus, and its neighbouring cities around the coast, had produced some of history’s greatest poets and song-writers, many orators and dramatists, and some philosophers. Heraclitus the philosopher had lived there, the war songs of Callinus and the poems of Homer were widely declaimed. In the Roman civil wars of the first century B.C. Ephesus had been unfortunate politically, twice supporting the unsuccessful party, first Brutus and Cassius, and later Mark Anthony. Despite the presence of a large Roman administration it was essentially a Greek city, with a popular assembly presided over by a *grammateus*, or town clerk. It was also famous for its *Panionic*, *Ephesian*, *Artemisian* and *Lucullan* Games.

Paul found the city more Greek than Antioch, more oriental than Corinth, more populous than Athens, more wealthy and cultured than Thessalonika, and more superstitious than Ancyra. In his customary manner he had walked around the city to familiarize himself with it, and he noted the superstitions of all kinds. There

were groves, hills, trees, grottoes, and sanctuaries of all varieties, where mythical encounters with the popular gods were supposed to have occurred. But above all there towered the *Temple of Artemis*—or Diana to the Romans—on the outskirts of the city. The original Temple had been burned down three centuries before, and a new one built to replace it, of which one writer had said:

"I have seen the walls and hanging gardens of Old Babylon, the statue of the Olympian Jove, The Colossus of Rhodes, the great labour of the lofty Pyramids, and the ancient Tomb of Mausolus. But when I beheld the Temple at Ephesus towering to the clouds, all these other marvels were eclipsed."

The ground occupied by the Temple was four times that of the Parthenon in Athens, and at its base it measured almost three hundred-and-fifty feet by over one hundred-and-sixty feet. It was surrounded by a double series of Ionic pillars of Parian marble over fifty feet high, twenty-seven of which had been donated by kings. The great altar in front of the Temple had been sculptured by Praxiteles; and in the centre, within the gorgeously decorated *cella*, open to the sky, stood the *adytum* of the famous and grotesque image of Artemis claimed to have "*fallen down from Jupiter.*"

The worship of Artemis had spread across the world from Ephesus, and, like the Temple in Jerusalem, the contributions of the worshippers had made their Temple and city a powerful centre of finance, and Ephesus a place of pilgrimage and great wealth.

The city authorities had made provision for the international pilgrims, with regular processions from the Caressian Gate through the streets to the Temple outside the Magnesian Gate. These processions were led by garlanded *Ephebi*, or consecrated youths, bald Phrygian eunuchs, and painted *Melissae*, or virgin-priestesses, dancing erotically to the music of flutes and timbres in order to excite the watching onlookers to attend the orgiastic Temple ceremonies.

Corinth was only two days away across the Aegean Sea, and ships travelled constantly between the two cities. But Paul had more on his mind than an intellectual interest in pagan architecture. He

was interested in a people's culture for what it said of them, of their attitudes, and even of God Himself. But, just as Jesus directed his disciples' admiration of the "great stones" of Herod's Temple to the spiritual value of a widow woman's sacrificial worship, so Paul measured the Ephesians by their attitude towards their temple and to eternal values. He had not come to acclaim a grotesque image fallen from a mythical god, but of a peerless Son of God who came from heaven and who returned there. He, Paul, had come as God's special messenger from heaven to do what the obscene idol in a heathen temple could never do: make perfect children of God from pagan sinners.

Paul was living in the home of Aquila and Priscilla, who had remained in the city from the time of their arrival there from Corinth with Paul several months previously. In Paul's absence, another visitor had arrived, called Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria, who was gifted with a profound knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures and a great eloquence in teaching them. When Apollos first arrived, however, he knew only of John the Baptist's teachings and little of Jesus until he met with Aquila and Priscilla. They had taught the enthralled Apollos all they knew of the teachings of Jesus and of Paul.

The spiritual impact on the pagan city of such gifted and eloquent Bible teachers was immediate and profound, with many believing in Jesus as their Messiah. Among them were some people from Corinth, and they invited Apollos to go with them as their teacher. He was encouraged to do so by the elders of the growing church in Ephesus, much as they would miss him. They had caught the vision of Paul and of Antioch, of a world transformed from its present darkness into a kingdom of light, by the resurrection power of Jesus the Messiah working through passionately committed believers. To accomplish this task there had to be a variety of individuals with appropriate gifts of the Spirit—apostles, teachers, pastors, prophets, evangelists—who were prepared to go wherever and whenever God directed.

Paul had noticed during his travels that individual churches often took on the spiritual characteristics of some elder, or individual, in

the congregation with a distinctive gift—a concern to make converts, a hunger for teaching, an intelligent understanding of Scriptures, a warm compassion, a commitment to prayer; or an unhappy authoritarianism, or contentious arrogance, or superficial hypocrisy. In Ephesus, there was noticeable warmth of friendship and love among the members that owed a lot to the warm presence and characters of Aquila and Priscilla. Paul conducted meetings in their home, as well as in the synagogue, and the freedom from tensions and disputes he had known in other places gave his preaching an untrammelled power that had a transforming effect on the city.

In three months the uncompromising presentation of Jesus as Messiah moved several of the Traditionalist elders of the synagogue to protest; and, while there was not the same virulent opposition they had experienced in other places, Paul and the elders of the Jesus community felt that it was advisable to set up a separate entity as the visible church. The rabbinical Judaisers were not so much concerned with theological differences as the effect of Paul's preaching in pagan Ephesus and its possible religious or financial consequences for them.

There was one Jew in Ephesus at the time who had gained a reputation for himself as a pseudo-Heraclitus, or weeping philosopher, because of his speeches and writings denouncing the idolatrous evils of the city. He had been heard to declare that the whole Ephesian population should be throttled one by one. He scorned the worship of Artemis: the gloomy darkness of her adytum was symbolic of a vileness that hated the light, he said; the brutish morals of the worshippers were worse than the beasts, for these did not go around castrating themselves to be acceptable to their masters, he mocked; their ceremonies were a cloak for every abomination, he asserted. That was why he could not laugh, only weep. While not agreeing with his presentation, Paul could only agree with the sentiments of the despairing and courageous Jewish philosopher, and felt that he could be no less frank.

Then there arrived in Ephesus the peripatetic philosopher, Apollonius of Tyana, Paul's fellow-student from Tarsus. During his visit there was a plague raging, and the population was invited to go

to the great Theatre—which could seat upwards of thirty-thousand people—to hear how the city could be delivered from the pestilence. When they were assembled Apollonius stood up and, in the tense silence, pointed towards a tattered and miserable old man and declared him to be the cause. The rabidly superstitious crowd grabbed hold of the frightened and bewildered old man and stoned him to death. Later, it was said, when the stones were removed from the body, a carcass of a Molossian hound was found; proving that the old man was really a demon in disguise, and a public collection was taken to raise a statue to Heracles on the spot.

Despite the appalling paganism and morbid superstitions Paul was excited and challenged by the city and the opportunities for winning converts to Christ. He described it to the others as “*a great door and effectual open to me*”, though there were many adversaries. So, when a teacher called Tyrannus offered him the use of his School, or lecture-hall, for five hours each day, between the hours of mid-day and late afternoon, Paul eagerly accepted the offer. This was the usual time for siesta, yet the numbers who attended were so great that the church membership increased enormously. But it meant that Paul had to do his tent-making work early in the morning and late at night, making for a long and tiring day; it also meant that Paul and the Jesus community were much more exposed than when they were confined to the synagogue, or meeting in individual homes. The Church of the Messiah had become the greatest single threat to the worship of Artemis, if still not in numbers then in personal enthusiasm and spiritual commitment towards their God.

After several months in Ephesus, Paul had a visit from a delegation from the Church of the Messiah in Corinth. The members comprised his old friend, Stephanus, with two others, Acharcus and Fortunatus, and they brought a letter from the Corinthian church listing some of the problems they were having, and seeking Paul’s advice. They required some spiritual direction, they said, regarding marriage in a sexually permissive society like Corinth. Then there were the practical details of how they were to keep the ritual recommendations of the Jerusalem letter; for example, how to

refrain from food offered to idols when the best meat was sold in the temple markets? Some members were arguing that, if buying meat in the temple market were permitted, then soon there would be parties being held in the temple rooms like the pagans, with the consequent profits going into the temple treasury for the making of idols, the upkeep of the prostitutes, and so on. Where did it stop? Or start? What about such practical details as the differences in cultural practices between Greek and Roman women in the matter of praying or speaking in church, where the Greeks and Romans had greater permitted freedom than the Jews? How did the Spirit of God work in these and other similar circumstances?

These problems were now dividing the church in Corinth to such an extent that many among them were taking sides—*“the school of Paul”, “the school of Apollos”, “the school of Peter”, even “the school of Christ”*. Just like the Jews with their rabbinical *“schools of Hillel, Shammai, Gamaliel”*, and so on! So Paul had to find time in his already overworked life to conduct discussions with the messengers from Corinth, and the elders of the church in Ephesus. Then find still more time to write a *Letter to the Corinthians* with his advice, based on his apostolic authority. He vehemently rebuked their divisive practices:

“No more boasting about men! All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos or Peter or the world or life or death or the present or the future— all are yours, and you are of the Messiah, and the Messiah is of God . . . ”

He admonished them to lift their vision above the petty and mundane. They were acting like the groups and institutions around them, and were already arrogating to themselves a status and influence that was both inappropriate and ludicrous. If they wanted someone to emulate then it ought to be himself—as he sought to emulate the Messiah. He rebuked them:

“You are honoured; we are dishonoured! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse

of the world. I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children . . .”

Only those who were like the Messiah in their lives were acceptable to God. It was for this divine purpose—to make men and women Messiah-like—that the Holy Spirit had been sent to transform the minds alienated from God through disobedience into obedient minds like the Messiah’s. This perfecting process by God through His Spirit would lead to ever greater spiritual maturity in individuals and churches. All other forms of learning and activities were “natural” and not divine, carnal and not spiritual, self-conceived and egotistical; resulting in zero growth, distorted perceptions of God, and constant friction.

Because of this indwelling Holy Spirit, the body of the individual and the Spiritual Body of the Church of the Messiah, were sanctified, holy, different, as God is holy and different; a “*temple*” set apart for God alone. In sexual matters, therefore—especially in a sexually permissive city like Corinth—this meant that there could be no fornication, no adultery, no incest, no homosexuality, no bestiality, no divorce. He, personally, thought that, in expectation of the possible imminent return of their Lord, it was even better not to marry. But it was better to marry than to be distracted by the compulsive natural demands of the body. The Scripture had made clear that marriage occurred when a man and woman copulated with each other; every other relationship outside of that union was either fornication or adultery in the sight of God. When married, both man and woman constituted one body, neither asserting superiority on the basis of selfish desires but, out of love for the Messiah, emulating him and considering the needs of each. Where there was an unbelieving partner, it should be an occasion to show God-pleasing attitudes instead of contemplating divorce.

Then there was the matter of their confusing their spiritual authority and its exercise with spiritual judgment and carnal criticism. The divine perspective on this was that God was perfecting them for the glorious inheritance of reigning with the Messiah and thereby being in a position in the future with him of

judging angels as well as administering the new heavens and new earth. The Corinthian church was disgracing their high calling by taking their criticisms of each other to the law courts of unbelievers. This was an intolerable breach of the purposes of God. Even the Judaisers had Jewish arbitration courts, and at the very least Jesus believers should have Messiah-directed church arbitration, but never legal action in a secular court. They were obviously confusing God's sovereign disposition of judgment to Jesus—*"He has committed all judgment to His Son"* - with their own abdication of personal responsibility for spiritual judgment in the church. Paul demanded:

"What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those who are inside? God will judge those outside. Expel the wicked man from among you...Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know we shall judge angels? How much more the things of this life? . . ."

What they had to learn was how to distinguish between the various aspects of judgment: evaluation from experience, deduction from evidence, estimation from observation, criticism from data, opinion from disposition, condemnation from investigation. All of these, to a greater or lesser degree, were involved in the definition and process of judgment, and God's spiritually maturing of individuals and churches was directly related to their immediate circumstances and how they handled them in a divinely appropriate manner.

"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus the Messiah and by the Spirit of our God."

Paul wanted them to see themselves as they were in the past without God, to see as they were in the present with God, and to see

in the future as God had provided for them. They could not forfeit their eternal salvation, which they had appropriated by faith, but they could lose the rewards associated with the demonstrations of that faith in their daily lives. Without faith it was impossible to please God; with faith nothing was impossible to the believer. The goal was God Himself—not numbers of converts, not status in ministry, not influence in employment, not structures in religion. The kingdom of God was a mind orientated towards God, ready and responsive to His every wish and command in all aspects of daily life. That was the message incarnated and incorporated in the person of Jesus the Messiah, and it was the essence of the gospel they must learn and teach.

It was essential that all must grasp the majestic scope of this divinely provided inheritance won by their Lord: that the new creation meant a new canon of Scripture, a new standard of spiritual judgment. If the Messiah was truly made “*wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption*” by the work of God in each believer, this must be reflected in the daily lives of all who followed him—daily wisdom, daily righteous acts, daily sanctified activities, daily deliverance from the corrupt—for it to be meaningful and not just the empty doctrine of intellectual verbosity like that taught by the ritualistic rabbinical Judaisers. It was this vision of an all-sufficient Messiah that had sustained him in all his many sufferings, and, speaking of the claims of others, he reminded them:

“I have worked much harder, I have been in prison more times, I have been whipped much more, and I have been near death more often. Five times I was given the thirty-nine lashes by the Jews; three times I was whipped by the Romans, and once I was stoned. I have been in three shipwrecks, and once I spent twenty-four hours in the water. In my many travels I have been in danger from floods and from robbers, in danger from fellow-Jews and from Gentiles; there have been dangers in the cities, dangers in the wilds, dangers on the high seas and dangers from false friends . . .”

As Paul looked into eternity through the mind of God his pen linked the heavenly vision with the ordinary daily circumstances of

men and women like himself struggling on earth. He ranged from the beginning of time to the end of time, and he moved with God through history as the divine Scriptures unveiled before him. His soul exulted at the grandeur of the divine glory being presented to his gaze, even as his mind ached acutely with the sharp-edged problems of the ravaged world of the Corinthians and others.

Paul paused in the passionate flow of his writing to let his mind dwell on the greatness of God's love before committing his thoughts once more to paper. He was still being carried along on the exaltation flowing from the revelations from God. Then he began writing slowly, measuring each word and phrase and sentence:

"If I speak in the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all that I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

"Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

Paul ended his *Letter to the Corinthians* with some reflections on the resurrection of Jesus believers. He was aware that his own strong expectation of the imminent coming of the Messiah permeated his teachings, and was even the cause of spiritually unhealthy

speculations by others which did not afflict him. For him, time was short, and the return of the Lord was at hand, and this added urgency to his already passionate commitment. So he spelled out for their encouragement his conviction that the same power that brought Jesus from the dead was mighty towards all those who believed and followed their risen Lord. This resurrection power was not only available to overcome all the usual daily temptations and tribulations, but would also raise them from the dead even as it had raised the Messiah. The Messiah first was the order; then, at his second coming, those who belonged to him.

What was in the future for the Jesus believers, Paul wrote, was beyond description, a life more glorious than imagination could conceive. The resurrection body will not be subject to corruption as presently experienced; but would be like the glorified resurrected body of Jesus himself. Like the seed which dies in order to come to a new life, the quality of what it would be must not be measured by what is buried. For whatever was sowed—wheat, corn, or other seed—God gives to each seed its own distinctive future-potential body; and the same was true of the bodies of animals, birds, fish and humankind. Each body had its own innate splendour. Looking down the spiritual vista of eternity, he penned:

“So it will be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body . . . We will be changed. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true, ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’”

Paul sent the *Letter to the Corinthians* with Stephanus and his companions, assuring them that he would visit Corinth shortly. He sent Timothy with them, and requested the Corinthian church to make him at home amongst them, for he was doing the same work as Paul.

Just as Paul was considering moving on from Ephesus an embarrassing situation occurred. The admiration for Paul led many

of those pilgrims who had come to Ephesus as worshippers of Artemis, and who had become followers of Jesus, to collect handkerchiefs and other items which had been in contact with Paul. They then used these to effect "*magical cures*" in healings and exorcising demons, as part of the new Messianic experience. Others, who had heard Paul using the name of Jesus with powerful effect in his ministry, were using it to cure diseases and demon possession in popular and public demonstrations of supernatural power.

In addition to its other claims to fame, Ephesus was already notorious for its commitment to black magic practices. The *Ephesia Grammata*, or "*Ephesian Writings*", were well-known documents said to contain spells and magic formulae, and were sold for very high prices to devotees of the occult. These magic formulae and incantations were claimed to influence human destinies, dispel diseases, and placate malevolent spirits; and a hugely profitable commercial industry had been built up from them. The month of May was especially dedicated to the worship of Artemis, and had been named Artemisia in honour of her. During the month a great fair was held, called "*Ephesia*", which brought huge crowds from all over Asia to participate in the orgiastic revels. There were living representations of all the leading gods and goddesses, and these were given public adoration as they paraded through the streets in gigantic processions.

There were also athletic Games, horse races, musical contests, with other spectacular dramas and prolonged festivities for the people. The Theatre and the Stadia were packed with crowds of shouting and gesticulating admirers. The vast cost of this public spectacle was borne by the *College of Asiarchs*, men of high distinction and great wealth representing the different cities of the province, who were responsible among other duties to preside over the Games and keep order in the city.

It was an unprecedented opportunity for Paul and the local church, and they used the occasion to carry their message into the streets and market-places. Previously, although there had been opposition, it had never developed into anything serious. However, now that so many new and enthusiastic Messianic believers were

using the items from Paul, and the name of Jesus, to practice their “miracle cures”, it precipitated a public crisis. As a witness to their new faith and powers these Messianic believers called for copies of the *Ephesia Grammata* to be burned in public. This overt display of the superior power of the Messiah over the demonic powers of the cult of Artemis infuriated the Artemis pilgrims.

A wealthy supporter of *Artemis*, Demetrius the silversmith, one of the twelve leaders of the Temple of Artemis and president of the powerful *Guild of Silversmiths*, called a public meeting of all those who were employed in the religious objects’ trade. They took to the streets in demonstration against the Messianic believers, claiming that their trade was being destroyed because of the teachings of this new cult. The demonstration turned into a riot as angry followers of Artemis went on a rampage through the city to the School of Tyrannus looking for Paul. When they could not find him there they dragged two of his companions, Gaius of Derbe and Aristarchus of Thessalonika, to the Theatre for public censure and punishment. When Paul heard of this he made to follow them, but was finally persuaded by the Ephesian church elders that this would only make the situation worse. Their view was upheld by two influential *Asiarchs* who were well disposed towards him and had been influenced by his teachings, and by the general conduct of the Messianic community.

The rabbinical Jews - who were not being attacked by the rioting people on this occasion, but who were conscious of the close association between the Messiah believers and themselves—knew that it would not take much for them to be the objects of such public wrath. They chose one of their leaders, Alexander by name, to go to the Theatre and try to calm the enraged crowds, at the same time disclaiming any association with the Messiah believers. But he was howled down, unheard, by the crowds chanting, “*Great is Artemis of the Ephesians*” for two hours.

Eventually, the town clerk of Ephesus, the city’s most important administrative official, managed to persuade the leaders of the Artemis cult to quiet the crowds by warning them that the Roman authorities would exact a heavy price from the city for such public

disorder. He pointed out that if there were justified complaints these could be brought before the courts in a recognized procedure. With great reluctance, the crowds slowly dispersed, still uttering threats against the Messiah believers.

The situation was one of mortal peril for Paul, in that he was considered the ring-leader of the Messiah movement, and as such was a fair target for assassination by any religious fanatic or devotee seeking public approval. Describing the experience he said:

"We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us."

This crisis in Ephesus left Paul feeling depressed, coming so soon after the euphoria of high expectations produced by their expanding churches in Asia. It seemed that, as soon as a work of God developed in any place to a point of significant importance and impetus, it was corrupted by Satanic malevolence from either within or without—and sometimes both. He was reminded of the gladiators and athletes in the Games; they committed themselves totally to physical perfection in order to triumph in a prepared contest, only to find after victory that the process had to begin all over again to overcome in the next contest—and so on, until death or rare freedom was won.

He contracted another bout of malarial fever and, when he was still weak from the associated complications, he received news from Corinth that his *Letter* to the church there had the opposite effect from what he had intended or expected. His sharp criticism had offended several members, and the tensions generated by his uncompromising demands for what appeared to them to be an impossible purity of life provoked an intense antagonism against him. They also found fault with his change of plans in saying that he was coming to see them shortly—twice—but still he had not come. Then they accused him of a false humility when he was with them and of arrogance when he was somewhere else. His motives were

questionable, they implied, and he used his apostolic authority excessively. They even mocked his impressive *Letters* which, they said, were at variance with his less than impressive appearance. Sick and tired, pursued by enemies and misunderstood by friends, facing possible death from illness and from assassins, Paul had reached one of the low points of his life. At fifty-five years of age, it looked as if his work was ending in a failed cesspool of petty controversies and religious strife.

The political situation in Rome as well as in Asia did not help Paul, either. In the autumn of A.D.54 Claudius Caesar had died amid ugly rumours of poisoning by his wife, Agrippina; and the infamous Nero, her son, had succeeded to the imperial throne. A potential rival was another great-grandson of Augustus Caesar, Marcus Junius Silanus, Proconsul of Asia. At the instigation of Agrippina he had been assassinated by two members of Nero's entourage. In her endless plotting and limitless ambition Agrippina also poisoned Nero's favourite aunt, Domitia Lepida, to remove her influence; and the powerful imperial adviser, Narcissus. When Nero tried to curb her powers she conspired with Claudius Caesar's son, Britannicus, and then had him poisoned. She shifted her focus of attention to his sister, Octavia, and finally Nero had enough of her plotting and had her banished from Rome.

The ebb and flow of the murderous Julian-Claudian imperial dynastic politics, and their repercussions in Asia, sometimes worked in Paul's favour and sometimes against him, as the different Roman factions conspired with or against each other in the cities of the region. But mostly the consequent uncertainties and fears militated against the activities of the Messiah believers, and helped their adversaries.

When he had sufficiently recovered from the major effects of his illness Paul left Ephesus quietly, and went straight to Troas. The after-effects of the fever had left him listless and debilitated, and he had no clear idea of what he would do or where he would go. Timothy and Erastus, Silas and Luke, were in Corinth and other churches; Gaius and Aristarchus, with Tychicus and Trophimus, had gone to their own churches to help make the collection of money to

help the Jesus believers in Jerusalem, as had been promised. He had no spiritual direction to go south to Egypt, or east to Persia, or even—with his eyes always on Rome—into different parts of Italy, where others had already gone. Rome and Spain were his ultimate goals, but he was in no condition to face the challenge at present, feeling as he did and with the churches as they were. The church in Ephesus would survive its crisis; but would Corinth?

Before leaving Ephesus he had sent word to Titus in Corinth for Titus to join him in Troas. His reason was that until he had the question of Corinth's spiritual condition settled he would have no real peace of mind. But as the weeks passed and Titus did not come to Troas, Paul grew increasingly uneasy. Finally, unable to remain inactive any longer in Troas, he left for Illyricum on the shores of the Adriatic Sea.

All navigation from Corinth for the winter had ceased, and there would be no more ships for Troas until the spring. Illyricum was the Roman name for the Greek Illyria, the territory lying to the north-west of Macedonia. The province was more Roman than Greek in culture and language, and for the first time Paul was forced to use more Latin than Greek in his preaching, giving him some experience of what lay ahead when he came to visit Rome and Spain. In Illyricum Paul spent some time recovering from the enervating fever, and in preparing a *Second Letter to the Corinthians*. He did not know when he would meet up with Titus now, but, when he did, he would give him this *Second Letter* to deliver to the church in Corinth. Meanwhile, he would think deeply over what they had said and what he would reply.

Paul spent the summer and autumn of A.D. 56 in the Macedonian region, visiting the churches and collecting donations from each as had been promised to the elders in Jerusalem. When he reached Thessalonika Timothy arrived—and, at long last, Titus from Corinth. To his great relief he learned from Titus that there had been a great turnaround in his favour in Corinth. His *Letter* had done what he had hoped, and provoked a deep shame and grief at their unspiritual conduct. Now, if anything, there was a distinct danger of their swinging to the opposite extreme. Paul was happy to send Titus

back to Corinth, with a renewed promise that he would be with them shortly when he had completed his visit to Macedonia.

From Thessalonika he and Timothy moved on to Hellas, on their way to spend the winter in Corinth. From Corinth they hoped to catch an early ship leaving for Jerusalem in the spring. Paul and Timothy arranged for some representatives of the churches to travel with them to Jerusalem. This served the double purpose of helping to safeguard such a large amount of money; and also to bring news of their churches to the believers in Jerusalem. Paul had also arranged that Sosipater from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonika, Gaius from Derbe, and Tychicus and Trophimus from Achaia, Luke from Philippi, would meet up with them in Troas after his visit to Corinth.

Paul did not know what his reception might be from the volatile Corinthian church following his most recent *Second Letter* to them through Titus, but he was determined that the corrupters and compromisers would not be permitted to bring down the divine standards—whether Jews or Gentiles. He knew that the tendency of human nature would always be to choose the easy conformist way before the difficult aspiration goal. When he arrived in Corinth he was overwhelmed with the warmth of their welcome, not only from his old friends who still met regularly in the home of Gaius, where he stayed, but also from the repentant members of the church.

With so many gifted teachers visiting Corinth Paul felt free to use his time to send a *Letter* to the Messiah believers in Rome. Despite the increasing demands and potential of the multiplying churches in Asia and around the Mediterranean, Rome was ever before him as his ultimate goal - and farther west Spain, too, if possible. He had regular news from Rome through Aquila and Priscilla, and from his relatives Andronicus and Junius, and he knew that there were already an influential number of believers there.

The powerful Jewish community in Rome had been described by Cicero as "*how numerous, how united, how influential in public assemblies*". There were synagogues of the Campeses, Augustenses, Agrippenses, Suburenses, Volumnenses, "*Hebrews*" and "*Olive Tree*", according to tribal or family associations. In these synagogues there

were also many influential Roman and other national proselytes. Right at that time one Pompania Graecina, the wife of Aulus Plautius, conqueror of Britain in A.D.43, was being charged in a Roman law court with having embraced a “foreign superstition” because of her unusual—for a Roman!—social restraint and modesty over a period of fourteen years.

Paul was deeply concerned at these signs of mounting persecutions of Messiah believers in Rome—and in other places—knowing from his own experiences that it did not take much to inflame unwarranted suppositions into riots, imprisonment and death. Already Nero, as had been feared, was behaving worse than Caligula. Nero had taken a new mistress, Poppaea Sabina, who feared and hated Nero’s exiled mother, Agrippina, and she incited him to have her murdered. After a series of grotesque failures, Nero eventually had some sailors beat her to death. The sycophantic Senate had passed a vote of gratitude for the “deliverance” of the matricide. A horror of expectancy hovered over the Roman capital and empire as it waited for the next debaucheries and murders.

It was against this background that Paul wrote his *Letter to the Romans*, in anticipation of a hoped-for visit to them after he had been to Jerusalem with the collection for the poor. He had not set out to compile a new canon of Scriptures as a supplement to the *Old Covenant* Scriptures. In his *Letters* he had been addressing existing specific circumstances in the churches and how they might be remedied, but now, as he heard how they were being circulated and read among the churches, he could see how they might come to be accepted as *New Covenant* Scriptures to complete those of the *Old Covenant*. Luke was making careful notes of all events in Judea, Syria, Cilicia, Galatia, and Macedonia. John Mark, Timothy and Titus were also keeping records of what had been said and done by Jesus and his Apostles. Some of the Apostles, certainly Peter and James, were said to be writing to the churches regarding their own experiences and convictions. There were also reports that Peter and John Mark were on their way to Rome, and might even have arrived there.

All of this would help to establish the churches in the years ahead, just as the *Law of Moses*, the *Psalms*, the *Prophets*, had contributed to

the development and character of God's chosen people over the past centuries despite the intermittent times of defiance. But these *New Covenant* Scriptures must not be seen as being competitive with the *Old Covenant*, nor superior to them. They were a unified, integral part of the whole revelation from God from the beginning; the *Old Covenant* Scriptures leading up to Jesus the Messiah, and the *New Covenant* Scriptures springing from them and the teachings of Jesus. It was the will of God that both Jew and Gentile should inherit the universal spiritual kingdom of God and be a unified Body of the Church of the Messiah.

Paul opened his *Letter to the Roman* church with the emphatic salutation:

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God - the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit was declared with power to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord . . .

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes; first for the Jew, then for the Gentiles. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous shall live by faith.'"

Paul then proceeded to set before the Roman Christians a systematic presentation of the many things he had already preached and written to the churches he had raised and visited, but in a manner that would meet the objections, and overcome all the prejudices, of all those who had a tribal, national or even idolatrous conception of God. He emphasized his great love for his fellow-Jews, and his profound appreciation of their glorious inheritance bestowed by a loving God; while explaining why those same fellow-Jews had been temporarily rejected by God according to His promised warnings regarding punishments for disobedience, and the replacements of the Jews by others who would be obedient. Paul stated categorically that he was even prepared to be anathema—

separated from God as by a curse—for the sake of Israel, if it would take that to ensure their repentance and salvation.

Having described the evils of Gentile paganism Paul turned their attention to the Jews who, despite passing judgment on such paganism, did much the same things. God's judgment of humankind was based on truth, and so, although it was true they were the chosen people of God - which, in their arrogance, they had used to cover centuries of rebellion and disobedience—they had to learn again and again the eternal verity that there is no respect of persons with God. Each nation, each individual, would be judged according to his or her responsibility before God alone, according to how each had responded to the light provided by God for them. Divine righteousness did not depend on the *possession* of *Moses' Law*, as they had so fondly but mistakenly imagined, but on *obedience* to it.

Gentiles as well as Jews had a law. The Jews had *Moses' Law*; but the Gentiles had a natural law, written on their hearts—Adam, Noah, Job and the Babylonian Hammurabi had demonstrated this—and sufficiently clear to cause God to hold them accountable now and at the day of judgement as to how they responded to it. Both Jews and Gentiles, therefore, were equally guilty before God through their failure to keep the divine moral law, whether written in stone or written in hearts—unless that guilt was expunged by the forgiveness of God through the sacrificial work of Jesus the Messiah.

His intense hope, said Paul, was that when the Jews saw the blessings given by God to obedient Gentile believers exercising this faith, the unbelieving Jews would turn again to God and be saved and blessed together. All were committed to the same goal, and all were subject to the same degree of commitment to God. It was God who had chosen the Jews to be His people; and it was God who had chosen the Jesus believers to be inheritors of the same promises.

"Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Finally, Paul exhorted the Romans to be obedient to the civil powers. It was no part of their spiritual task to be political revolutionaries. Jesus had made it clear that his kingdom was not of this world; and his conception of lordship was different from that of the pagan world. The pagans interpreted lordship as dominance; Jesus taught it as service to others. Everyone should submit himself to the governing authorities, for they had been given their authority by God. In all the present immorality the sovereign hand of God could be seen in the punishments of evil and rewarding of good. If the governing authorities overstepped their divine authority to rule, and evaded or corrupted their responsibilities, thereby becoming an exploiter and oppressor of the governed, God had stated that He would produce individuals to rebuke and replace them.

The declared aim of civil power was the citizen's well-being and the necessary suppression of evil; it was not, in ordinary circumstances, any source of terror to those living blameless lives. Therefore, it should be respected and obeyed, not out of compulsion but as a matter of right and good conscience. He himself had benefited from good rulers, as well as suffered under bad ones. In Rome, if they had suffered under Nero and Caligula, they had benefited under Augustus and Claudius.

In closing Paul asked them to be considerate of those who had problems with the rigid rituals of the rabbinical Judaisers, and of those who found the careless hedonism of the Gentiles offensive. There were certain things that could not have a final judgment, that were simply cultural differences and no violation of principle. The freedom in the new Jesus doctrine should not be made an excuse for license and the destruction of the faith of the "weak" brother or sister in God's family; on the other hand, there should be no Pharisaic prejudices either. Those who were "strong" in their faith should not be arrogant in their condemnation of others; and the "weak" should not be supercilious in their sanctimonious self-esteem. The life of the true believer was a life absorbed in the Messiah, a life of contingent freedom, a life without fear of consequences, rising transcendentally above the shackles of ritualism and the self-conceits of ascetism. When he had finished writing the *Letter to the Romans*

Paul gave it to a prominent woman in the nearby church of Cenchraea, Phoebe, who was due to travel to Rome shortly, and he asked the Roman believers to give her a warm welcome for his sake.

Paul was unable to find berths on the early spring ships leaving for Caesarea, so he and the others decided to keep the Feast of Passover in Philippi, and then take a ship from Neapolis which put in at Troas, where the others were waiting for them.

Also, a new problem had arisen when they heard reports of a plot to murder Paul. The rumours were confused, and it was difficult to determine whether the motive was the large sum of money it was known Paul was carrying to Jerusalem, or because of his preaching which so infuriated the rabbinical Judaisers.

In Tyre, while the ship was unloading cargo, Paul and his companions sought out the Messiah believers in the city. There were not many, but they were enthusiastic and they appreciated the unexpected visit from Paul and the others. While there, some prophets informed Paul by the power of the Spirit not to go to Jerusalem because of the dangers awaiting him there. Paul, while privately conscious of his own reservations, refused to accept their urgings. The delivery of the financial contributions to the starving poor from the concerned churches was a spiritual commitment he had accepted, and also he had a personal responsibility to report to the elders in Jerusalem how the work of God was progressing in other places in increasing numbers of Messianic churches.

They left Tyre after seven days to make for Ptolemais, the ship's final destination. From Ptolemais they journeyed by land across the Plain of Sharon, brilliant with the spring flowers, the forty miles to Caesarea. Here they rested for a few days while they made arrangements for the final stage to Jerusalem.

The situation in Caesarea was bleak. The Roman procurator, Claudius Felix, was virtually under siege from the Jewish revolutionary Zealots and terrorist Sicarii. There were reported killings every day, the roads were unsafe even when travelled under escort, and there was scarcely a family that did not have a dead or missing member. In all of this turmoil Paul and his companions found the home of Philip the evangelist, and his four

prophet-daughters, a haven of peace. After preaching in all the cities of the Azotus, Philip had settled in Caesarea, where he and his devout family became very well known for their godly lives.

While they were with Philip in Caesarea the prophet Agabus (who had previously prophesied the imminent famine when Paul was in Antioch several years before) arrived in the city. He had heard about Paul's arrival and had hurried to meet him with a prophetic message. When they met, Agabus, in the symbolic imagery of the prophet, took Paul's girdle and bound his own hands and feet with it, declaring, "*The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'*"

When Luke and Philip, and the other companions of Paul, heard this solemn prophecy, they, too, tried to stop Paul from going any further. They proposed that they go ahead to Jerusalem with the financial contribution, leaving Paul in Caesarea to go elsewhere. This was the second, and most serious, Holy Spirit warning of danger in Jerusalem. Why should he face certain peril? For what purpose? His life and contribution were too valuable to risk for the sake of a personal appearance with the collected church money.

As Paul listened to their arguments he recalled the face and words of Stephen as he faced death in Jerusalem—the place, said Stephen, where all the prophets had been stoned to death. Jesus had said the same, before he, too, was rushed away to his illegal trial and death. Would his death be by stoning, or crucifixion, or some other means, in this tormented city? He shook off his dark forebodings.

Paul was adamant in his determination to go to Jerusalem, he told his friends. He was not going in defiance of the prophets, he affirmed, nor in stubborn neglect of the serious warnings. He accepted that he faced danger, and even imprisonment of some kind, in Jerusalem. But there was nothing new in this. From the time of his conversion and subsequent threats against his life in Damascus over twenty years before, he knew he was in danger of arrest and death from the fanatical rabbinical Judaisers and others. But against this Satanic opposition he had the assurances of God that he would stand before governors and kings as a witness to the gospel—and

this had not yet been fulfilled. If to do this meant risking imprisonment and death, then so be it.

It was seventy-five miles, and a normal three days' journey, from Caesarea to Jerusalem. As Paul travelled the familiar road, and entered the city, he recalled all the earlier times and circumstances. Accommodation had been arranged for him and his companions in the home of Mnason, who had a large home on the outskirts of Jerusalem. In his circumstances Paul did not wish to focus too much hostile attention on his sister, and also he wished to be with his companions as they met with the Jerusalem elders.

Jerusalem was dying, Paul noted. Each time he visited the city it presented an increasingly deteriorating facade. Not so many years ago, when he was studying, it was the breath-taking beauty which caught the attention of the arriving travellers; the colour and vitality of the busy streets; the friendliness and hospitality of the people; the sincerity of the religious worship, even where there were differences of opinion.

Now, what was most apparent was the tension evident everywhere. The normal everyday activities were still the same, but the easy drift of shoppers and visitors in the streets had been replaced by an uneasy hurrying, and by restless, suspicious glances. Over all—like the heavy odour of the burning flesh of Temple sacrifices, and fragrances of Temple incense and bazaar perfumes—there hung a lowering cloud of fear and smouldering anger.

The Roman military presence was pervasive, as groups of legionaries patrolled the streets, knocked on or broke down doors as they searched for suspects or fugitives. Groups of young Jews stood in low-voiced conversation, suspiciously eying passers-by and glaring at the Roman soldiers. The oppressive air of expectancy was that of impending catastrophe, of a people preparing for unavoidable disaster. Even in the Temple Courts the atmosphere was pregnant with despair, with none of the former excitement of challenge and optimism of a hopeful future. There were warring factions within the Temple, too, based more on politics than theology.

The increasingly conspiratorial Caesars, Senate and military

generals in Rome had sent their representative favourites over the years to bring Palestine, or at least the subversive Judea province, under control. Then, when they failed they were replaced by others more inept or corrupt than their predecessors. And all the time they killed in Caesarea, they killed in Jerusalem, they killed in Judea, they killed in Samaria, they killed in Galilee—and still the Jewish rebellions and counter-conspiracies increased, forcing the Romans to withdraw into their garrisons while waiting for the promised effective reinforcements from Rome that never came.

When Paul and his Gentile companions arrived in Jerusalem during this highly charged political situation he was aware that they were the objects of intense Jewish suspicion, rumour and hatred. His own history and reputation were well-known to the people of Jerusalem, both before and after his conversion; and his death would be considered a triumph for the rabbinical Judaisers, as well as the Zealot nationalists and Sicarii fanatics. Also, with the Traditionalist Jewish pilgrims of the Dispersion still in Jerusalem after the recent Feasts, bringing their negative reports of Paul's visits and activities in their cities, it would intensify the antagonisms against the Messiah believers in Jerusalem.

The day after his arrival Paul went with his companions to visit James and the elders of the Jerusalem church. There were no apostles present in the city, all of them having left for other places in fulfilment of Jesus' commands. Despite the large gift from the Asian churches which they brought with them, it was not a warm reception they received. The elders were cautious and courteous, but distant: interested to hear the reports from the elder-delegates of the Asian churches with Paul, they made it clear that they were concerned about the potential negative effects of Paul's reported Messianic teachings across the world.

The austere James told Paul that there were now many tens of thousands of Jews in Judea who had accepted the gospel of Jesus as Messiah, and all of them were zealous for the *Law of Moses*. They were not happy with the reports that Paul was teaching other churches to disparage Moses, in not advocating circumcision, or keeping the *Traditions* and customs of their forefathers.

Paul was overwhelmed by a feeling of disappointment and frustration. Was the sterile controversy over ritualistic observance and spiritual obedience never to end? Why could they not see that the former bred death, and the latter life? God had made this clear when he told their forefathers: *"If you keep my commandments you shall live in them."* But if they did not obey, His warning was equally clear: *"Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen."*

Once again Paul went over his words to them from the beginning; how he had been commissioned by God, what God had helped him to do in raising the many Messianic churches throughout Asia. He emphasized that he was not being defensive or apologetic in his statement, nor did he feel he was accountable to the elders of the Jerusalem church. He was giving them a report as a fellow-worker, an Apostle ordained by God, blessed by God.

The prejudiced Jerusalem elders had the grace to show they were impressed by Paul's patient but passionate address to them, even to the extent of expressing a qualified approval of his work. However, James concluded because there were so many hostile Jews in Jerusalem at that time, in order to mitigate their antagonism, he suggested that Paul should consider joining a group of four Jews who had publicly undertaken a Nazirite vow, in the same manner as Paul himself had done a few years previously. These men now had to perform the ceremony of purification on the termination of their vow, and to offer a sacrifice; but because they were too poor to pay for the sacrifices if Paul would agree to pay for the four lambs and eight pigeons for each of the four as an act of charitable fellowship, this would go a long way towards making him acceptable to the Traditionalist Jews who were accusing him.

Paul was aware that this was a fairly recent adaptation of the Scriptural requirement, and one that he could easily dismiss. But he paused to think it over. He could win a theological argument over James and the rabbinical Jews, but it would not benefit the four Jews with the requirements of their vow. In these circumstances the

words of Jesus regarding going “*the second mile*” when asked were applicable. Also, as he had said in his recent *Letter to the Romans*, there were occasions when those who are “*strong*” have to consider those who are “*weak*” in order that both might benefit. This was one of those occasions in his view, and so he agreed. It meant that, in addition to paying for the sacrifices, he would have to share the requirements of the vow and remain with the four participants during the week of purification.

On the fifth day, while he and the four Jews were in the Temple, Paul was recognized by some visiting Jews from Ephesus. They had seen him earlier in the week with Trophimus of Ephesus and the other Gentile Messiah believers, and now they jumped to the conclusion that Paul had surreptitiously smuggled the Gentiles into the sacred Inner Court of the Women - an act punishable by death, even when the offender was a Roman citizen. These anti-Messianic Jews now raised a public outcry against Paul, denouncing him to the quickly gathering and enraged crowds as the man who was everywhere teaching Jews to disregard the *Law* and the *Prophets* and the Temple. They grabbed hold of Paul and began beating him, throwing him to the ground and kicking and stamping on him.

It was only the sacredness of the Inner Court which saved Paul’s life, for his death would have desecrated the sanctuary and required a long period to sanctify it again. He was pulled to his feet and rushed through the “*Beautiful Gate*” of Corinthian brass, down the fifteen steps into the Outer Court. The rulers of the Temple ordered the Temple guards to close the Gate between the Inner and Outer Courts to keep the crowds from entering, then, ignoring the turmoil, they left the crowds to work their will on Paul.

Fortunately, the Roman garrison sentries in the Fortress of Antonia towering above the Temple Courts were alert to the possibilities of trouble. When they noted the disturbance they called out the garrison soldiers, and they quickly poured down the double stairway on the north-east corner leading into the Outer Court of the Temple. They drove their way through the incensed Judaisers beating and kicking Paul, and took his unconscious body on their shoulders through the raging crowds. The military *chiliarch*, or

captain, in charge of the garrison, Claudius Lysias, ordered more troops into the city streets before further trouble exploded. He then formally arrested the now conscious Paul, bound him with chains, and ordered him to be imprisoned in the Fortress pending enquiries.

From the serious scale of the incident the Roman captain thought that Paul was some important political agitator, perhaps even a recently escaped Egyptian Messianic prophet. So, when Paul was safely removed from the clutches of the crowd below, he demanded from the crowds milling around the foot of the double staircase, *"Who is this man, and what has he done?"* The crowd, sensing an attempt to reason with them in order to release Paul, shouted, *"Kill him. Kill him."*

From the top of the double stairway, where he was being held by the soldiers pending further orders from the captain, Paul shouted to the captain above the din, *"May I have a word with you?"*

The captain, surprised by Paul's use of the Greek language, replied, *"Are you not then the Egyptian revolutionary who fled to the desert with his four thousand Sicarii?"*

"No", replied Paul, *"I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, no mean city, I assure you. I beg you permit me to speak to the people."* He thought that a few words of reasonable explanation would reduce the tensions and anger.

The Roman captain agreed, and Paul stepped forward to the top of the stairway beside the captain to address the now quiet crowd below. He lifted his hand pacifying, and addressed them in their own vernacular Aramaic. He told them that he sympathized with them in their zealous anger, for he himself had been like them only a few years before, and only a divine revelation had changed his outlook and conduct.

Effortlessly holding the attention of the crowd, Paul went on to tell them how, twenty years before, when he was worshipping in this very Temple where they were standing now, he had another vision of the risen Jesus, who had told him to leave Jerusalem with haste because the people would not listen to his witness at that time. He had even argued with God about it, so great was his desire to preach here, but God had said, *"Go, for I will send you to the Gentiles."*

When Paul uttered the fateful word “Gentiles” the spell of his eloquence was broken, and the crowd began shouting again: “*Rid the earth of him! He’s not fit to live!*” In their rage they tore off their robes, threw dust into the air, and hurled themselves against the ring of Roman soldiers guarding the stairway to get at Paul. The captain noted the rising clamour and told the soldiers to take Paul into the Fortress. There he ordered him to be beaten and interrogated by scourging—the dreaded *horribile flagellum*, by means of which the Romans extracted confessions—to find out why Paul was such a controversial figure.

While the soldiers were binding Paul to the scourging-post he asked the centurion in charge of the scourging, “*Is it lawful for you to do this to a Roman citizen without proper trial?*” Paul did not mind suffering for Jesus’ sake, as he had done in the past; but this was a gross miscarriage of justice based on false reports and malicious hatred, and he had no hesitation in invoking his rights as a Roman citizen.

The centurion was disturbed when he heard Paul’s question, spoken with quiet authority, and he held off the scourging while he sought out the captain for confirmation of his orders. Both were professional soldiers in the most disciplined army the world had known, so the captain was not offended by the centurion double-checking his orders in the circumstances—especially when he had not known about Paul’s Roman citizenship. He agreed that they should investigate further, and he went with the centurion to talk with Paul. If he was indeed a Roman citizen then the captain was aware that he had already twice broken the Roman law which entitled Paul to protection: he had bound him, and he had given orders for him to be subjected to the *horribile flagellum*. But he could not conceive of a reputable Roman citizen being found in such circumstances of public hatred as Paul had been without there being some heinous crime somewhere.

“*Tell me*”, he said abruptly to Paul, “*are you a Roman citizen?*”

“*Yes, I am*”, Paul replied calmly.

“*How is that?*” the captain asked sceptically. “*I paid a large amount of money for my own rights to Roman citizenship.*” And he

looked pointedly at Paul's simple garments.

"But I was born a citizen", Paul informed the captain confidently, knowing the effect that this would have on the mercenary Roman officer. Such a status as Paul claimed meant family wealth and influence — and any violation of this type of citizenship could mean really serious trouble for the military captain with the authorities in Rome; far more trouble than the local Jewish Sanhedrin could make for him in Jerusalem.

The captain turned to the centurion and ordered him to release Paul from his chains immediately, and to take him to the guard room and give him food while he made further enquiries and arranged a meeting with the Sanhedrin for an explanation of such public disorder in the Temple precincts.

Next morning, he invited Paul to join him for the morning meal. The captain explained that he had called for a meeting of the Sanhedrin to explain the riot, and that Paul would have to appear before them as a witness. So far as he could determine it was an incident involving Jewish religion, and not Roman politics, so he would have no jurisdiction in the matter.

At the Sanhedrin the Roman captain followed the proceedings with a mixture of interest and cynicism at the charges and counter-charges. He was no closer to understanding why Paul was so important, but it was clear that the Jewish leaders considered him both important and dangerous. When the verbal violence escalated into blows at Paul, he took hold of Paul and led him from the chamber before he was injured or even killed in the melee, and escorted Paul back to the Fortress for safe-keeping until he could decide what to do with him.

That night Paul had a vision in which Jesus appeared to him again, saying, *"Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."*

Next day, Paul asked the captain to send word to his sister about what had happened. The news of the riots and his arrest would spread quickly in the city, and he did not want her to be worried unduly. The captain not only agreed, but told Paul he could receive visitors as he was not a prisoner under charge, but only being held

in custody for his own and public safety.

Soon afterwards Paul's nephew arrived — not just to enquire after his welfare but to give him news of a plot to kill him. He was a student at the rabbinical academy, as Paul had been in his youth, and he had heard reports that a plot was being prepared by a fanatical section of the Sanhedrin and the terrorist Sicarii, who had earlier been responsible for the murder of the high priest Jonathan in the Temple Courts. It was said that forty men of the Sicarii had declared Paul a target for assassination, and they had taken a vow not to eat or drink until this was accomplished. They had agreed a plan with the Sanhedrin to call another meeting with Paul, and while he was on the way to the meeting he and his escort would be attacked by the Sicarii band and killed. They accepted the possibility that some, or even all, might be killed in the ambush, but had sworn that he must die because Christians would neither fight nor approve of Jews fighting the Romans.

Paul called for the centurion to take his nephew to see the captain with his report. Claudius Lysias listened to Paul's nephew and, after strict questioning he was convinced of the truth of the story. Warning Paul's nephew not to tell anyone else what he had reported to him, he assured him that he would take care of his uncle.

Without delay the captain ordered the centurion to prepare two hundred foot soldiers, seventy cavalry, and two hundred spear-men, as an escort for Paul. That night they would leave for Caesarea, carrying a letter from him formally addressed to the Roman Procurator, Marcus Antonius Felix. He still did not understand why Paul was important but any man who could attract the enmity and fanatical hatred of both the Sanhedrin and the Sicarii, so that they would attack a Roman escort to assassinate him, was too important for the captain to handle. He wrote to the Procurator:

"Claudius Lysias, to His Excellency, Governor Felix: Greetings.

"This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he was a Roman citizen. I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin. I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their Law, but there was no charge against him that

deserved death or imprisonment. When I was informed of a plot to be carried against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him."

That night, as soon as it was dark, Claudius Lysias sent for Paul. The escort was already mounted and ready to leave, and Paul thanked the captain for his consideration and protection, mounted the horse prepared for him, and rode off into the night. They rode the thirty-five miles to Antipatris, half-way between Jerusalem and Caesarea, before dismounting and resting for what remained of the night. They reached Caesarea in the late afternoon of the following day, and Paul was lodged in the headquarters of the Roman Governor Felix, in Herod's former palace.

The escort centurion presented Claudius Lysias's letter to the Governor, and he sent for Paul to be brought before him. He, too, like the captain, was intrigued by the unusual interest being shown in this man by the Jewish leaders. Why was he so important? He saw before him a balding, gaunt-faced, poorly-dressed Jew, with piercing intelligent eyes, who stood quiet and unconcerned.

It was the accepted practice, when a prisoner had been sent with an *elogium* such as the captain Claudius Lysias had presented, to be tried within three days. But, even with the fastest messenger, it would take more than this for Felix's order to the Sanhedrin to appear before him to be delivered to them in Jerusalem. It gave him secret pleasure to think that he would be able to order the arrogant Sanhedrin representatives to come to Caesarea immediately to answer charges of riot and murder. He told Paul that there would be an unavoidable delay of several days until the Sanhedrin representatives arrived, and that meanwhile he would be accommodated in a guard room in the Governor's palace until his case was settled.

Felix had held office in Judea for almost five years at this time, and was weary of the appointment which kept him in a country of constant tension and away from the pleasures of Rome. He had powerful connections in high circles in Rome, but to advance his career it was necessary to be there; out of sight in Palestine was out

of mind in Rome. He was the son of a slave who had become a freedman in the aristocratic household of Antonia, mother of Claudius Caesar, and a brother of Caesar's notorious favourite, Pallas. He was the first freedman ever to hold the post of procurator, and it was said of him that "*he exercised the prerogative of a king, with all the cruelty and lust, in the spirit of a slave.*" He had married three times, on each occasion to a princess: one of them, a grand-daughter of Anthony and Cleopatra; another, Drusilla, daughter of Herod Agrippa I and sister of Agrippa II, he had induced to leave her husband by using the demonic arts of a Cypriot Jew, Atomus. Throughout his five years in Judea he was a malign influence who tyrannized the province, and who was hated by all Jews.

When the Sanhedrin representatives arrived they were accompanied by a famous lawyer, Tertullus, to present their case against Paul. In cultivated, sycophantic prose he informed Felix that Paul was a well-known demagogue, a nuisance to both Jews and Romans in whatever city he visited in his many travels throughout the empire preaching his divisive doctrine. He had left the practices of Judaism to join the Jesus sect of the Nazarenes, sometimes known as Christians, among whom he was a leader. He had profaned the Temple during his recent visit to Jerusalem, and the Sanhedrin rightly would have punished him for this violation of the *Law of Moses*, which the authority of Rome conferred on them, had it not been that the Roman captain, Claudius Lysias, had intervened with unnecessary violence and took Paul from them, thus creating the present situation.

Paul noted that, for all his flowery verbiage and damaging innuendoes there was no substance to his allegations, the most obvious weakness being the lack of witnesses to substantiate the accusation of "*profaning the Temple*". When Felix, without commenting on the charges, asked Paul to speak in his own defence, Paul did not preface his address with a flattering eulogy as had Tertullus, although he was aware of the technique. With Felix's reputation it would serve no useful purpose. Paul was not there as a supplicant before Rome, seeking imperial favours; he was a s

ervant of God there to witness to the power of God and His Son, Jesus the Messiah. So Paul simply expressed his satisfaction in presenting his case to one who had five years' experience of dealing with Jewish questions, and then proceeded to deal with the allegations.

"You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone in the Temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers, as a follower of 'the Way', which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

"After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the Temple Courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance. But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me. Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin — unless it is this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: 'It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day.'"

Paul's statement was lucid and without rhetorical artifice of any kind, addressed to contradicting the only charge brought against him. The differences in doctrine between him and the rabbinical Judaisers were not relevant to his present circumstances, and Roman law could not in any case take cognizance of them. It was not part of his intention at this stage to defend the doctrine of the Messiah believers, which was still recognized as being within Judaism as *religio licita*. He knew that Felix, shrewd as well as duplicitous, was aware of this; and that whatever the rights and wrongs of the case he would make his decision on the basis of what was to his own advantage. Paul knew, too, that whatever the Sanhedrin, or Felix, thought, his fate would not be decided by them, but by God.

But Felix could not leave Paul alone. He had never met anyone like him - his calm bearing, his pellucid intelligence and moral force. He could not believe a man could live a life such as Paul's—solely for God, to be approved by God. He tried to tempt Paul by hinting that he could be released from his detention by paying a fine. Paul knew that this was just a euphemism for a bribe, and he disdained to discuss it.

Felix was in no hurry to release Paul because he knew it would bring him into immediate disfavour with the Sanhedrin—and they could make more trouble for him in Rome than anything Paul could do. So he calculated cunningly that as long as Paul was treated well under his care, he was under no immediate compulsion to release him.

The simmering resentment in Caesarea had flared into open revolt when the Syrians were said to have paid a huge sum of money to Nero's adviser, Burrus, to persuade Nero to disannul the former Jewish privileges granted to the Jews by earlier Caesars, and Nero was said to have complied. The avaricious Felix was also said to have benefited, because it was well-known that he had little sympathy with Jewish claims to Caesarea, having reminded them sarcastically many times that they hated Herod who built it, hated the temples and statues to heathen gods, hated the theatres and gymnasia and public baths—but liked the money they made there.

On this occasion Felix sent in soldiers with orders to teach the rioters a lesson they would not forget. The soldiers took this literally and murdered, looted and raped without restraint. Unfortunately for Felix, Herod Agrippa returned from his war campaign against the Persians, and he replaced the high priest Ananias with one of his own choice, Ismael ben Fabi. This precipitated a public riot in the streets of Jerusalem, and Felix was recalled to Rome to give an explanation. In Rome, Felix found that his brother Pallas, Nero's favourite, had been replaced, and his own situation seriously endangered.

While Felix was away in Rome a new crisis erupted in Jerusalem. Herod Agrippa had built an extension to his royal palace facing the portico of the Temple. The Herodian palace was intensely disliked by

the Jews anyway, because of its non-Jewish "Hasmonean" emphasis. When it was seen that Agrippa and his guests while entertaining could look right into the sacred Courts of the Temple, they built a wall on the topmost part of the Temple to screen out Agrippa's view. This angered Agrippa, and he prepared a demand for the Roman procurator that the Jewish leaders be punished, and their wall removed.

Meanwhile, Nero appointed Porcius Festus as the new procurator of Judea, and his first challenge from the aggressive Jewish leaders was that Paul of Tarsus should be punished. On his first visit to Jerusalem to meet with Herod Agrippa, a powerful delegation from the Sanhedrin headed by the new high priest, Ismael ben Fabi, demanded Paul's death.

They wanted the governor to bring Paul back to Jerusalem from Caesarea for trial but Festus rejected this and remained for ten days seeking to resolve the dispute. Finally, despairing of any solution, he ordered the Sanhedrin leaders to appear before him in Caesarea with Paul present. Paul was reminded of God's words to him many years before that he would preach the Jesus gospel "to Gentiles and kings". On this occasion the silver-tongued lawyer, Tertullus, was not present, but the Jewish leaders used aggressive and threatening tactics to intimidate both Paul and the new governor, but still producing no evidence to support their charges. Finally, the angry procurator tired of the endless arguments and proposed that Paul return to Jerusalem to settle the dispute. Paul flatly refused, knowing that the Zealots and Sicarii would still be waiting to assassinate him and that was the real reason behind the Sanhedrin tactics. In coldly measured tones he stated to the governor:

"I am standing before the emperor's own court of judgement where I should be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you yourself well know. If I have broken the law and done something for which I deserve the death penalty, I do not ask to escape it. But if there is no truth in the charges they bring against me, no one can hand me over to them. I exercise my rights as a Roman citizen: I appeal to Caesar."

There was a murmur of surprise and consternation among the

tribunal members at this unexpected demand by Paul. They ought to have known, as Paul did, that as a Roman citizen he had the special privileges under Valerian law — *Caesarem appello*, or right of appeal to Caesar himself. This was a right granted by Caesar Augustus, followed a few years later by the *lex Iulia de vi publica*, which forbade any magistrate to kill, scourge, torture or even sentence a Roman citizen who announced his intention to appeal, or to prevent him from going to Rome to lodge his appeal to Caesar within an approved time. It was a right that was never exercised lightly, because it involved consequences which could be very serious for the individual concerned if the substance of the appeal did not match the dignity of the imperial prerogative.

To Festus, therefore, Paul's statement came as a shocking surprise, because it placed him under public scrutiny and imperial judgment in Rome as being at the least inadequately briefed, and at the most deliberately prejudiced, to provoke such a request by Paul. He held a brief, and very angry, consultation with his advisers, who confirmed Paul's rights under Roman law. To the fury of the Jews present he gave his judgment to Paul: "*You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!*"

While Festus was preparing his explanatory report to be sent to Rome with Paul, and making arrangements for a ship and military escort to take him there, Herod Agrippa arrived in Caesarea, together with his notorious sister, Berenice, to discuss his case against the Jewish religious leaders over the matter of the wall looking into the Temple Courts. During his discussions with Agrippa, Festus informed him of the situation regarding Paul. Festus was aware of the antagonisms existing between the Herodians and the Jewish leaders, but he knew little of the family, tribal and religious causes which were at the root of the unending conflicts between them.

The present Herod Agrippa II was the great-grandson of Herod the Great who tried to kill the child Jesus and all aspirant Messiahs; he was grandson of Herod Antipas who had John the Baptist executed and, with Pontius Pilate, had Jesus of Nazareth crucified; and Agrippa himself was a widely acknowledged reprobate. The

great Judean kingdom ruled over by Herod the Great had been drastically reduced through Roman machinations until Herod Agrippa II ruled only as King of Chalcis, a tributary kingdom near Lebanon, with three small *tetrarchies* added; and with supervision over the Temple and the appointment of high priests within his official jurisdiction from Rome.

Herod Agrippa's sister, Berenice, like the other Herodian princesses was extremely beautiful and very decadent. She was married at sixteen years of age to her uncle, widowed before she was twenty, and travelled to Rome with Agrippa, where their openly incestuous relationship was the scandal of that notoriously tolerant society. For political reasons she married the king of Cilicia—after insisting that he become circumcised—but, despite this, she left him to return to Agrippa.

It was with this dissolute pair of Jewish degenerates that Festus discussed the situation regarding Paul. Festus was not really seeking advice, although he had phrased his statement to appear so; he was basically interested in finding out how such sophisticated Jews reacted towards Paul as opposed to the Traditionalist religious Jews. Also, knowing from experience how the Jewish leaders had destroyed the careers of several of his predecessors by tendentious reporting of the circumstances to the authorities in Rome, Festus arranged for Paul's companions to be present during his discussions with Agrippa and Berenice, including Luke, a physician, who was also known as a writer of Messianic records.

The following morning Festus had invited all the leading civil and military authorities in Caesarea and the surrounding districts to attend the official celebration of his installation as procurator, and he combined this with an official reception for his royal guests from Jerusalem, and a requested appearance by Paul. There were the commanders of the five Roman cohorts stationed in Caesarea, the leading Jewish and Syrian civil and religious representatives, and foreign guests, and they formed a colourful and glittering procession through the colonnaded streets to the Praetorium, the former magnificent Palace of Herod the Great where the Roman proceedings were to take place..

When the sumptuous banquet was ended Festus sent for Paul to appear before them. There was a rising murmur of interest as the slight, balding and bearded figure of Paul entered the banqueting hall, and those who knew of his history and reputation told their fellow-guests about him. As Paul approached the table he looked around at the glittering assemblage, with all its meretricious trappings on display, and then looked thoughtfully from Festus to the two royal guests of honour, whom he knew well by reputation. He was aware that this was a staged setting to suit Festus and his ambitions, but his sense of humour also prompted the observation that the prophecy of Jesus had been arranged by Festus inadvertently - that he, Paul, would be brought before "*kings, governors, and those in authority*", all at one time!

To the right of Festus, the royal Agrippa was dressed in full scarlet and purple military cloak, reclining on a gold-plated couch, and attended in a half-circle by courtiers and officials and bodyguards. On Festus' left, Agrippa's notorious and beautiful sister, Berenice, dressed in a gorgeous purple gown and dazzling array of jewellery, also reclined on a gilt couch surrounded by female attendants. All were looking towards Paul with amused interest. He recalled fleetingly his arrival in this same city from Tarsus thirty years before, vision-less and Judaically orthodox, and hungering for a cause. Now he was about to address the leading authorities of the region, as a stepping-stone to a yet more illustrious platform in Rome, in his task of setting up a universal—an eternal!—Church of the Messiah.

While Paul was reflecting on his situation, Festus had been explaining to his royal guests, and the others, that he had invited them to hear for themselves the man that all Jerusalem and Caesarea and Judea was discussing—and demanding his death. He, personally, had found in the man no cause for the death penalty, but because Paul of Tarsus, a Roman citizen, had made a formal appeal to Caesar he had no alternative but to send him there. He had nothing definite to write to the Emperor about Paul, but he had thought it a good thing to bring him before the people, and especially the Jewish king Agrippa, so that as a result of this public

discussion he might have something substantive to deliver to Caesar. In his opinion, it was not reasonable to send on to Caesar in Rome a prisoner without specific charges against him. Festus signalled to Paul that he was free to speak in his own defence.

Paul was ready, and with his instinctive and familiar speaking gesture of a lifted hand he addressed the gathering:

"King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defence against all the accusations of the Jews, and especially because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

"The Jews all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country and also in Jerusalem. They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee. And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today. This is the promise that our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. O king, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me."

Paul paused, then said slowly and deliberately,

"Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead? I, too, was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death I cast my votes against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them..."

Paul went on to describe his sudden conversion on the road to Damascus and continued:

"So, then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. That is why the Jews seized me in the Temple Courts and tried to kill me. But I have had God's help to this very

day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”

Festus, unable to contain himself, interrupted Paul with a sudden expostulation. *“You are out of your mind, Paul! Your great learning is driving you insane.”* If he understood Paul correctly what he was saying was that, from amongst this small obscure race of religious bigots, had come a man claiming to be God, who had died so that the Jews and all other nations of the world might be delivered from their sins if they repented of them, and become enlightened with the knowledge of the true God. Paul was not a criminal, he was mad!

Paul was shaking his head in rebuttal as he said courteously, but firmly: *“I am not insane, most excellent Festus. What I am saying is true and reasonable. The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner.”*

Paul addressed the king directly, *“King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do”*, he added emphatically.

When Paul had begun speaking he had no clear idea of what he was going to say, except in the most general terms. But, from his past experience—and from the explicit words of Jesus himself, that no thought should be given as to what should be said when brought before governors and kings, for the Holy Spirit would direct what should be said—he was confident that the appropriate words would come when the time was right. Conventional wisdom would have it that the last person to address with such spiritual remarks was the reprobate King Agrippa, yet that was what God had directed and Paul was as interested as any others in the possible outcome of his challenge. But Paul was not seeking supporters in his personal predicament; he was, as always, seeking lost souls in search of salvation and forgiveness. And if ever anyone needed that, it was these two unregenerate sinners sitting on royal thrones! But his message was not just that they needed salvation and forgiveness, but that Paul’s God was willing and ready to provide both to such as themselves.

At Paul's challenging words Agrippa, who had been listening with supercilious interest, half-turned towards Festus and Berenice to gauge their response, unsmiling but absorbed, and waited for his response to Paul's question. Agrippa turned back to face Paul, his mind obviously in a turmoil. He tried to temporize with a light reply:

"Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Messianic believer?" he asked sardonically.

Paul would have none of the polite badinage. This was a matter of the life or death of a soul; and, although a public discussion, it demanded from him the same passion and commitment as if he had been alone with each one seeking to win them for his Lord. Speaking slowly and with deep feeling, so that no-one would mistake his seriousness, he said: *"Short time or long — I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me this day may become what I am, except for these chains."*

In the silence following on Paul's solemn reply, Agrippa stood to his feet, obviously moved, and Festus and Berenice rose with him. Festus signalled for Paul to go, and without another glance at Paul they left the banqueting-hall, Festus saying thoughtfully, *"This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment."*

Agrippa looked straight at Festus and soberly nodded his agreement. *"He could have been set free, if he had not appealed to Caesar."*

Now that it had been irrevocably decided by his formal appeal that Paul should go to Rome, Festus was anxious that he should leave Caesarea as soon as possible, before he became the possible cause of more tension or trouble for himself with the Sanhedrin. Also, it was late August, of the year 59 A.D., and sailing in the Mediterranean would cease in mid-September, so that if Paul did not leave soon he would have to wait until the next spring. There were few ships available, and what ships there were had full complements of cargo and passengers. But the word of the Roman procurator was powerful, and a special military escort with an important prisoner of Roman citizenship, had sufficiently high priority to find passage. Festus had been singularly impressed by Paul as a man and intellectual, so he had him placed in the custody

of a centurion named Julius, of a famous troop of Roman soldiers known as "*the Augustan Cohort*". Such special attention, Festus hoped, would serve as a warning to the Sanhedrin not to attempt any of their murderous plans.

Festus stressed the importance of Paul to the centurion Julius, informing him of the hatred and hopes of the Sanhedrin, the Zealots and Sicarii; and of the friendly relationship between Nero and Agrippa. Julius did not need to be reminded that Roman soldiers were responsible with their own lives for the security of their prisoners. This requirement had led to the custom of prisoners, especially important ones, being attached by a lengthy light chain from the right wrist of the prisoner to the left wrist of the soldier on duty. Also, while a prisoner was not allowed to have friends to accompany him, Festus granted Paul permission to have two: Luke as physician, and Aristarchus as general servant.

Julius quickly established a close rapport with Paul and his two companions accompanying him to Rome. He noted that they were widely travelled, gifted and intelligent men, with wide knowledge of Jewish, Greek and Roman customs - a welcome change from other prisoners he had escorted. Learning that Paul had often sailed on the Mediterranean in different seasons Julius asked him to join the ship's council to provide the benefit of his experience. The ship's council was formed representatively from among those travelling on board - merchants with goods for sale, officials on state business, travellers visiting relatives, financiers seeking new investments—in order to pool all experiences and requirements in arriving at decisions during the voyage.

The ship was a merchant vessel, single mast-and-sail, belonging to the port of Adramyttium, leaving Caesarea on its last trading voyage of the year along the coast of Asia. Julius hoped to find another ongoing ship at Ephesus, because the unpleasant alternative was to march his prisoners from Adramyttium to Troas, sail from there to Neapolis, then take to the Egnation Highway to Rome, an overland journey that would be difficult for everybody.

The first part of the voyage began favourably, with a light westerly wind carrying them the seventy miles to Sidon. Julius had

become increasingly impressed by Paul the more he talked with him, and while the ship's crew were trading there Julius offered him the unusual freedom for a prisoner to go ashore and meet his friends in the Messianic community. Paul was grateful for this generous concession, as he was suffering one of his attacks of malarial fever. He spent an enjoyable day, with the church members caring for him and giving provisions for their onward journey.

From Sidon, the ship's direct course was west-north-west to the island of Rhodes, but because of the strong westerly winds they were forced to steer northwards, with Cyprus on their left, till they reached the coast of Cilicia. They dropped anchor in the mouth of the River Andriacus, opposite a hill crowned with the magnificent buildings of Myra, capital of Lycia. In Myra, the Roman centurion was fortunate to find a grain ship from Alexandria on its way to Italy. Egypt was the chief granary of the empire, and the grain ships averaged about a hundred-and-eighty feet in length, forty-five feet in breadth, and the depth of the hold forty-three feet. With a full complement of crew and passengers the ship had two hundred and seventy-six persons on board.

The weather continued to worsen and in grey and stormy conditions the ship slowly fought its way for a hundred-and-forty miles along the coast, taking many days for what was normally only a one day's journey. When they reached the destined port of Cnidus they found they could not enter the harbour because of the adverse winds and currents. In the face of the contrary conditions the ship could not cross the Aegean as planned, but held southward to Crete and, rounding Cape Salmone, on the eastern extremity of the island, made for Fair Havens along the south coast. Fair Havens was the last harbour before arriving at Cape Matala, the farthest point to which their grain ship could reach with the prevailing north-westerly winds before laying up for the winter.

It was now the first week in October, and navigation was becoming impossible, although it was usually considered possible in less adverse conditions to sail in these parts until mid-November. The ship's council held a discussion regarding the advisability of wintering at Fair Havens, or attempting to reach their planned

destination of Cape Malata, or Port Phoenix, about thirty miles further on. In the discussion Paul expressed his adverse opinion for not proceeding further: “Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to both ship and cargo, and to our own lives also.”

But Paul was opposed by both the ship-owner and the sailing-master, who did not want to remain in Fair Havens for the winter. Port Phoenix was known as a better harbour, where the ship would be safe. Julius the centurion, as leader of the council and representing the imperial interests on board, agreed with their recommendations.

As they started off, it seemed a good decision, for the wind changed almost immediately to the south and they ran before it almost all the way to Cape Matala. The Cape jutted southward into the sea, and the prevailing wind carried the ship dangerously close to the rocks. The lifeboat was lowered and made ready in case it was needed; but the ship slowly eased past the hazardous point safely and the course was adjusted to west-north-west across the Gulf of Messara.

Just when everybody thought all danger was past the feared *Euraquilo*—a raging north-east tempest dreaded by all who sailed in those seas—suddenly struck the ship on the starboard side. The unexpected fury of the storm caught the sailors unprepared and, unable even to furl the mainsail, they had to let the ship drive before the shrieking force of the hurricane. For over twenty miles they cowered in terror before the unrestrained savagery of the raging wind and the mountainous seas, until they came under the lee of the small island of Clauda. Here, in the temporary shelter, the sailors were able to bring the ship head on into the wind again, and to lift the lifeboat back on board. They were also able to “*frap*” the ship, passing cables under the keel and binding them tightly around the hull with a windlass to hold the straining timbers together for greater security. Finally, they lowered the great sail and hove-to under a storm-sail to try to ride out the tempestuous hurricane. To give themselves a greater chance of survival it was decided to jettison all cargo—grain, movable baggage, spare gear and sails—to

help keep the ship afloat and on a course which would avoid destruction. Eventually, the drift anchor gave way, and the ship was carried by winds and currents out of its shelter into the raging holocaust beyond the reefs.

Day after day the hurricane howled on without easing, blotting out the sun by day and the stars by night so that they had little idea of where they were. Sick, bruised, sleepless, soaked, hungry and fatigued, the terrified passengers and anxious crew resigned themselves to inevitable death—except for Paul. Physically exhausted from the effects of the fever before the storm, and made worse by the unceasing buffeting, he drew strength from the vision when Jesus had told him he must bear witness to him in Rome, so he knew he would not die in a ship at sea before then. Supported by Luke and Aristarchus, he moved from person to person calming their fears, encouraging hope, comforting the frightened and despairing.

At the height of the crisis another vision was given to him, and he told the ship's crew and passengers:

"Men, you should have taken my advice and not sailed from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. Last night an angel of the Lord whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you'. So, keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."

On the fourteenth day of the storm, as they were drifting across the expanse of what they assumed was the Adriatic Sea somewhere south of Italy, the sailors began to suspect that they were approaching some land. Behind the rise and fall of the wind-roar there came the steady boom of breakers and the phosphorescent gleam of spray. Lowering a weighted rope overboard they took a depth sounding, and found it to be twenty fathoms; then, shortly afterwards, fifteen fathoms. They cast out the four anchors from the

stern to bring the ship's bow head on to the shore, and to keep the ship from drifting on to any rocks in the darkness. The greatest danger now was that, with the storm-sail lowered, the ship was at the mercy of the pounding seas, and at any moment a heavy wave could sweep over and engulf her.

Paul noticed a group of sailors gathered suspiciously in low-voiced conversation, and he moved to where he could overhear what they were saying without being observed. As he thought, they were plotting to forsake the ship by taking the remaining lifeboat, pretending that they wanted to inspect the four anchors, but instead slipping away quietly in the darkness. Paul reported this to Julius the centurion, telling him that unless the men stayed on the ship with everybody else the ship would be lost with all on board. God's guarantee of safety for all depended on obeying Him at all times in every detail. The centurion immediately ordered his soldiers to cut the lifeboat adrift, and to arrest the intending defaulters. The severed boat fell into the heaving seas, and drifted away. Watching it disappear into the waves and darkness the passengers and crew knew that without the boat they were now all committed to the fate of the ship—and to Paul.

When it was light enough to see the shore they lightened the ship by throwing everything that was left into the sea. Then they cast off the anchors, raised what was left of the tattered sails, and let the ship be swept by the strong current running past what someone guessed was the island of Salmonetta, close in to the encircling arms of the protected bay. There was little control left in the battered ship, and the heaving seas carried it on to a hidden sand-bar, where it stuck hard, the pounding waves remorselessly tearing apart the timbers in a final frenzy of destruction. To their left lay the rocky headland of the Point of Koura, where the towering waves were breaking with the thunderous roar that they had heard the previous night. But, right ahead, beyond the calmer waters, was a deep bay with a fringe of sand.

With safety in sight both crew and passengers prepared to jump off the doomed vessel - when they were startled to see the Roman military escort draw their swords to kill their prisoners. The Roman

law that made the soldiers responsible for their prisoners was rigid and unbending, and there were no extenuating circumstances in which the prisoners could be freed. Rather than allow them the possibility of escape, the soldiers had to kill them and then report their deaths as accidental in circumstances beyond their control, if they were to save their own lives. Paul's journey to Rome was about to end here. But Julius the centurion had grown to respect Paul, and he brusquely ordered the soldiers to sheath their swords. He ordered all who could swim for land to do so, and those who could not swim should grab hold of the breaking timbers of the ship and paddle their way to the shore. As Paul had predicted, all made it safely to land.

Some islanders, who had come down to the shore on seeing the shipwreck and hearing voices, confirmed that they had arrived off the island of Salmonetta in Malta. Malta was originally a Phoenician settlement, later passing under Greek domination, but for almost three centuries it had belonged to Rome and was included in the province of Sicily. The crew and passengers gathered together in the shelter of the dark and dripping caves in the rocky hillsides of the bay, out of the reach of the thunderous seas and curtains of spray.

The islanders were friendly, and they brought food and torches to light fires for the soaked and shivering passengers. While Paul was helping the others to gather driftwood for the fires he unwittingly picked up a deadly snake, which quickly wrapped itself around his arm, to the consternation and fear of the islanders who superstitiously attributed this as a sign of divine judgment by the gods for some heinous crime committed by Paul. When Paul calmly shook off the snake without harm to himself they equally superstitiously jumped to the opposite conclusion that he must be a god himself in disguise to have such power over creation.

For the next few days the governor of the island, called Publius, entertained the centurion and prisoners, until they were able to travel northwards some six or seven miles from the shipwreck bay to the city of Malta. Before they left for Malta, Publius' father became seriously ill with dysentery and fever. Although Luke was a skilled physician, Paul chose to lay hands on the sick man and prayed for his cure. Following this demonstration of spiritual healing many

Maltese came to Paul for treatment of their diseases, and Paul and Luke complied. The grateful Maltese heaped gifts on them, and were also hospitable to the other members of the ship's company.

Three months later, with winter ended and, when the first spring sailing was possible, Julius arranged for them to travel on to Italy on another grain ship—called the *Dioscuri*, after the twin brothers, *Castor* and *Pollux*—which had spent the winter in Malta and was due to sail for Syracuse, eighty miles away. After putting in at Syracuse for three days, and then Rhegium for one day, a favourable south wind carried them swiftly through the Straits of Messina, between the chain of snow-clad hills and the Stromboli volcano for almost two hundred miles, to Puteoli on the beautiful Italian bay of Naples. Puteoli was the principal harbour in the south of Italy, and while it was a considerable distance from Rome it was the regular port for the grain ships supplying Italy. There the ship was unloaded, and the passengers made for Rome by carriage or on foot, depending on their circumstances.

To Julius it was an end to the most memorable experience he had known in his eventful military career. For almost six months he had lived in close proximity with his distinguished prisoner, Paul of Tarsus, had passed through the most demanding challenges with him, and in all that time Paul had shown himself to be courteous, serene, considerate, courageous, understanding and exceptionally well-informed. To Julius, the charges made against this man by the religious leaders in Jerusalem were ludicrous—especially when they could produce no witnesses to support them. But what impressed Julius most of all was the scope of Paul's vision, the passion he had for the Jewish Messiah and his teachings, his commitment to make them known throughout the world. That was the blazing flame which burned so intensely in the gaze which seemed to pierce the soul, whether standing conversing quietly on deck or in the fury of the days of the hurricane. To Paul, God was not just a priest's religious deity, a scholar's theological proposition, but a human being's personal experience of his living Creator and loving heavenly Father. How was he to put all this in a military report?

As they approached Rome, more and more Jesus believers came

out to meet them, and the overwhelmed Roman escort was hidden among a joyous chattering crowd of Messianic believers. Paul had achieved his heart's desire at last. He was about to enter Rome, the capital of the world. On either side of the stately avenues now were the magnificent tombs of the great patrician families of Rome—Scipios and Caecilia Metella and others—and thousands more of great beauty and striking *bas reliefs*. Every forty feet along the road there were low seats placed for the accommodation of travellers. The roadside inns were crowded with elegant aristocrats, bustling traders and merchants, and roistering soldiers and sailors.

They wound through the Alban Hills, with many famous towns and villages scattered whitely on the green and blue-flowered slopes, and crowned with the great *Temple of Jupiter Latiaris*. Then, topping a gentle rise, Paul had his first view of the city of Rome, and he lifted his voice in praise and prayer to God, asking for courage to face the task before him. The vast city spread over the wide Campagna, with gleaming buildings of all shapes and sizes massed upon and between the Seven Hills on which Rome was built. Close up, the white marble was seen to be encrusted with the green serpentine of Numidia, and inlaid with intricate designs of gold in breath-taking workmanship.

They passed the terraced rows of suburban villas, with greater multitudes of people leaving and entering the city through the groves and fountains of Egeria, with its colony of beggars; passed the pyramid of Cestius, under the arch of Drusius, and through the dripping Capenian Gate aqueduct. There were other unnamed arches, hundreds of temples, thousands of statues, on the way to the Excubitorium, the barracks of the section of Praetorian cohorts on duty to guard the Emperor Nero.

Here the military took over command again from the excited Christians, and Julius informed Paul that they would have to report to his camp commandment at their headquarters on the Caelian Hill, where his responsibility for Paul would end. Paul might have to remain there, but it was Julius' opinion that, following on the submission of his military report to the commander, Burrus Afranius—in which he spoke highly of Paul's conduct and integrity

during the journey—Paul might be placed under house detention only.

Paul was lodged in the *Praetorium* within the quarters of the imperial guard, and a special apartment was allotted to him, although a Roman guard was appointed to be with him at all times in the house. He was still attached to the guard by a light chain, and the guard was changed daily, but, apart from this, he was given considerable freedom. With the money sent from Philippi, and the support of the Roman Christians and his own relatives in Rome, Paul, with Luke and Aristarchus and Epaphroditus, was able to live reasonably comfortably. He was also able, despite the restrictive presence of the guard, to carry on his apostolic work. With his whimsical humour Paul was able to assure sympathetic friends that the constant presence of the soldiers presented him with a regular captive audience from among the elite imperial Praetorian Guards.

As soon as he was able Paul invited the leaders of the eleven Jewish synagogues in Rome to come and meet with him for a discussion. In the city of almost a million people there were estimated to be at least about sixty thousand Jews. They lived in the Jewish Ghetto of Trasevere, on the far side of the River Tiber. When they arrived, and had gone through the usual courtesies, Paul addressed them:

“My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people, or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of anything deserving of death. But when the Jews objected I was compelled to appeal to Caesar—not that I had any charge to bring against my own people. For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.”

The Jewish leaders were cautious and orthodox in their responses. Within their own community in Rome they had serious difficulties and monumental problems. It was just over ten years since they had been subject to banishment from Rome by Claudius Caesar. The edict had been allowed to lapse quietly into neglect, and

the followers of “Chrestos” were blamed for the troubles which had precipitated the imperial edict; but antagonism still existed in the capital against both Jews and Christians. So they replied to Paul:

“We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of the brothers who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking about this sect.”

Whether their reply was truthful or not—Paul found it difficult to believe that they had not heard anything from Jerusalem—Paul was aware that they would have to be careful about how they responded for they would see that, as a Roman citizen, he had been given extraordinarily favourable treatment by the Roman authorities in his detention. Also, he guessed that it was almost certain that, before they came to see him, they would have had him checked out from their Jewish Christian friends or relatives. In response to their request Paul laid before them the Scriptural basis for his teachings concerning Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah, and of his own personal experience of divine intervention in his life. While a few of the Jewish leaders were impressed, others openly disbelieved, and some reserved judgment, claiming they needed more time to think it over.

When they next met with Paul there were more of them, and for a whole day Paul argued with them, expounding the *Law* and the *Prophets*, demonstrating the true nature of the kingdom of God, and the increasing worldwide vehicles of its expression in the local church of both Jews and Gentiles together. Again they were divided, and they began to dispute among themselves. The gathering finally broke up when Paul, with his usual calm authority, stated unequivocally:

“The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet: ‘Go to this people and say, “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and

I would turn and heal them". Therefore, I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!"

It was Paul's final, uncompromising statement to the legalistic Judaizers with their message of rabbinic bondage, so emphatically denounced by Jesus. From Jerusalem to Rome he had carried the message of spiritual freedom through the Messiah burned on his heart; he had blazed a trail—no, a highway!—across the nations between the two world capitals, one religious and one political, trying to keep both Jews and Gentiles together as God had meant them to be. His conscience was clear: he had not been divisive at anytime, he had tried to the point of compromise to keep both Judaism and the way of the Messiah together in unity, as Jesus himself had taught. From now on he would pursue his own course; he would make no more attempts to win over his stubbornly bigoted and rabbinically subversive fellow-countrymen.

So long as Paul was with his guard he was free to go about the city; but Paul was never a sight-seer, he had too many urgent spiritual concerns which took priority over his appreciation of fine architecture or art. His interest in the purposes of God in surrounding circumstances was without sanctimony or cant, but with a scholar's hunger and a lover's passion. As he looked around him at the magnificent structures of the greatest political and military power in the world, the regular parades of further military triumphs, the displays of beauty and ostentation and vulgarity, the sights of slavery and exploitation and poverty and hunger, he saw a world heading for political, economic, social and spiritual destruction.

This was an empire as described by Daniel, with feet of iron and clay, and doomed to destruction. Beyond these structures, and events, and conditions, he saw eleven synagogues, and sixty thousand Jews, God's chosen instrument to "*enlighten the Gentiles*", disappearing into obscurity and contempt because of self-interest and prejudice. He saw scores of Jesus believers who had come to meet him on the Appian Way, and he saw the hundreds of others he had met since, who were scattered across the city, from slaves to

aristocrats to Praetorian Guards in Caesar's Palace. He envisioned the tens of thousands of others in the many places he had visited, now carrying the message of Jesus the Messiah to other places. The words of Jesus came to him across the years: "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." What he was building now would remain when the Roman empire was forgotten.

As the weeks and months passed with no sign of his appointment with Caesar Nero being imminent, Paul decided to send Luke to Philippi to visit his relatives there, and to bring back news of the church. The Philippi elder, Epaphroditus, who had brought the gift from Philippi to Paul, was still with him, and Paul found his company comforting. But Epaphroditus was quite different from the gentle Timothy, being vigorous and polemical, and as he threw himself into the many activities and strenuous debates in Rome, he undermined his health to the point where his life was endangered for a time. When he recovered Paul suggested that he, too, should return to Philippi, and carry a *Letter to the Philippians* from Paul.

In his *Letter to the Philippians* Paul admitted that his circumstances in Rome were indeed difficult. However, despite all of this, his presence in Rome had been productive spiritually, not only in the church but also in the barracks of the Praetorian Guard. His fate still hung in the balance for some reason beyond his understanding, but he was in the hand of God and he had no fear of death, if that was to come. Pending the hearing of his appeal to Caesar, Paul said he did not feel free to take too prominent a role in the public debates in the synagogues, and he contented himself with the meetings being held in his own house, or in the households of others in the city. He had also found an encouraging response among the Jews who had first met him on his arrival in the city. Paul concluded his *Letter to the Philippians* by promising to send Timothy to them with news of the result of his appeal, just as soon as it was settled. He thanked them warmly for sending Epaphroditus to him, and added that in sending him home to them he was sending a part of himself. Cherish all like him, he wrote, for they are rare.

The delays in his official hearing had not unduly troubled Paul at first because of the many other demands on his time. He knew from

common report that such appeals often took time to prepare and present, and - what was discreetly implied but not said outright—the appeal had to wait the whim of the Emperor Nero. Added to that, Nero had just spent a year in Greece, and there was a great amount of work and decisions for him to attend to on his return.

Paul found it intriguing that, after two years, the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem had not been in touch with the Roman authorities, because it would seem that they were uncertain how to present their case and when to arrive. They dare not just refuse to appear, especially after the public fuss they had made before the Roman procurators Felix and Festus in demanding the death of Paul. He could only assume that the Sanhedrin, with their powerful connections in Judea and Rome, would delay the hearing for as long as possible in the hope that they could dredge up some supporting charge against Paul from elsewhere. Also, from their point of view, the longer he was held in Roman detention, the less opportunity he had of preaching the Jesus doctrines they hated. But it was now the summer of A.D.61, and he had been in Rome for almost two years.

John Mark's presence in Rome, Paul found to his surprise, was a great encouragement to him, especially when the others had gone. The young cousin of Barnabas had matured greatly since their first meeting and their subsequent disagreement, due no doubt to the influence of both Barnabas and Peter. He had come to Rome with Peter on his recent visit, and had travelled with him to many other places. John Mark had kept a detailed record of all the events which had transpired since the birth of Jesus, and these reports and recollections were now of great value to Paul. He had been to places with Peter which Paul had not visited and Paul was thrilled with this new insight into the Church's expansion.

What was Rome to Jerusalem? What was the Emperor Nero to the Messiah Jesus? What was the wisdom of the world to the foolishness of God? What were Seneca and Cicero and Philo to Peter and James and John? When buildings had crumbled to dust, and statues to gods and the famous had disappeared, the living words of God that were being spoken now would live on in the hearts of men and women for ever.

Paul was finally brought to trial in the winter of A.D.61. Cases such as Paul's were presented before the Praetorium, a body comprising the Prefect of the Praetorian Guard representing the Emperor, together with the assessors and high officials of the imperial court. From the start of the trial it was obvious from the attitude of the tribunal that Paul was held in esteem, and Paul presumed that it was because of the reports from his previous trials and appearances before such reputable Roman officials as Sergius Paulus in Cyprus, Lucius Gallio in Corinth, Claudius Lysias the tribune in Jerusalem, Porcius Festus in Caesarea, and Julius the centurion of the Augustan Cohort. From these and other submissions they had gathered the tribunal had concluded that the issue was a religious squabble within Judaism, and not significant enough for the Emperor's personal attention.

Paul's reasoned explanation of the cause of the dispute, when he was called on to make his defence, and his clear statement regarding the nature of authority and responsibility of citizens when questioned on these matters, were also convincing to the imperial court tribunal. However, when Paul would give them no assurance that there would be no repetition in the future of such trouble within the Jewish communities in the cities of the empire, the tribunal would not give him an unconditional dismissal of all charges against him; but he was released from detention, and was required to leave Rome, with a stern warning against causing further disturbances by his teachings.

It was the spring of A.D.62 when Paul was finally free to go on his way. The decision of the tribunal had left him with a sense of anti-climax. For so long he had been anticipating his visit to Rome, anticipating that whatever the combination of circumstances there they would somehow reflect a significant capstone of his life's ministry. Instead, he had spent two years attached by a chain to a guard, and while he had many influential meetings with both Jews and Gentiles in households there was little of the public preaching and teaching he had accomplished in other places and subsequent growth of churches. He was even without any of his former close companions, all of them having left to visit other churches in Asia.

He decided that he would fulfil another of his life's ambitions—to go beyond Rome as far west as possible to carry the good news of Jesus the Messiah, and visit Spain. He wrote a *Letter to Timothy* telling him of his plans, and arranged to meet up with him in Ephesus later in the year, or the following year.

Before Paul left Rome he was shocked and saddened to hear news from Jerusalem of the death of James the Just, the brother of Jesus. Festus, the Roman procurator, had died unexpectedly while still in Caesarea several months before. A successor, Albinus, had been appointed, but in the three months' interval before he assumed office, the current high priest Ananus, took advantage of the situation. He convened a council of judges and ordered James and several other leading Nazarenes to appear before them. They were quickly charged with trumped-up charges of violations of the Law, and condemned to death by stoning. When Albinus arrived in Judea he joined forces with Ananus the high priest, and between them they imposed intolerable pressures on the already tormented Jewish people. Herod Agrippa II added his own quota of oppression by increasing the already extortionate taxes in order to expand his ambitious building programs, while at the same time refusing to pay the wages of the eighteen thousand workers who had been repairing the Temple. Between the three of the leaders in Judea they precipitated a series of crises in which the Zealots and Sicarii were able to successfully take over large sections of the countryside in a widening rebellion.

As Paul noted the increasing pace of decline in world-wide political affairs, especially in relation to God's Promised Land of Israel, he felt increasingly convinced that God's Day of Judgment was near. At the same time he was conscious of his own precarious health, and the diminishing time at his disposal. Other, younger, men would have to carry the torch in the surrounding darkness—if Jesus did not return in the meantime, as he had promised he would.

In his *Letter to Timothy* in Ephesus he advised him how he should conduct himself in such significant times. He warned him against the infiltration of false teachers into the churches, men with myths and long genealogies to give spurious substance to their

unacceptable doctrines. Timothy's own goal should be to do God's work in a spirit of love, with a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. Prayer of all kinds, at all times, should be made for all persons—from the king, through those in authority, to the humblest member of society and the church. He gave Timothy instructions on how both men and women should conduct themselves in church gatherings, and urged that blameless conduct, faithful domestic life, moderation of habits, hospitality and tolerance, should be the qualities observed by all bearing the name of the Messiah.

Paul's travels in Spain were illuminating for him, but not productive in churches being formed. He went by ship from the port of Neapolis to the south of Rome, to Gemma in North Italy, and from Gemma to Massilia in Gaul, then on to Dartosa in Spain. From there he travelled around the coast to Nova Carthago, and Malaca, and on to Hispolis in the far West. From there he found a ship to take him back to Neapolis. It was the autumn of A.D.63 and he took the first ship leaving for Ephesus. There he met up with Timothy, and together they visited the churches in the regions of Macedonia and Colossae.

In the autumn of A.D.65 he sailed once more for Syrian Antioch to renew - perhaps for the last time - his fellowship with the elders of the church which had first commended him to his apostolic work for God. While in Antioch, Paul learned that in the previous year yet another Roman procurator had been appointed in Judea, Albinus being replaced by Gessius Florus. Florus was married to Cleopatra, a close friend of Caesar Nero's wife, Poppaea, who had obtained his appointment. It was the final disaster for the Jewish people. Florus, more than his predecessors, was blatantly evil in his nature and activities, and he deliberately fomented troubles in Judea so that he could personally profit from them, either by money extorted or by cruel punishments imposed. He even joined forces with known bandits if he could profit from the association.

The simmering revolt in Caesarea between Jews and Greeks and Syrians over ownership and special privileges in the city also intensified under Florus, when the Greeks bribed a decision against the Jews and had the Jewish imperial grant of equal civic rights

annulled. In turn, the Jews tried to bribe Florus with a greater payment, but he took their money and did nothing for them in return.

From Rome the news was just as bad. Since A.D.62 Nero had once again introduced the dreaded treason trials practiced by Caligula. Nero's able advisers had gone, Burrus had died and Seneca had been forced into retirement; and they had been replaced by two Praetorian Prefects, Rufus and Tigellinus. They pandered to Nero's worst vices, and Poppaea had persuaded Nero to divorce Octavia and to marry her instead. In the consequences which followed there were conspiracies and assassinations, the Senate lost power, and Nero gained unbridled power.

On the night of July A.D.64—*“the night after the full moon”*—there was an outbreak of fire in Rome, near the Palatine Hill which raged for five days, and destroyed or damaged almost the whole of the fourteen regions of the city. The Imperial Palace was itself destroyed. The rumour that the profligate and decadent Nero had deliberately set the city alight for his own perverted reasons spread widely. To combat it, the now fearful Nero claimed it had been done by the sect of Messiah believers. He was advised to do this by his wife, Poppaea, who was interested in Judaism and had Jewish friends she wished to spare from possible blame. In his panic and desperation Nero gave orders for all Messiah believers to be arrested and punished, hoping that this would serve to save his own skin.

It was not too difficult to make Messiah believers the scapegoats, not because they were destructive but they were believed to be anti-social. Like the Jews, the Messiah believers found most of the Roman social activities either idolatrous, or immoral, or both, and consequently they had little in common with their neighbours. This had led to all sorts of superstitious stories circulating about them. The leading historians said that they were *“a race of men given to a novel and baneful superstition”*; and *“notorious for their depravity”*; that one of their beliefs was in a *“last day”* for the world when it would be swept by fiery judgment from their God. So, the historians concluded, *“the Christians were convicted not so much of arson as of hatred for the human race.”*

Meanwhile, Nero opened the imperial gardens to the homeless of Rome, and provided grain at greatly reduced prices. It quickly became a public sport to find and arrest Messiah believers. Nero, to curry further favour with the enraged populace, conducted murderous spectacles of Messianic persecution in his imperial gardens. Many Christians were sewn up in skins of wild animals and turned loose in the circus to be savaged by beasts. Others were fastened to crosses, smeared with pitch, and set on fire as living torches to illuminate the gardens. But Nero continued to live under suspicion, especially when his grandiose new palace emerged from the ashes of the old; it was assumed that he had planned this from the start. The following year a conspiracy of leading senators, and one of Nero's own Prefects, Rufus, tried to overthrow him, but failed.

Nero became even more tyrannical. He got rid of his wife, Poppaea, by kicking her to death, and married Statilia Messalina. Then the military, loyal to Nero until then, began to voice their discontent. Nero was now identifying himself with the gods *Hercules*, *Apollo* and *Helios*, and a magnificent ceremony was being prepared for him to be worshipped as the god *Mithras*, the coronation to be conducted by the King of Armenia.

From Judea there were reports of fresh rioting in the streets of Jerusalem and Caesarea, when the high priest and the Jewish leaders had refused to sacrifice to Jehovah on behalf of Nero when commanded by Florus. Despite an intervention by Herod Agrippa the Roman garrison was massacred. Florus responded by raiding the sacred Temple treasury and claiming the wealth "*for imperial services*". This sacrilegious act precipitated a huge public demonstration, which Florus declared a rebellion against Rome. He arrested the leaders at random and had them crucified, and handed over parts of the city to marauding mercenaries for plunder. Herod Agrippa was hounded from the city.

Florus called for assistance to the Roman Legate from Syria, and he arrived with the Twelfth Legion of thirty thousand soldiers. But this was now insufficient to contain the rebellion, which had spread across the country from Damascus in Syria to Alexandria in Egypt.

It was no longer a local revolt against Florus but a national revolution against Rome. Nero appointed the experienced General, Flavius Vespasianus, to command an expedition against the Jewish people. It was September, A.D.66.

With the whole Roman world in turbulent crisis, and the Jewish nation facing annihilation, Paul left Syrian Antioch for Crete, to see how Titus was coping with his responsibility for the churches there. Paul had called in at Crete while on his way to his trial at Rome, during that memorable shipwreck journey, but had only been able to have a short talk with the Christians there. Isolated as they were from the mainland, and subjected to a morally defective culture, they were easy prey for any kind of superstition or huckstering philosophy. So Paul felt that Titus would appreciate his support in these critical times. He wished to end his days with preaching of increasing urgency regarding the imminence of God's judgment on the world and the return of the Messiah.

From Crete Paul paid short visits to Galatia, Illyricum and Dalmatia, returning southward through Western Macedonia to Nicopolis. This was the flourishing city of Epirus built by Caesar Augustus to commemorate his famous victory at Actium. From there Paul sent Tychicus with a *Letter to Titus* in Crete, to see if he could join Paul in Nicopolis for the winter, leaving Tychicus to look after the work in Crete for a time. In his *Letter to Titus*, Paul gave similar practical instructions to those given to Timothy, regarding the care, supervision and conduct of the churches:

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good...But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the Law, because these are unprofitable and useless. Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned . . ."

Then Paul turned once more to face Rome. His work for the Church of Jesus the Messiah was drawing to a close. He was sixty-six years of age, in poor health, and had just completed a punishing four years of travel across the length and breadth of the Roman Empire. In Rome, Nero, that great enemy of the Messiah and the Church, was defying God in every blasphemous way conceivable; and so it was fitting that he, Paul, servant of the living God, should go there in defiance of the imperial order, to preach the Messiah gospel once more in the city that was the seat of Satan.

Paul arrived in Rome in the late summer of A.D.67. The magnificent metropolis he had known on his previous visit was a charred and blackened shadow of its former glory. Nero had given orders for the burned city to be rebuilt at great cost and for a great linking canal to be built between Lake Avernus and Ostia to improve access to Rome for sea-borne goods. Instead of the narrow winding streets, and irregular blocks of high tenement buildings, there were now broad streets and spacious buildings emerging from the ashes. Nero's magnificent new "*Golden Palace*" reached from Palatine Hill to the Equiline. Nero had just returned to discover more plots against him, and he had capriciously ordered his leading military commanders to kill themselves. They had obeyed, but the army no longer considered itself loyal to him.

The news of Paul's arrival in Rome was communicated to the authorities by some of his Jewish enemies as soon as he began preaching boldly in the synagogues, and wherever the Messiah believers were gathered in their secret meeting-places. Paul was immediately arrested, and this time he was thrown into prison for violation of the imperial order not to return to Rome. Unlike the previous occasion he had no favoured treatment or powerful friends in high places. Any who attempted to visit him were suspect, and subject to immediate arrest, imprisonment and gruesome death, so he was kept isolated and alone except for a single visitor to bring him his daily food.

He wrote a *Second Letter to Timothy*, which he thought was likely to be his last. Timothy had been the close companion of many travels, the inheritor of his vision. Now, bereft of all his friends, and

facing certain death, Paul's last thoughts were with the young man who had been like a son to him. He was aware that although death was near, it might be delayed some time, so he sent for Timothy to come and join him if at all possible. He wrote:

"Recalling your tears I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us the spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

"So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life - not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day. What you have heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you — guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us . . .

"Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs - he wants to please his commanding officer. Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

"Remember Jesus the Messiah, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Jesus the Messiah, with eternal glory . . ."

Paul now waited for the Emperor's decision. The former jurors' judgment of *ampliato*, or postponement for further evidence, really meant that he was now subject to the caprice of Nero, who had introduced the custom of hearing such cases separately in order to demonstrate his superior judgment. Paul was content. God had so arranged it that his first defence had produced this possibility of a personal appearance before Caesar with the gospel of Jesus the Messiah, as he had hoped: the representative of Satan in all his corrupt earthly majesty and evil oppression of humankind to be confronted by the representative of the Messiah in all his simple heavenly glory and world-wide love. God had spared him for this moment.

But what excited Paul most of all was the possibility that even for such a human monster as the thirty-year-old Emperor Nero there was still mercy and forgiveness from a loving and righteous God. The same grace had been there on the cross with the dying thief beside Jesus. It had been there for Felix and Festus and Agrippa in Caesarea.

Such redemption was not to be. When at last Nero and Paul stood face to face—imperial power and human weakness, monstrous youthful evil and superlative aging holiness, the living epitome of human self-indulgence and the dying epitome of human selflessness, pagan ignorance and divine knowledge—the curious Nero only saw a nondescript, ragged and elderly Jew, and heard him talk about a strange creed and a bloody sacrifice and ridiculous resurrection and future judgment. Nero had expected so much more from the man he had been told was the leader of the world-wide Messiah movement, and, in frustrated disappointment and intemperate anger, he gave his impatient verdict on Paul—death. As a Roman citizen he had the right to die by the sword.

The soldiers led Paul through the uncaring crowds in the streets, who were too accustomed to this sight to be distracted by it. They passed through the gates of the city, the Porto Capua, on to the Via Ostiensis. Three miles down the road, at the landed property called *Aquae Salvaie*, surrounded by the tombs of famous dead, they stopped and told Paul to prepare to die.

He looked at the tombs with a slight smile, remembering Lazarus and Jesus; then looked at the pine woods behind, and on up to the deep blue of the sky overhead, remembering Stephen, and his radiant face at the time of his death, and the voice and words which had broken Paul's heart: "*Lord, do not hold this sin against them*", he murmured in recollection, looking at his escort.

He nodded that he was ready, kneeled down at their direction, bowed his head and closed his eyes in prayer. With the sound of the descending sword Paul entered the presence of the God he had served faithfully to the end.

Chapter 5

will be available on this site on the 1st February 2012