

SPEECHES IN THE ACTS – JOHN CARTER

STUDY 6 – PAUL’S DEFENCE

Reading: Acts 24

Introduction to Study 6 from tape: In this final study, Brother Carter concludes his summary of the work of the Apostles in the days of the flowering of the Divine plan in Christianity. He notes the Jewish opposition, both political and doctrinal, the political being neutralised by Gamaliel’s influence, and the doctrinal issued by Stephen, who gave his life in the defence of truth. Here is Brother Carter.

So we come, brethren and sisters, to the last of the studies. There is very much which we must gather up in an attempt to see the picture as a whole as Luke presents it, and to examine the speeches that were given in connection with defence.

Let us glance at the book. You are familiar with it, and we needn’t turn anything up; and see if we can gather up a picture as we glance along, what it records. We have a completing of the number of the witnesses in chapter 1, where Peter goes back to scripture as a reason for what they were doing and as an explanation of the defection of Judas. We’re told in that chapter, of the Lord’s commission that the work had to begin in Jerusalem and expand outwards through Samaria and through the whole world. We’re told that the spirit would come upon them and would guide them, and Luke in his narrative shows how this was fulfilled under the Spirit guidance until even in the very headquarters of the Roman government, the witness to the Gospel of Christ was set forth by Paul, the Lord’s ambassador to the Gentiles.

We have the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost which was the beginning of the Divine work in preaching the gospel. We have Peter’s speech, from which we learn how they followed the Lord’s example after he was raised from the dead, in going back to the Old Testament scriptures and opening them up and showing how it was there were written, that Christ must suffer and must rise from the dead. That the One who suffered in the way that Jesus did, the One who died, and the One who was exalted to God’s right hand - the essential characteristics of the Messiah - had been fulfilled in Jesus and therefore he and he alone was the Messiah. But this had to be put in the larger framework of the Divine purpose in Jesus Christ. Whereas the Jews fixed their attention exclusively upon the material features pertaining to the Messianic age, the apostles showed them, not that they were wrong in expecting the Messiah and those material benefits belonging to the Messianic age, but that they must be seen in the framework of the larger purpose of God which was being fulfilled in him, who was the Messiah. And that the Messiahship of Jesus and the restoration of Israel to their own land and that time of blessing and good will among men, was not an end in itself as Israel was so apt to think, but was just the final stage of the Divine work begun in their rejection of the Messiah which would carry forward to its completion, the Divine work of redemption. So the Messianic age was put in the framework of the Divine activity of redemption and placed in its right relationship.

We saw again in Peter’s speech before the authorities as the result of the healing and giving of soundness to a man lame, that Peter turned back to the Old Testament scriptures. That, in particular, he showed that the Divine Manifestation among men that had been revealed for example, in the name that God gave to Himself, had been realized in Jesus Christ and he was

the name of salvation because God had raised him up, and by him God was known in the saving purpose which He had revealed in the prophets.

Luke tells us of Jewish opposition and now at last it ceased under the guidance of Gamaliel that these men be left alone. Yet, Luke tells us that opposition did come - the POLITICAL OPPOSITION was silenced by the counsel of Gamaliel, but then arose DOCTRINAL OPPOSITION as the implications of the Christian faith were seen, as testified by such exponents as Stephen, that it involved in fact, that law and temple were only temporary that - they were only a typical arrangement, that therefore they'd fulfilled their purpose when the reality had come in Jesus Christ.

This doctrinal opposition found its expression in the arraignment of Stephen. We looked at his address and saw with what wonderful power he passed in review Old Testament events to bring out the fact that God wasn't dependent upon temple or tabernacle or sacrificial arrangements for worship to Him, but that He had a purpose which had been centred in Jesus, who in keeping with the traditional opposition of Israel (such is human nature) - he had been rejected. But just as Joseph was found at his second appearance and just as Moses had to go back to Egypt, so Jesus would come back again, to fulfil the purpose that God had appointed him.

Then as the result of this, Luke tells us that the progress of Christian teaching was brought about by the scattering of the believers. So the gospel was carried to Samaria and an eunuch, a Gentile proselyte, was received into the Christian faith, and so we're being led on to the expansion of the Divine work among the Gentiles. Then we get the apprehension of Saul while he was on that work of persecution and immediately afterwards we are told of the official recognition of the Gentiles, by Peter receiving Cornelius into the Christian community, and we are told, although we have not got time to look at it, of Peter's address on that occasion. But it fits into the same pattern as those addresses given by Peter on the day of Pentecost and before the Jewish authorities.

But now the Jewish leader, Peter, having received a Gentile, the way was open for the public setting forth of the Gospel to the Gentiles in the ministry of Paul. And so Paul comes into the picture and is the centre of the picture from that point onward in the Acts of the Apostles. It isn't that the other Apostles were not busy, but Luke is tracing the order and development of events in particular with reference to the fulfilment of the Divine commission and with particular reference, as we shall presently see, to the relationship of the Christian to the law of the land.

And so we have the Gentile missions, and how appropriately on that first mission is reported by Luke for us, the speech of Paul in Pisidian Antioch. And there is an obvious parallel, a correspondence between the speech of Paul and that of Peter. It is the same essential message that is being proclaimed by Paul as by Peter.

But the receiving in of the Gentiles provoked a very difficult position in the Christian community. And this was settled by the counsel at Jerusalem where a middle way was found whereby, Jews and Gentiles sharing alike the common faith, could enjoy social intercourse with each other. And so we have the council's decision, in the record of which we are moving on to show, how the church's difficulties were met under the guidance of the Spirit, and how the Divine purpose of bringing Jew and Gentile within the scope of the Gospel, was worked out. With the Gentile missions we learn something else in this record in Acts.

We learn of the growth of oppositions. There was the opposition of the Jewish mob, for example, or the mob incited by the Jewish authorities at Pisidian Antioch. Where, you remember, Paul was stoned in the course of his journeys among those south Galatian towns, Pisidia and Iconium and at Lystra. Incidentally, Timothy was present when Paul visited this place, and in his epistle (and here is another of those little undesigned coincidences), he reminds Timothy of the afflictions which came to him at Iconium and at Lystra. These little touches are very, very interesting in our Bible study but they are very confirmatory of faith as we see how accurate are both the history in Acts and the epistles which we have. Christianity came into conflict with vested interests. We see it in the case of the ventriloquist at Philippi, that woman with a spirit of divination who being healed, ceased to be a source of wealth to her owners, and at once there was trouble and the Apostles were arrested and imprisoned. We see again a similar conflict with vested interests in the case of the craftsmen at Ephesus. And so Luke traces for us the sources of the oppositions that arose to the Christian preaching.

And so we are led on to the arrest of Paul. And we remind you again of the rather striking amount of space that Luke devotes to this. And if Luke is the very skilful historian that we have striven to show that he was, in his accuracy with regard to all outward facts and the very wonderful way in which he manages to summarize speeches, so that we can trace the course of the argument and follow it out in its expansion; and if Luke is so accurate, and if he has interposed these speeches, so obviously at the right position to show the development of Christianity, then there must be some reason why he devotes so much space to the trial of Paul.

He was arrested in Jerusalem and he gave a number of addresses from this time onwards. We have his address on the steps of the temple, we have his address before Felix, we have his address before Agrippa. Now we cannot trace these through, but we will glance at the points particularly in these addresses in which they are related to Roman Law. None of us would think of a policeman coming into this room today, and arresting the speaker or arresting any of you for assembling here, for the very obvious reason that there is no violation of law in our assembling here. But suppose one did come in, we'd say, "What have we done wrong" and we would expect that there would be some relation to law, some clear indication of a violation of law and the arrest of the Apostles must be seen in the legal framework of Roman practice in the 1st Century. And so, we will look at these charges that were made and see how Paul deals with them, and then come back to another feature in the Acts of the Apostles which we must see in relation to it.

In Acts 21, we have the record of the tumult in the Temple court, when because someone had raised the shout that Paul had taken a Gentile into the holy precincts, that therefore he was one who was violating temple customs and practises. And so the 28th verse tells us that they cried out,

"Men of Israel, help!: This is the man, that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, (that is, against the Jewish nation) and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place".

Now you will notice that there is a revival of the charge against Stephen in the fact that it was against the law and temple, and since such things were so unpatriotic they were also against the people.

Paul gives the reply when he got permission to stand on the steps of the Tower of Antonio of the Roman citadel which had the oversight of the Temple Courts. And he spake to them in the Aramaic tongue. How does he meet the charge? Well - first of all in v3-5 he shows that he was not opposed to the people;

V3-4 "I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the Law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye are all this day. And I persecuted this way unto death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women".

So far "was he against" the Jewish people, that he himself had been trained in the most exclusive of the sects of Israel, he was therefore by upbringing one of the most intense of the Jews.

He was one who thought that he must persecute the followers of the Christian way. So then, the natural instincts and the training of the man were all in favour of the Jewish people. Why then had he changed? The answer comes in his relationship to the Law from the 6th verse onwards, in which it tells of the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Divine commission. Now the Law given to Israel was recognized by all' of them as being a Divine Law. It was still Divine Law though it was given to them by the ministry of angels. And if Divine Law could be given through the medium of angels, still more could Divine Law be given through one who was risen from the dead and exalted as Jesus was. So Paul is explaining, that so far from being opposed to Divine Law, his conduct had been actuated by a **further revelation of Divine Law.**

It is quite true that this would raise objections, but the basis of his reasoning was unchallengeable. If the sanctity of the Law rested upon the fact (The Law of Moses) that God had given it, then their duty was to examine the validity of Paul's claim that a further revelation had been made, by virtue of which, it altered the course of his life and now he was pursuing the course which had brought him into such opposition to them. And as concerning the charge about his attitude toward the Temple, he takes that up in the 17th verse and he says that, so far from being opposed to the Temple, he had actually gone into the Temple to pray. Acts 22:17

"And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the Temple, I was in a trance;"

So then he was clearly one who was not disregarding of the Temple arrangements. But even while he was in the very Temple of God itself in a trance, the commission had been given to him, that he was appointed to be the ambassador to the Gentiles.

Again there is the appeal to the sanction of Divine revelation. Whether they accepted it or not at any rate there was an obligation on the part of a people who recognized there had been Divine revelation in their history in the past, that there might be indeed again Divine revelation. And so Paul develops his case along those lines. But the reference to the Gentiles proved too much for them, and mob law broke out and the Apostle was delivered by the sentry on duty at the Tower of Antonio observing the riot that was proceeding, and a squad of soldiers were quickly sent down into the court and they rescued Paul from being torn to pieces by the authorities.

The next stage consists of Paul being brought to face the Jewish authorities and it was the Roman Officer who convened the meeting. Paul explains that he was a Roman and therefore he was exempt from the flogging that they were about to give him in his examination and the 30th verse of chapter 22 tells us that...

“On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty whereof he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them.”

You will notice it's the representative of the Roman authorities that commanded the Jewish leaders to appear, and Paul is there before them. But who is in charge of the assembly? Who has convened it? Who has commanded the Jewish leaders to appear? - the representative of Rome. And this helps us to understand the situation that developed. Paul was invited to speak. That opening verse of chapter 23 tells us that he said, looking at the council...

“Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.”

And it is quite evident that Paul is going to pass in review his history, much is yet done on the stairs in the Temple courts. But before he could go further, the High Priest commanded that he should be smitten on the mouth, and quick as a flash the Apostle said “God shall smite thee, thou whited wall” and Paul has been the subject of some criticism here, and some misunderstanding. At once when it was pointed out that it was the High Priest, who had spoken, Paul apologised, and said, ‘I didn't know that he was the High Priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people!’

Why didn't he know who was the High Priest? Well the High Priest would not be there with his robes of office. He was not presiding, he would be there in the semi-circle, maybe in a central position, but in the semi-circle of Jewish rulers before whom Paul was standing, the whole assembly being under the presidency of the Roman officer. For he is inviting a man who has been secured by Roman Authority, who has declared himself to be a Roman Citizen and who therefore was entitled to Roman protection - to state his case to his compatriots. When the voice came from the circle of listeners Paul would not recognize the speaker and at once when it was pointed out who it was, he made the statement that we have just quoted.

But we see Rome working out its course, in the examination of the Christian case which has come to a focal point in the apprehension of Paul.

And at this time Paul looking at the community of leaders before him, recognizes that there were there, members of the sect of the Pharisees and members of the sect of the Sadducees. And so he cried out,

“Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question” v6

And at once caused a very serious conflict of opinion among the Jewish councillors who were present at this examination.

A smart thing, somebody says, on Paul's part, very clever indeed - he divided his opponents among themselves. But it wasn't that at all. As we shall see in a moment or two, Jewish

religion was protected by Roman Law because of the Jewish insistence upon the fact that their beliefs, their practices, their constitution was founded upon Divine sanction, through Divine revelation. And Paul puts the case, that if they (the Pharisees) with their belief in the resurrection of the dead could have this privilege of being recognized as a legal religion, then in that respect his beliefs were in no-wise different and he on that ground was as entitled to the protection of Roman Law as were the Jews. So it had a strict relevance to the position.

And so we pass on in the course of this trial of Paul and in the 24th chapter, we see the formal presentation of the case against Paul,

“After five days Ananias the High Priest descended with the elders and with a certain orator (or lawyer) named Tertullus.” v1

And as an illustration of the accuracy of Luke, how delightfully does he catch up, the spirit and method of this man. Although the Judge before them was a man of very reprehensible character, this man lauds upon him flattery, after the manner of a professional lawyer,

“Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness”

(and you catch the fulsomeness of the eulogy - the craven quality of his speech in contrast to the way Paul addresses himself to the Judge)

“and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness” Vv2-3

and then having made such a fulsome introduction, he says ‘but we won’t be tedious’; he knew the skill of his craft and he preferred his charges. Now verses 5 and 6

“For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world”

- he was a man who stirred up trouble - very subtle point, a point which indicated that Roman Law must take cognizance of this man. He was a seditious man, a man who caused trouble and turbulence in their cities.

Then secondly he was *“a ring-leader of the sect of the Nazarenes:”* and this touches the point of the privileges that some enjoyed under Roman Law. And the third point

“Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law” v6

Now Roman Law took account of other religions and displayed a considerable amount of tolerance towards them, if they did not conflict with imperial policy. But it was their policy in the provinces in particular, to form a cementing influence in the cultivation of ‘emperor worship’. So there the ‘Apotheosis’, - the deification of the emperor, past emperor and living emperor, and there were festivals and occasions when the emperor was worshipped. Now Jewish religion conflicted very seriously with such a deification of a man. But the Jews had obtained from the Roman Authorities, the legalization of their religion (we needn’t go into the Latin terms) but they were (speaking in general English) - they followed, a ‘legalized religion’ - one permitted by Law.

Now Tertullus is saying in this speech by calling the religion of Paul and his associates ‘a sect’ - they were ‘a heresy of the Nazarenes’, he means that they were not in anyway to be recognized as identified with the Jewish religion, and therefore could not enjoy the privilege of freedom that the Jewish nation enjoyed.

But since the Jewish nation had been granted this freedom of worship, since their religion had been legalized under the Law of the Roman Empire, they were entitled to the protection of the authorities against anything, that went against their practices. And so when this lawyer said, ‘that he had gone about to profane the temple’ this 3rd point was added to claim the protection of Rome, to ask them to introduce a suppression of his activities because what he was doing was opposed to that which Rome had permitted and legalized.

Now that briefly puts the charges in the framework of legal practice at the time. Now Paul answers those three points and we look now at how he answers them.

The 10th verse - and mark the contrast in Paul’s approach from that of the lawyer:

“Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation.”

A complete recognition of the fact with a rather subtle recognition that he knew how difficult they were and how they had been a continual source of irritation and were in fact a real problem to the authorities. And so Paul says “*I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation,*” and therefore “*I do the more cheerfully answer for myself.*”

They have said, says Paul that I was a mover of sedition, that I stirred up trouble. Well, v11-13 be you then informed...

“That there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. And they neither found me in the Temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me.”

In other words Paul says **not guilty!** The charge cannot be substantiated. It is not true! What then of the claim to be a ring-leader of this heresy. What of this charge that he was pursuing a way of worship that Roman Law did not permit and therefore he was obnoxious to Roman Law? The answer to that is in v14-16

“But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, (the same word as ‘sect’), so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law (of Moses) and in the prophets: And have hope toward God which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.”

In other words they based their claim to freedom of worship, upon the fact that their God revealed Himself. ‘I have not changed the God whom I worship’, says Paul, ‘I still worship the God of my fathers, the God whom I have worshipped from my childhood: and, just as the Jews claim to base their right to freedom, upon the Divine revelation that is written in their

Old Testament scriptures, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the prophets. My belief is based upon their sacred writings and any privileges that they should have, therefore, because they claim to be followers of a Divine revelation, should be extended equally to me in fact, as a member of the race I am covered by them,' in effect Paul says.

'And if there should be a reference to what I said about the resurrection of the dead being my belief well, that they themselves also allow. That isn't an objection in their own case and it cannot be an objection in mine.' The 3rd point, that he would have profaned the Temple is met very dexterously, but very truthfully from the 17th verse onwards.

Vv17-19 "Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the Temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult, who ought to have been here before thee and object, if they had ought against me."

In other words, so far was it his intention to profane the holy place he was **actually in** the Temple **observing** a temple rite; at the very time when he was arrested.

And so the scene passes on, just as in the case of Jesus first before the Jewish authorities, then Pilate, then tossed over to Herod, then back again to Pilate. So we can see there's a kind of correspondence in what happens here, in the case of the followers of Jesus as represented by the Apostle Paul.

He is left there a prisoner by Felix; and Festus comes to Jerusalem and he willing to do the Jews a pleasure asked if Paul would go up to Jerusalem. Now Paul knew what scant respect would be given for his case by the Jewish authorities. He knew that the matter would have to be finally settled by the Roman authorities and therefore he made his appeal to Caesar. In the first instance the words can mean: 'that I must be judged by Roman Law', but it was understood at any rate, by Festus, that Paul was preferring a claim as a Roman citizen. That the case should go before the highest court in the world of that day; and after consultation with his assessors, the Clerk of the Court and the lawyers as part of the apparatus, as to whether the case was sufficiently important to justify a reference to the highest court, it was granted that the appeal should go to Rome. Now the central government in Rome didn't view with favour sending any and every case there. And it is a mark of the very grave importance with which the Roman Provincial authorities viewed the position of the Christians in relation to law, that a test case was allowed to go to Rome.

Meanwhile, while Paul having stated that he wished to be heard before Caesar was still in prison and no report had been sent up to the authorities, King Agrippa comes upon an official visit to Festus. King Agrippa was one of the Herodian family, in origin half-Edomite, but the family had made great professions of sympathy with the Jews as the rulers over them, a crafty difficult family for the most part. But here is one of the descendants of Herod the Great whose policy was to eliminate the newborn Messiah even though it meant massacring all the babies in a village.

And so there is a certain naïveté in the words that Festus says to King Agrippa at the end of the 25th chapter, he says, 'I have a man here who has to go before Caesar', but he says 'I am really flushed you know, he's got to go on and I don't know what report to send!' And there is something decidedly funny, (as it strikes me anyway) humorous, in the 27th verse, when it

says, *“It seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him”*. In other words, they had not managed really to formulate a case against Paul, yet Paul had made the appeal and it had been granted.

And so Festus says, ‘you come and hear him Agrippa, and see what you think of it and see what we can make of it’. And so we have Paul standing before Agrippa - we can see the man, in little touches that Luke gives us of him *“earnestly beholding the council”* is how Luke describes Paul standing before the Jewish Council when that Roman Officer was presiding. And here Agrippa said unto Paul *“Thou art permitted to speak for thyself”*. Then Paul stretched forth his hand, and answered for himself. It is possible he was not a very imposing figure in view of the sneers that his enemies in Corinth made against him. But he must have been a very impressive figure, as with this oratory that he had at his command and this power of reasoning which characterized all that he did, he made his case before Agrippa.

He reminds Agrippa that his hope was the Hope of Israel;

“I have lived as a Pharisee of the strictest sect and even now I stand and am judged for the Hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers; unto which promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope’s sake, King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.”

He says, I have the faith of our fathers, my faith is founded upon the books that we recognize and revere as a Divine revelation. And the theme of it all, the burden of his argument is, that if Israel’s is a real legal religion permitted by Rome, there is nothing in what I believe that should produce a contrary decision.

And he passes in review his life, tells us why it was changed by the appearance of Jesus and the commission given to him that he’d be sent to the Gentiles to open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, that they might receive forgiveness of sins, an inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me, Jesus.

And so again there is the same appeal to the fact that it was by a Divine revelation that this course had been pursued by Paul. It is all part of Luke’s evidence that it was through the guidance of the Spirit of God, that these developments took place in connection with the Christian movement. In other words, the whole movement had its origin and had its development as a part of Divine activity among men. He traces back the position of Jesus to the prophets when he says to Agrippa,

“I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.”

And following the method we have seen Luke follow, we can expand those verses by going to the Old Testament prophecies which refer to the opening up to the Gentiles of the way of life.

It must have been a very earnest and impassioned speech, for Festus interposes by saying, ‘Paul all this intense application to these religious ideas is affecting your mind!’ and he says *“I am not mad, noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness”*. And he

turns to the King and he says *“The King knoweth of these things before whom also I speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.”*

In other words can't you, King Agrippa, see that upon the basis of the things to which you make a profession ... this is the inevitable outcome in the development of the Divine purpose. What a predicament Agrippa was in. He could not say he denied the prophets and prejudice his standing before the authorities. But he could not say also, that he followed them, and accept all the implications that Paul had established. And so with a half sneer he says, 'With very little, Paul you're thinking you will convince me to be a Christian.' Paul says, 'I would not mind whether it were little or much so long as you came to see this truth that I believe and accepted it and did everything that I have except...', and he held up his hands with its manacles, 'except these chains'. And Agrippa thought he'd better not pursue it, obviously. So they went aside and talked among themselves and Agrippa said, *“He has done nothing worthy of death but he has appealed to Caesar and we will have to let him go”*.

So the rest of the book takes us on to Paul at Rome. And now we want to gather up one or two things that are obvious in this record, when they are pointed out.

Whenever Paul was in contact with the Roman authorities they were always favourable toward him. The Jewish authorities themselves had conceded the rights of the Christians to worship their own way. It was mob law that brought about Stephen's death. But when Paul was before the authorities at Philippi, the hastiness of those more Roman Officers than the officers in Rome themselves, with their petty little local pride in their colonial rights (for Philippi was a Roman colony) had been quick to put Paul in prison. So far were they proved to be wrong that Paul insisted that they should come themselves and set him free.

When Paul was at Corinth he was before one of proconsular rank, and the decision of Gallio to dismiss the case against Paul in Corinth would stand in Roman law and give Paul a charter of freedom, until a higher court rescinded the decision that Gallio had made.

At Athens before the philosophers they were contemptuous. Although Paul was before the Council in Athens that determined whether any preacher in Athens should have a license to preach, but they were contemptuous, and therefore not adverse.

In Ephesus, we're told, that the first men - the chief men of the city befriended Paul. The word by which they were described, translated in our authorised version 'Chief Men' was a technical term 'the Asiarchs'. They held office once a year as presidents of the temple festivals at the Temple of Diana in Ephesus. And they retained the title of 'Asiarchs' after their work for that one year was done. And since the 'Asiarchs' befriended Paul in this city of the Roman world, the Chief men, were helpfully interested in Paul. And then when, in this crisis that developed, Paul is before the Roman authorities, we see him protected by Roman Officers when the Jews would have torn him to pieces. We see the Centurion acting with marked impartiality, when he insists that the Jews should be brought before him to hear Paul's defence. We see the Roman authorities befriending him when the Jews had that plot to assassinate him, and the nephew of Paul, learning of it communicated it to Paul and Paul escorted by Roman authorities, a cohort of soldiers, was sent to Caesarea.

We see again in that very detailed and very accurate chapter of the voyage and shipwreck, that Paul stands out as a man of considerable importance and his travel companions on that

occasion must, since he was a prisoner, have gone not as friends but as his servants and attendants, his body slaves. And Aristarchus and Luke who accompany him on the journey, had the status during the journey of being Paul's servants. Therefore Paul was regarded on that voyage as a Roman citizen of considerable standing. Must have been so regarded - for any ordinary, every day sort of person was not permitted to take a test case to the highest court.

And we see him in Rome with every concession that can be granted to him, subject to the one, that he must be kept a prisoner until his case was heard.

And so, throughout this record there is emphasis upon the fact that Rome, in its administrative operations, again and again proved friendly and tolerant toward Paul.

Now before we come to the climax, there are just one or two details, not without their interest, that we would like you to look at, showing again this remarkable accuracy of Luke.

We have one in the report that Claudius Lysias made. This comes in Acts 23:26; he wrote a letter after this manner,

“Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting. This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman.”

Which indicates that what we describe in English as a euphemism, was not unknown to these men and they could just put the emphasis where they wanted. Or, if you go back to 21:33 you would have a little difficulty in recognizing the case just as Lysias put it;

“And the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done”.

Hardly the language of rescue. But the other was a more political form of putting it in his report to Claudius Lysias.

There is another illustration of the same thing, in what Festus has to say in chapter 25:9

“But Festus willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, wilt thou go up to Jerusalem there to be judged of these things before them?”

But when later, Festus is stating the case to Agrippa you will notice how delightfully he modulates the tone.

V20 *“And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters.”*

There is no reference to his willingness to show the Jews a pleasure.

But it is all part of the wonderfully accurate picture that Luke builds up and just as we compress his description of any scene to its utmost limit in determining his words, so we compress his descriptions of these men and so we can examine in the minutest detail, the record of the speeches that he has given to us.

Now we just might gather up one or two more threads in this record. We have seen, half humorously, how that the Roman officer who had to send Paul to Rome was a little flushed as to what to write. So there was obviously not a very clear cut case against Paul, and King Agrippa said that if he had not appealed unto Caesar he might have been set at liberty, for there was nothing worthy of death. In view of these preliminary pronouncements that there was nothing worthy of death, and that Paul ought to be acquitted, what was the issue of the trial?

Now when we come to the end of the Acts of the Apostles, we appear to find the matter undetermined. Paul met the Jews in Rome and talked with them and then Luke says; Chapter 28:30-31

“And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house and received all that came in unto him, preaching the Kingdom of God and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.”

And it would seem to us English readers as though the matter had not come to trial, but it had. And Luke tells us that it had. Now it is clear that when men from the provinces were sent to Rome, with all the possibilities of delay that marked even Paul's journey to Rome, that there could be long delays before a matter was brought to the issue in a court. And if a man had a very bad case, but had somehow managed to get his opponent under arrest, it was obviously good policy that he should delay as long as possible, his appearance at Court to present his case.

His opponent was out of the way and that was the most he could expect, and therefore there was an abuse of law, in accusers delaying to come before the authorities. Therefore, not very long before Paul was in Rome, an edict was passed by the Emperor that if there was a delay extending beyond a period of something like eighteen months and the accuser did not appear, there had to be a formal trial and an acquittal. And Luke therefore, by telling us that Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, is telling us that the accusers did not appear. There was a formal trial and Paul was acquitted.

But think what he carried with him in his acquittal. Roman law did not allow any form of worship as we have said. And the test case that Paul took to the highest authorities, secured for the brethren for the time being a 'charter of freedom' to worship God according to the Christian profession, without the law having any right to interfere, nay, since they were thus pursuing their course with the legal sanction of Rome, they were entitled to Roman protection.

There was a change not long afterwards. The early years of Nero were spent under the influence of two wise councillors, whom with Nero's growing strength in power and in years, he dismissed. And the Nero whose name has become so infamous in history, began to appear. And he caused a change in policy.

After the fire of Rome, and the blame was put upon the Christians, it had the effect of annulling this freedom that Paul had secured by this test case in Rome. And when Peter writes his Epistle he speaks of "any one suffering as a Christian." That means to say, that any follower of the Lord Jesus Christ from the time of the Roman fire, was suspect, and if proved to be a follower of Christ he could be punished with death. And that was the position of the

brethren and sisters after that period in Nero's life. What then does this record tell us in the light of that. Well it presents to us a parallel between the case of the Lord Jesus - he too was declared by the authorities that there was no cause for death in him. Yet such is the character of the world as embodied in its rulers, that they encompassed his death. The course of history of early Christianity, in its conflicts and strifes, in its difficulties within and without, yet was found to be not contrary to law, it was found to be not revolutionary in character concerning this present world's order. And yet despite the establishment of that fact, just as they crucified the Master so they reversed the decision and the Christians were persecuted. And the better the Emperor the more violent was the persecution during the first two centuries. A bad Emperor didn't bother his head so much about applying the law. And thus it was, those who were the ablest Emperors, because they applied the law were the worst enemies of the Christians.

But to anyone during those early days who tried to examine the beginnings of the Christian faith, when they were experiencing the bitterness of the conflict with the Roman authorities, must have found a help that it is possible eludes us, as they read read is masterly account of the inspired pen of Luke of the beginnings of Christianity.

And it has its value for us, as we said in our first address. How much do we know of what happened after the year 60, in the First century? Very little. Why? Because the records are so incomplete, so casual, the history has to be inferred from merely casual references in this or that writing. And it would have been the same with regard to the same for the first forty or fifty years but for this inspired record. But it was, in this inspired record taking it as far as it does, that we see the Divine energy at work in the progress of this movement. We see it established in fulfilment of the Lord's command that it should begin in Jerusalem and extend to Samaria and go outward to the Roman world. And even in the very head citadel, in the capital city of the Roman world, it was found that this Christian faith was not inimical to human interest, not revolutionary in character, but so well established was it even in the lifetime of the first generation, that a test case concerning its standing was before the highest authorities.

As Paul could say to Agrippa concerning the things connected with Jesus "these things were not done in a corner." They turned the Roman world upside down and there is no question about the truth of the origin of the Christian faith, and it surely couldn't have been better established, than by this writing of Luke.

Now we are conscious of many, many deficiencies in the course of this address. It really is a course that ought to extend over a whole winter, but it may be that what has been advanced will help you in your own individual studies to see a little more fuller light on the record, a greater understanding and appreciation of the blessed truth which has been revived in our own day. And if it should be, as was suggested in the address this morning, that there might be a reversal of our position in anyway in the struggles of the last days, why then, Acts will become a new book to us, because it will be a transcript from life that will then enter into our own experiences.