

# A PROSPEROUS JOURNEY

by Walton Weaver

Paul had a great desire to go to Rome. He knew however that if such an opportunity presented itself, God would have to open up the way. His prayer that God might do this for him is given to us in Romans 1:10: “Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.” He often shows his awareness of God’s involvement in the everyday affairs of his life by the use of the expression “if the Lord [God] wills” (see Acts 18:21; 1 Cor. 4:19; 16:7). We have to be careful lest we find ourselves living on the basis of human wilfulness rather than the Divine will.

God’s providential will is not always according to our own wishes or desires. When Paul prayed that he might have a prosperous journey to Rome he likely had in mind a pleasant and comfortable journey. But let’s notice how God answered Paul’s prayer.

## MANY HARDSHIPS ENDURED ON THE WAY

All was not easy. Things did not prove to be as pleasant and comfortable as Paul might have liked. After he prayed this prayer notice the kind of things that happened to him.

**1. *He was persecuted by the Jews.*** After Paul had come to Jerusalem for the last time, upon seeing him in the temple certain Jews from Asia “stirred up all the people and laid hands on him” (Acts 21:27). They accused him of teaching against the people, the law, and the temple. They also accused him of desecrating the temple by taking Gentiles into it, which they “supposed” he had done. After seizing Paul and dragging him out of the temple, they began beating him, and they set out to kill him, and would have done so, had it not been for the fact that word came to the chief captain of the band of soldiers that all of Jerusalem was in an uproar. They stopped beating Paul when they saw the chief captain and his soldiers. After he had been taken into custody by the chief captain (Acts 21:33), Paul asked to speak to the people and he was given permission to do so (Acts 21:39-40).

The Jews gave a receptive ear to Paul’s message until he spoke of his work among the Gentiles (Acts 22:21-22). “And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live. And they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air” (Acts 22:22-23). This led the chief captain to command that Paul be brought into the castle where he had planned to examine Paul by scourging. But this plan was abandoned when Paul informed him that he was a Roman. The next day the chief captain allowed him to present his case before the chief priests and their council. This permission was granted to Paul for his own personal benefit. The chief captain wanted to know “the certainty whereof he was accused of the Jews.”

In his speech before the council Paul intentionally turned the Pharisees and Sadducees against each other by making reference to the resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees sided with Paul since they believed in a resurrection from the dead (Acts 23:9). The dissension between the two groups became so severe that “the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle” (v. 10). The following night the Lord stood by Paul and said, “Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome” (v. 11). The next day Paul barely escaped a plot to kill him. He would not have escaped had it not been for a nephew who informed him of the plot. Paul sent him to the chief captain, who, upon learning of the plot, put together a large number of soldiers, horsemen, and spearmen to safely transport Paul to Caesarea.

**2. *He was brought before various Roman officials.*** In Caesarea Paul first appeared before Felix the governor. A letter had been sent by Claudius Lysias to the governor informing him of his rescue of Paul from the Jews and his knowledge of the nature of the charges brought against him which he had learned by Paul’s appearance before the Jewish council. He told the governor that their charges had to do with their law, and therefore Paul had “nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds” (Acts 23:29). When Felix learned that Paul was of the province of Cilicia he agreed to have Paul and his accusers brought before him to hear his case. (Acts 23:34-35). Luke gives an account of Paul defense before Felix in Acts 24. The last verse of this chapter tells us that Paul remained in prison in Caesarea for a period of two years, and at the end of this period Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus.

Only three days after succeeding Felix, Festus made a trip to Jerusalem. Upon his arrival at Jerusalem the Jews immediately made request of him that he would send for Paul to bring him to Jerusalem, “laying wait in the way to kill him” (Acts 25:3). Festus refused to give in to their request, but he did agree to allow their leaders to go to Caesarea and told them he would hear their case against Paul there. After hearing the charges against Paul and Paul’s answer, Festus would have allowed Paul to go to Jerusalem and be tried before the Jews there, but Paul refused, saying, “I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews I have done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I am an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar” (Acts 25:10-11).

In a matter of only a few days Agrippa came to Caesarea to visit Festus. After Festus had fully informed the king about Paul’s case, and the request Paul had made to appear before Caesar Augustus, Agrippa told Festus he would also hear Paul himself (Acts 25:22). Paul’s defense before Agrippa is reported by Luke in Acts 26. After hearing Paul’s case, Agrippa said to Festus, “This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar” (Acts 26:32).

**3. *He suffered shipwreck.*** Acts 27 gives a full account of Paul's trip by ship from Caesarea to Italy, and all the troubles encountered along the way. Not long after setting sail they began to encounter contrary winds. After some days of hard sailing and it had become certain that "sailing was now dangerous," Paul warned them not to proceed (Acts 27:10), but "the centurion believed the master and owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul" (Acts 27:11). So they set sail hoping to get to Phenice and winter there. But shortly after they had sailed by Crete there arose a "tempestuous wind, called Eurocydon" (Acts 27:14), and from that point onward shipwreck was inevitable. Luke gives a detailed account of all the attempts that were made to avoid it, but eventually everything was lost except that no life was taken, just as Paul had been promised by the angel of God (Acts 27:21-26). After coming onto the island Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake, but he "shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm" (Acts 28:5).

### **WAS PAUL'S JOURNEY A PROSPEROUS ONE?**

With all these hardships being encountered before he finally arrived in Rome — persecution by the Jews; arrest by the Romans, and imprisoned in Caesarea for two years; trials before Felix, Festus and Agrippa; suffering a shipwreck; being bitten by a viper — was Paul's journey to Rome a prosperous journey? This was what he had prayed for when he said, "Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you" (Rom. 1:10).

There are several reasons why we may say that Paul's journey to Rome was indeed a prosperous journey.

**1. *It was a journey made "by the will of God."*** Notice that on two occasions in particular the divine record tells us that the Lord stood by Paul to reassure him. After the chief captain rescued Paul from the hands of the Jews and took him into custody, the very next night "the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome" (Acts 23:11). Also, after Paul had been opposed by the centurion (Acts 27:11) and it was certain to Paul that the ship was going to be lost, Paul says, "there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul: thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee" (Acts 27:23-24). The Lord stands by those who stay close to him, so that their journey may be prosperous even though not free from adversity.

**2. *It was a journey that opened up doors of opportunity to testify of the Lord Jesus Christ.*** Before Felix Paul "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come" (Acts 24:25). Festus heard him speak of "one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive" (Acts 25:19). Paul was able to affirm before both Festus and Agrippa all

the work he had done among both the Jews and Gentiles: “Whereupon, O king Agrippa,” he said, “I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: But showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea , and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance” (Acts 26:19-20). He also preached Christ from the prophets and Moses, “that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:22-23). On the island of Melita Paul healed many people of diseases, and as a result these barbarous people loaded them with such things as were necessary for them to make their voyage on to Rome (Acts 28:1-10).

**3. *In Rome the same opportunities were afforded him.*** As Paul drew near to Rome his journey was prosperous because the brethren had heard about his coming and came out to meet him. When Paul saw them, he “thanked God and took courage” (Acts 28:15). Even while imprisoned at Rome he appears to have been given private quarters (Acts 28:16). During this two years imprisonment he had “his own hired house, and received all that come unto him. Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him” (Acts 28:30-31). During this two years period of imprisonment Paul wrote four of his letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. To the Philippians he said, “But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel” (Phil. 1:12), and, “All the saints salute you, chiefly they that of Caesar’s household” (Phil. 4:22) — meaning that he had had much success in reaching some in Caesar’s household with the gospel.

A prosperous journey indeed!!