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Q&A#152 The Trials of Paul

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Today's question: "I am wondering what you think about Luke's purpose in dedicating so much of his writings at the back end of the book of Acts to the legal proceedings involving Paul. What is he wanting to highlight by giving essentially a quarter of the book (chapters 21-28) to the details around these matters, including a very detailed account of the shipwreck (cf. Acts 27). One thought could be that Luke wants us to see Paul in the strain of the OT prophets. Similar to Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc. Luke shows Paul speaking truth to power, and repeats his calling moment (Damascus Rd experience) twice more in these final chapters. Is that it or is there more to it."

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Transcript

Welcome back. Today's question is, Perhaps the best way to think about this is by comparing the Book of Luke to the Book of Acts. At the beginning of the Book of Luke, we see an emphasis upon the Spirit, the Temple, and other things like that.

The Spirit descends upon Mary in the conception of Christ. The Spirit leads Simeon into

the Temple. Anna is praying constantly in the Temple.

And then later on, we see Christ being baptized by the Holy Spirit at the Jordan. Each one of those events anticipates something that we see at the beginning of the Book of Acts. Acts focuses upon the Temple at the people are gathered together in one place.

They are praying constantly. There is an emphasis upon the women along with the men in the 120 disciples. And then we also see the Spirit foregrounded.

The baptism of the Spirit that corresponds with the Spirit descending upon Christ at his baptism. And also the Spirit overshadowing Mary and the Spirit leading Simeon into the Temple. So there are parallels between the beginning of the two books.

As we look more carefully there, I think those parallels go quite deep down and they follow through in a number of different details. But those parallels between Luke and Acts continue throughout the rest of the book. And I think this is the key to the significance of the story of Paul's trials at the end of the imprisonment as he moves towards Jerusalem.

He's warned about the fact that he will be taken in chains and yet he undertakes that journey. We see elsewhere in the Book of Acts, people treading in the steps of Christ. Peter is taken into prison at the round the time of the Passover.

He's going to be put to death. The doors of the prison are opened. He appears to a woman in the house where the disciples are praying.

The disciples do not believe the woman. And then finally she goes back and they believe her. And then Peter is let in and then we don't see him much upon the scene after that.

That is a replaying of the story of Christ's death and resurrection at the time of Passover. Later on, the story of Paul's trials are four trials corresponding to the four trials that we see of Christ within the Gospel of Luke. So Christ is tried before the council.

He's tried before Pilate. He's tried before Herod and then he's sent back to Pilate again. In the story of Paul, Paul is arrested.

The mob calls for his destruction as we see in the case of Christ. He speaks to the people in the tribune and then he defends himself in the trial before the council. He's tried before Festus the governor, then before Festus and the Jews and then, or Felix the governor, then before Festus and the Jews, then before Agrippa and Bernice with Festus and then he's sent to Caesar and the shipwreck happens at that point.

As in the case of Christ, we're told that Paul did not, this man did nothing wrong. We see other features that are similar. There is a good centurion involved.

The centurion that says this surely was an innocent man in the case of Christ and the

centurion that prevents them from killing the prisoners in the story of the shipwreck. The story of the shipwreck has a number of details as well that might recall what happens earlier. In the story of the shipwreck, we read that they have to stay with Paul on the ship to be saved.

Paul on the 14th night, when the 14th night had come, as we were being driven across the Adriatic sea, about midnight, the sailors suspected that they were nearing land and then later on he says, today is the 14th day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing. Therefore I urge you to take some food, for it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you. And when he had said these things, he took bread and giving thanks to God in the presence of all, he broke it and began to eat.

Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves. We were in all 276 persons in the ship and when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea. This might recall the story of the Passover, 14th night.

It's not an accidental time. The fact that that detail is twice repeated, it seems that Paul wants us to recognise, Luke wants us to see the Passover sacrificial themes. Earlier on, he's connected the story of Peter being released from prison with the Passover.

Here there's another Passover deliverance and so they eat at that time and then there's a sacrifice as it were of the wheat. The 276 persons, I'm not sure what to make of that, it's 23 and the triangular number of 23, there are a number of triangular numbers in scripture, 153, 120, 666, etc. I'm not sure what to make of that particular figure here.

23, could it be connected with one short of 24? So Jews and Gentiles together perhaps? There's one short in the Last Supper which is paralleled with this. I'm not sure, it could be some connection. Other details that might recall what's taking place in the Gospels, all of them have to be gathered together and stay with Paul.

And there's a threat if anyone tries to leave, they will perish, but if they stay with Paul, they'll all be delivered. This is again a sort of Passover theme. Stay within the house and you'll all be saved.

Do not step outside. It's protected realm, outside there's death. So I think all of this is playing upon the background of the story of Luke, the three trials, or the journey towards Jerusalem, the three trials, the shipwreck corresponding with the crucifixion, and then the faithful centurion after the shipwreck event, and after the event of Christ's crucifixion.

There's a resurrection type story that follows. They're delivered out of the shipwreck, brought up onto the land. That's a form of deliverance.

But there's another form of deliverance here. There's the serpent that attacks Paul, and

he's delivered from the attack of the serpent. And again, that would seem to recall the story of Christ's death and resurrection.

And then he ends up in Rome. And in Rome, the story kind of ends without everything being resolved. There's a sort of conclusion at this point that looks back to perhaps Christ's completion of his mission.

And so I think that is the best way to understand this. The prophetic themes that the questioner asks about, I think, are also important because Luke is about prophetic themes more generally. The book of Matthew and Mark have, I think, it's eight and six percent respectively given to the story of the journey towards Jerusalem.

Whereas Luke, it's 35 percent. And so journeys are really important within Luke because Luke is interested in prophetic themes. Christ is the one who completes the ministries of the prophets.

He's the one who goes towards Jerusalem, and he dies in Jerusalem as the prophets were supposed to. In the same way, Paul goes towards Jerusalem as a prophet, and he is captured within Jerusalem. But then he's sent towards the ends of the earth.

He's sent towards the heart of the empire. And so this maybe is concluding other sorts of themes. I've remarked elsewhere upon the way that 1st and 2nd Samuel are important for understanding Luke and Acts.

But I think 1st and 2nd Kings are also important. The beginning of 1st Kings is the establishment of a new kingdom, a new regime that the Davidic king is leaving the scene, David, and establishing a new regime with Solomon, giving him instructions concerning the kingdom. Solomon sets up the new rulers, and then there's a gift of wisdom.

And I think that's what we see at the beginning of the book of Acts. And at the end of the book of 2nd Kings, it makes me wonder whether there's some connection with the state of Jehoiakim at the house of the king of Babylon. So it's part of the prophetic literature, the story of the kings.

That's the background for prophetic literature. But Paul has arrived at the heart of the empire. He's someone who's protected by Caesar at this point.

He's under house arrest, and he's able to speak to people. And I wonder whether we're supposed to see some sort of parallel between his state and that of Evil Merodach in his treatment of Jehoiakim. Elsewhere in the Gospels, we can see the Old Testament narrative providing some sort of template for the account.

We see that again, I think, in the book of Matthew. Matthew begins with recalling the story of Genesis and then ends up with the conclusion of 2nd Chronicles. So if you read

the very end of 2nd Chronicles and think, where have I heard this before? It shouldn't be hard to figure out.

Now in the first year of Cyrus, or thus says Cyrus, king of Persia, the Lord, the king of heaven, the God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has charged me to build my house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him. Let him go up.

That's the great commission of the Old Testament. It's the conclusion of the books of the Old Testament. And here, I think we see something similar.

There's the template of first and second kings, the prophetic themes coming to the fore. So Paul undergoes a Christ-like experience. He has tried four times and yet he's found innocent.

He defends himself before the Jews and he defends himself before the Romans, before the Herod, Agrippa and Bernice, and then also before the Roman governors, before Festus and Felix. And so all these stories are very similar. There's the council, tribe before the council, tribe before Roman governors, tribe before the Herod.

And then he experiences a sort of death and resurrection event in the shipwreck and in the event with the snake that follows. He's delivered through that. There's a faithful centurion and then finally ends up in Rome.

He's arrived at his destination and the mission is complete in some sense. And so I think that's the best background to understand what's taking place. At some point, I want to do a complete series on the book of Acts and get into each one of these chapters in considerable detail.

But for now, I hope that helps to explain the structure of the end of the book of Acts and the focus upon the trials. Thank you very much for listening. If you'd like to support this and other podcasts and videos like it, please do so using my Patreon or my PayPal account.

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