



PART 4

EPILOGUE

Chapter Twelve

THE MEASURE OF A LEADER'S SUCCESS

THE TEAM HE BUILT THE TRIALS HE SUFFERED THE TREACHERY HE ENDURED

The Fainthearted Believers in Rome

There were many more. In [verse 16](#), Paul described how he was abandoned by *everyone* soon after his arrest: “**At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them**” ([2 Timothy 4:16 NASB](#)).

We can piece together what had apparently happened from the sparse details Paul gave. He was most likely tracked down and captured somewhere in the Roman Empire, likely far from Rome.

Paul may well have been singled out by Nero personally because he had already appeared before the emperor, and he was well-known as a leader of the church. Therefore, when Nero began to persecute Christians, he would have specifically targeted Paul.

Once arrested, Paul would immediately have been transported to Rome for trial. This time Luke probably would not have been permitted to accompany him; the physician would have to arrange his own travel and arrive later.

As soon as Paul reached Rome, he would have been arraigned. The Roman court system demanded that he be given an opportunity to defend himself at that initial hearing. That is most likely what he was describing as his “**first defense.**” It apparently occurred before Luke or Onesiphorus ([2 Timothy 1:16](#)), or any of Paul’s usual companions were able to reach Rome.

2 Timothy 1:16 (NASB)

¹⁶“The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.”

But the church at Rome was filled with believers who knew Paul well. Paul probably anticipated that some of them would testify on his behalf or at least show up at the trial for moral support. But no one did.

2 Timothy 4:10 (NASB)

¹⁰“For Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens *has gone* to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.”

“All deserted me.” He used the same verb he used to speak of Demas’s defection: *egkatalipo*. They left him in the lurch. They abandoned him at a crucial time. They were no doubt embarrassed or afraid to be identified with Paul because of the persecution. Such deliberate neglect of the great apostle who had given so much for them was unthinkable.

2 Timothy 4:16 (NASB)

¹⁶“At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; **may it not be counted against them.**”

Notice Paul’s prayer for them: “**May it not be charged against them**” (v. 16). This makes a stark contrast with his words about Alexander. That’s because Alexander’s treachery was driven by evil motives. The people who were no-shows at Paul’s defense were most likely driven by their own fears and frailty. They were fainthearted, not false hearted.

Paul’s wish for them is reminiscent of Stephen, who said of those who were stoning him to death, “**Lord, do not charge them with this sin**” (Acts 7:60).

Acts 7:60 (NASB)

⁶⁰“Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, “**Lord, do not hold this sin against them!**” Having said this, he fell asleep.”

And it reflects the spirit of Christ, who from the cross prayed, “**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do**” (Luke 23:34).

Luke 23:34 (NASB)

³⁴“But Jesus was saying, “**Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.**” And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.”

THE TRIUMPH HE OBTAINED

Abandoned by his friends, hated by his enemies, Paul might have felt like giving up in despair. But instead he wrote:

2 Timothy 4:17-18 (NASB)

¹⁷“But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles

might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth.

¹⁸ The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Christ has promised, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” ([Hebrews 13:5](#)). Indeed, when everyone else forsook Paul, Christ stood by him.

[Hebrews 13:5 \(NASB\)](#)

⁵ “Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “**I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU.**”

Paul would have been put on trial in a large basilica teeming with hostile people. Nero himself may have overseen the proceedings, considering the importance of the prisoner. There Paul stood, without an advocate, without any witnesses on his behalf, and with no one to defend him. He was absolutely alone and helpless in front of an imperial court that, from the human point of view, held his life in their hands.

But the Lord stood with him and strengthened him. The Greek verb for “strengthened” speaks of an infusion of power. Paul began to feel Christ’s empowerment in his spirit, enabling him to be the human instrument through which the gospel was fully preached, so that all the Gentiles might hear.

That moment was, in effect, the pinnacle of Paul’s ministry and the fulfillment of his deepest desire. He was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles. Rome was the cosmopolitan center of the pagan world. Paul had long sought an opportunity to preach the gospel in such a venue before the world’s most important political leaders and philosophical trendsetters. This was that opportunity. In the midst of it, Paul was strengthened by the Spirit of Christ to speak boldly and thoroughly.

[2 Timothy 4:17 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁷ “But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and **I was rescued out of the lion’s mouth.**”

“I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion,” he wrote ([v. 17](#)). That’s probably figurative language (cf. [Psalm 22:21](#); [Psalm 35:17](#)) meaning he was spared immediate execution. God delivered him from that perilous tribunal and turned it into an opportunity to preach a strategic gospel message.

[Psalm 22:21 \(NASB\)](#)

²¹ “Save me from the lion's mouth; From the horns of the wild oxen You answer me.”

[Psalm 35:17 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁷ “Lord, how long will You look on? Rescue my soul from their ravages, My only *life* from the lions.”



But it didn't end his imprisonment or permanently end the danger to Paul's life. He *would* eventually be executed. And he knew that. But notice that even while acknowledging that his death was imminent, the apostle Paul could write, "**The Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom**" ([v. 18](#)). The deliverance he sought was an eternal reality, not a rescue from temporal or earthly tribulations.

2 Timothy 4:18 (NASB)

¹⁸ "The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen."

When Paul thought of the certainty of that deliverance, he could not resist a glad expression of worship: "**To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!**" ([v. 18](#)). This was authentic triumph. And Paul could enjoy it fully despite his circumstances.

Finally, Paul closed both the epistle and the final chapter of his life with some assorted greetings to old friends, news about key ministry partners, and greetings from select people in the church at Rome:

2 Timothy 4:19-22 (NASB)

¹⁹ "Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus.

²⁰ Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus.

²¹ Make every effort to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, also Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren.

²² The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you."

Notice the remaining names of people who also were part of Paul's extended network:

Priscilla and Aquila

Priscilla and Aquila are familiar to us. They were the couple who worked with Paul in the tent-making trade during his first visit to Corinth ([Acts 18:2-3](#)).

Acts 18:2-3 (NASB)

² "And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them,

³ and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers."

They left Corinth with Paul and traveled with him to Ephesus ([vv. 18-19](#)).

Acts 18:18-19 (NASB)

¹⁸ "Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow.

¹⁹ They came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews."

Having learned so much from Paul, they patiently taught Apollos ([v. 26](#)).



Acts 18:26 (NASB)

²⁶“And he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.”

Thus, Paul’s influence extended to Apollos through the ministry of this couple. They were the instruments God used to help bring Apollos to maturity, and Apollos became a powerful extension of Paul’s ministry and leadership

When Paul wrote Romans about six years later, Aquila and Priscilla were living in Rome (**Romans 16:3**).

Romans 16:23 (NASB)

²³“Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother.”

They apparently left Rome during the brutal persecution of the Jews carried out by Emperor Claudius. From there they went back to Ephesus and hosted the Ephesian church in their house, because when Paul wrote **1 Corinthians** (from Ephesus), he sent greetings to old friends in Corinth on behalf of Aquila and Priscilla and “**the church that is in their house**” (**1 Corinthians 16:19**).

1 Corinthians 16:19 (NASB)

¹⁹“The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.”

So, this was a couple that had traveled extensively with Paul for years. They were old friends and longtime fellow workers. Paul sent them greetings.

The Household of Onesiphorus

Onesiphorus may have been in Rome with Paul when Paul sent greetings back to his household in Ephesus. In **2 Timothy 1:16–17**, Paul mentioned that Onesiphorus had frequently refreshed him without being ashamed of Paul’s imprisonment.

2 Timothy 1:16-17 (NASB)

¹⁶“The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains;
¹⁷but when he was in Rome, he eagerly searched for me and found me.”

Moreover, when Onesiphorus had first come to Rome, he zealously sought Paul out. He arrived, apparently, soon after that bitter experience at Paul’s trial when no one had stood with him. So, Paul was obviously very grateful for Onesiphorus’s singular kindness to him.

Erastus

Paul then reported that “Erastus stayed in Corinth” (**2 Timothy 4:20**).



2 Timothy 4:20 (NASB)

²⁰“Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus.”

This is most likely the same Erastus mentioned in [Acts 19:22](#), who had ministered alongside Timothy in Macedonia.

Acts 19:22 (NASB)

²²“And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.”

Here was another old friend, a longtime fellow worker, with whom Paul still had a close connection. Now Erastus was apparently helping lead the church in Corinth, and Paul wanted Timothy to stay in contact with him.

Trophimus

Next on Paul’s list is another beloved old friend, Trophimus. According to [Acts 20:4](#), Trophimus was from Asia Minor.

Acts 20:4 (NASB)

⁴“And he was accompanied by Sopater of Berea, *the son* of Pyrrhus, and by Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia.”

He also had left his home in order to travel with Paul and work alongside the apostle. He had helped bring the Gentile offering to the poor Christians in Jerusalem. On the way, he traveled through Troas with Paul and was there when Eutychus fell out of the window and was resurrected. When they arrived in Jerusalem, the Jews took notice of Trophimus because he was presumably a Gentile. When they saw Paul in the temple, they wrongly assumed he had Trophimus with him, and that was the incident that led to Paul’s first arrest ([Acts 21:29](#)).

Acts 21:29 (NASB)

²⁹“For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.”

Now Trophimus was sick, and Paul had left him at Miletus. He must have been rather seriously ill, because Miletus is only about thirty-six miles from his home in Ephesus. We can safely assume that Paul would have healed him if possible. But here is rather dramatic evidence that even before the death of the apostle Paul, the apostolic gifts of healing and miracles (“**the signs of an apostle**” [[2 Corinthians 12:12](#)]) were beginning to cease, or had ceased already. It obviously wasn’t the plan of God to heal Trophimus, but Paul had not forgotten his dear friend.

2 Corinthians 12:12 (NASB)

¹²“The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.”



Some Faithful New Friends

In closing, Paul sent greetings from a few believers in Rome who had not been scattered in the persecution: **“Eubulus greets you, as well as Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and all the brethren.”** We know nothing of these people, but they furnish evidence that even in his worst extremity, the apostle Paul’s influence was still powerful and active. Even in the worst kind of persecution, people were still coming to Christ, and Paul was still ministering to them.

Finally, here was the sum of Paul’s situation: He was in a fetid hole in the ground. Demas was gone. Crescens was ministering elsewhere. Titus was in Dalmatia. Tychicus had been sent to Ephesus. Priscilla, Aquila, Onesiphorus and family, Erastus, and Trophimus were all scattered, carrying on the work Paul had begun. Only Luke was still with the apostle. A few believers in the church at Rome had also lately befriended him. But he longed to see his son in the faith one more time, to finish passing the baton of leadership.

So, he said in [verse 21](#), **“Do your utmost to come before winter.”**

2 Timothy 4:21 (NASB)

²¹ **“Make every effort to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, also Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren.”**

The appeal is full of pathos and melancholy, even though Paul himself was triumphant. He knew the day of his departure was at hand. Yet he also knew that if Timothy delayed they’d never see each other face-to-face on earth again, and Paul still had much more in his heart to say. Thus, the tender plea that sums up and ends this epistle.

Was Paul a failure as a leader? Not in the least. His continuing influence in the lives of so many people gives ample proof of the effectiveness of his leadership to the very end. He had kept the faith. He had fought a good fight. He had finished his course with joy. *That* was his legacy in this life, and through eternity.