

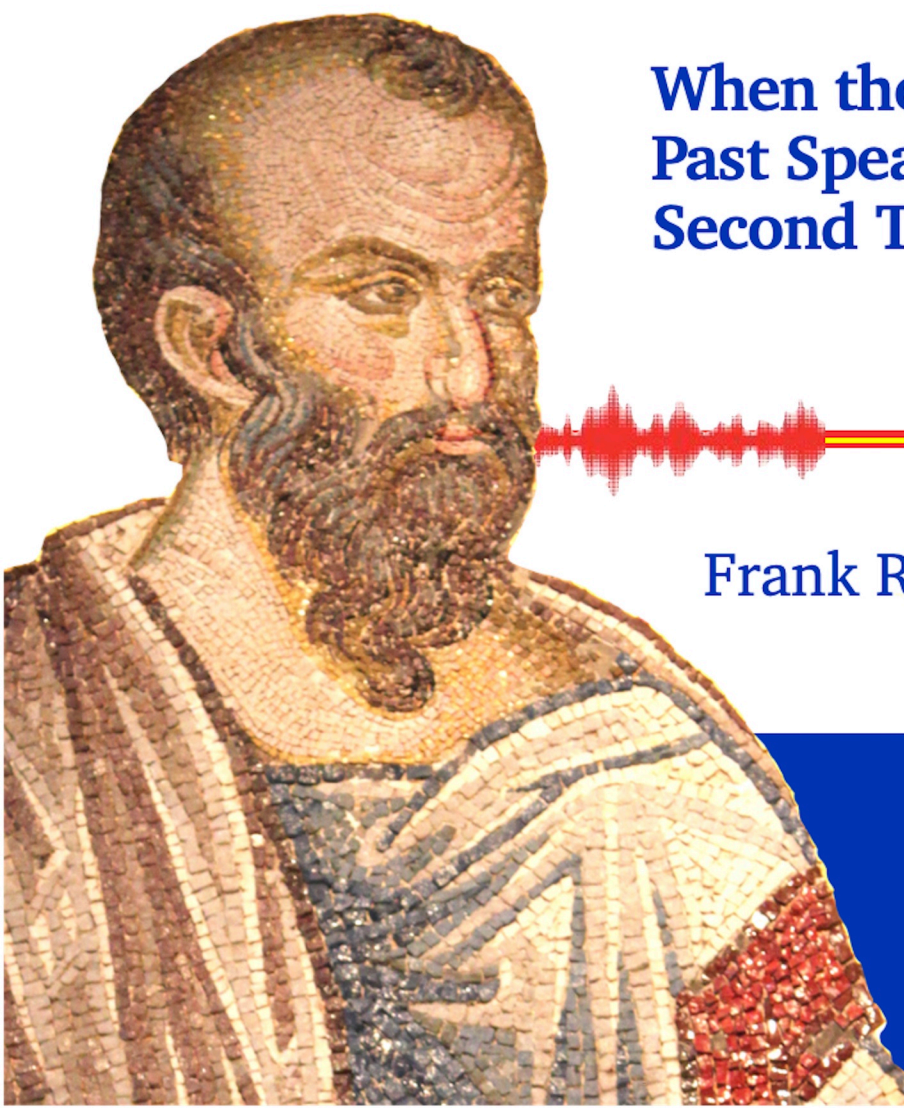
New scientific technology allows researchers to eavesdrop into the past with unexpected results. Their contact with the Apostle Paul gives new insights, but they soon realize the government has another purpose for their discovery.

I am Paul, the Apostle
By Frank Roe

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I am Paul, the Apostle

When the
Past Speaks a
Second Time



Frank Roe

I am Paul, the Apostle
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The actual quoting of Scripture is from the King James Bible (1769, 2008). Other use of Scripture is a conversational paraphrase of character dialogue. References are given for most statements.

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Prologue

First Century Israel

Joseph sat down into the chair his son had made in their shop. Without a doubt, it was the most comfortable chair he had ever sat in. He and Joshua had worked long that day finishing the table on which their cups of water now sat. Tomorrow morning, they would deliver the table to the synagogue just beyond the hill. Over the course of the day, they discussed many things including Joshua's plans for the months ahead.

With the day now over, Joshua picked up their two cups and told his father he was going into the house to help his mother prepare the evening meal. As he walked out the door, Joshua stopped and turned towards Joseph, saying that his father should answer the rock when the voice spoke to him.

Confused, Joseph looked at his son, now walking toward the house and said, "What voice?" Joseph shook his head once again in amazement at the words of his son, until he heard a scratching noise that seemed to come from one of the foundation stones.

"Shalom, Joseph."

First Century Israel

The Pharisees were one of two major groups who ruled the Jews in Jerusalem under Roman oversight. They numbered well over 5,000 in Jerusalem alone, making them the largest of all the religious groups in the city. The Pharisees were traditional and orthodox in their position, but added many additional rules to the Law of Moses.

The Sadducees were much more liberal, desiring to include many of the beliefs and customs from other cultures in the religion of the Jews. Though much smaller in number, their great wealth gave them more political power, providing them with the advantage and control of the ruling body of the Jews, the Sanhedrin.

Jacob was a blessed man. He was a Pharisee and truly loved the Lord with all his heart, mind, and soul. Jacob tried to obey the Law in every part of his life just as God had commanded. The Lord had given him a good wife, two obedient children, and a business that gave him riches beyond what he had ever imagined. Truly, God had been good to him, well beyond what he deserved. He often thanked Him by praying, "Thank you, my God, for your blessings. May my family live and give you praise. May I trust You, have faith in You, and Your plan."

He had worked in the tent-making business in Tarsus, Cilicia since he was a young man. Jacob understood the trade far beyond simply sewing material into a tent and dreamed of a bigger future. Borrowing money from a family friend, he began his own shop, making a new style of tents for shepherds and travelers. The tents soon caught the attention of a Roman army officer. With a few changes, orders began to come in for hundreds of tents at a price that made dealing and supplying the Romans tolerable.

The Romans were pleased with what they received and eventually granted full citizenship to Jacob and his wife to strengthen the business relationship. Though Jacob was never pleased with having to work with

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the Romans, this privileged position granted him additional business of which he took every advantage.

The business grew greatly, and Jacob's wealth benefited the city and its citizens with steady employment and provision for many families. The business after a few years expanded across the empire, and it was not long before Jacob moved the family to Jerusalem. There they were able not only to grow further into Egypt, but also to have the privilege to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem.

Jacob was an obedient and strict Pharisee. He faithfully attended the Temple for many of the regular sacrifices and without exception, each of the required feasts. He would often sit for hours on the barrier wall surrounding the Temple to discuss and debate the popular questions of the day. Jacob was a Pharisee who closely followed the more lenient teachings of the school of Hillel. Even so, he had become friends with some who were part of other sects of the Pharisees, such as the more restrictive followers of Shammai.

While not as violent as the Zealots, the Pharisees who were followers of Shammai, were known for their intense passion for the Law and typically stood in stark opposition to almost every position taken by the House of Hillel. Jacob's friend, Simon was a follower of Shammai. The two men had become close over the years through their discussions together. Both loved the Lord and stood firm on the Law, but as a follower of the House of Shammai, Simon had no respect or involvement with the Romans.

During one of their times together, their two sons met and soon became friends. Saul was the only son of Jacob and had a sharp mind, even for his age. It was still two years before he would be ready for his *Bar Mitzvah* at the age of thirteen, but already, his father would discuss Moses and the Prophets with him. Jacob hoped Saul would be accepted to the House of Hillel to be educated in the faith by the new young Rabbi Gamaliel, but it was in the hands of God.

Simon only had one child, Judas. He was the same age as Saul but a full handbreadth taller. Judas was also sharp in his thinking but was focused more on his own desires, rather than the details of the Law. His talks with

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his father occasionally would become filled with strong emotion, which each would carry with them into the next day. Lastly, Judas had the gift of selling the products of his father's business. Many found that any attempt where someone tried to barter with him for a better price was almost useless.

The two boys would often sit near their fathers and listen in on the discussions between the two men. Later, they would repeat the discussions between themselves, but using their own ideas to try and convince the other. Saul would almost always win the game, but Judas frequently pointed out flaws in their thinking with his passion and forcefulness. The disagreements between the boys never lasted very long, but, at times, Judas would remind Saul of his mistakes days later.

Judas was the first of the two boys to celebrate his *Bar Mitzvah* in becoming a man. All of Bethany where Simon lived turned out to honor the young man. Judas would now be counted as one of the Jewish men of the town and no longer sit with the women in the synagogue. Now he would be included with the men and have a voice with them. Beginning today he would become a partner with his father in the market and eventually run it for the family. He would also have the opportunity to join his father as a Pharisee, standing for the purity and respect of the Law.

All of this excited young Judas, except for the offer to become a member of the Pharisees. While he wanted to please his father, his heart was in the marketplace, not in trying to impress others with how devout he was. He wanted to be a good Jew but desired their business to expand into Jerusalem and for the family to become wealthy. Once this took place, he would honor his father and family with his love for God, Moses, the Torah, and the Temple, but he would also have a better life.

Less than two months later, Saul also had his *Bar Mitzvah*. He was now recognized and celebrated for having become a Jewish man. Jacob was exceedingly proud of his son, and many friends came by the home in the morning to congratulate Saul.

At noon, the *tefillin* box containing portions of the Scriptures was wrapped around his head and left arm with leather straps. Saul and his

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father began the walk from their home, making their way to the Temple. As they walked along the streets, many people gave Saul words of praise and encouragement.

Once at the Temple, his father handed him a full silver shekel of Tyre and told him this would be the last money he would give his son as an offering to God. From this day forward, Saul must give to God from his own heart and means. When Saul presented the coin to a priest, the priest laid his hands on Saul's head, giving a prayer of commitment of the young man to God.

As they walked back home, Jacob asked if Saul would be interested in attending the School of Hillel to study their faith more intensely. They had talked of it before, but never so directly. Saul asked about the business and if this meant he would not take it over, but his father assured him this would not be a problem. Their steps became quiet until they were almost home. Then Saul stopped, turned to his father, and said, "I will enter the House of Hillel to study the Law, the Prophets, and become a Pharisee."

First Century Israel

Saul had seen him in Jerusalem at the Temple many times when he was younger, but his father usually did not permit him to talk with others during the feasts. Until he had become a man, it was Saul's responsibility to stay by the side of his father. Saul judged the man to be a few years older than himself. He was most likely from out of the province of Judea, probably Galilee by the way he was dressed and the sound of his voice. If he was from Galilee, it meant he would not be as highly respected as someone from Judea, but his manner and actions showed he most likely came from a high-class family.

It was now midday, and when Saul saw him in the crowd, he walked straight up to him. The young man turned and looked at Saul, which surprised him.

"*Shalom*, I am Saul," he said trying to sound as mature as possible. "I have seen you before at the feasts, but this is my first chance to speak with you. Are you from Galilee?"

The young man looked at Saul for a few moments before speaking. "My name is Joshua, and yes, my father and I attend all the required feasts each year. My father, Joseph, is a builder of houses and goods in Nazareth, but I was born in Bethlehem." He stopped and paused again as he looked at Saul with eyes that seemed to know him.

"And your father is a Pharisee of many years," Joshua stated.

"He is," Saul said, "but how did you know this?"

"I have seen you with him many times, and he often wore the garments of a Pharisee, so it was not difficult to know this. He speaks well of the Law, and I have seen he is a respected man. I'm sure he is teaching you well and will be blessed by you."

Saul had celebrated his *Bar Mitzvah* just a few months earlier, so this was his first feast not to be by his father's side. He had looked forward to this

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time to have the opportunity to meet others who were about his same age. Joshua had been one he had wanted to meet for some time and as they talked further, Saul learned there was just over three years difference in their age. Both were under the traditional apprenticeship of learning the family business from their fathers, so it gave them something to talk about as they began to get to know each other.

This was the beginning of the friendship between young Joshua and the younger Saul. They would see each other several times a year at the Temple feasts, along with other young men, such as Saul's friend, Judas. Often, the two of them would sit together eating meals and talking for hours on end about Moses, the Temple, the teachings of the Torah, and how they each understood the doings of God.

Three

The clock on the computer said it was 9:22 in the morning when the phone rang in my office. The cell phone display said the call was from Israel, so I knew it was 5:22 in the afternoon in Jerusalem. The voice was clear, though I did not recognize it.

“Hello. Is this Professor Dennis James?” The man had a slight English accent and sounded like he was perhaps close to my age.

“Yes, it is, and who might be calling me from Israel at the end of your day?”

The man laughed, “Oh, my! Aren’t these phones amazing? You already know where I am calling from. My name is Dr. Vernon Holden. I am a physicist working on a project here in Jerusalem. Your name was recommended to me by a mutual friend, Dr. Stephen Budding.”

Now that was a name I knew well. Stephen had been a teaching colleague from my first days of standing at the front of a college classroom. To say he had taken me under his wing was an understatement, as I owed him much more than just helping me with my first days of teaching. He taught Ancient Languages, while I taught History focusing primarily on the first-century Roman Empire.

Our discussions were long and often went into the early morning hours. Mildred, his wife of many years, would make a pot of the strongest coffee you have ever tasted, give Stephen a good night kiss, and just smile as she went up to bed. About five years ago she had passed away, but Stephen had handled his loss well. Whenever it would come up in conversation, he simply said, “I know where she is, and someday I’ll be there too.”

Thirty-five years ago, I would have dismissed the comment, but many of those long, late-night talks had found their way into my mind. The conversations began with the Romans and soon the impact of first-century Christianity came up. Of course, this new sect of the Jews would eventually develop into the largest religion in the world. That had to be taken under

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consideration, but I argued the key to it all was the governance of Rome. Stephen would laugh and say that without Christianity, Rome would have never been more than a bankrupt society, both culturally and financially, which we both agreed was close to the truth.

I considered Stephen an academic more than a theologian, but soon he incorporated the New Testament into our historical discussions. As the conversations expanded, I came to see the historical figure of Jesus differently, until finally, I understood that Jesus was more than simply a moral teacher and a holy man. One night, well after midnight, Stephen asked me if I would consider asking Jesus to be my Savior, and I said yes.

In the years that followed, we would teach and prod each other onto greater things, both spiritually and academically. When the offer came from my current university to take the position of heading a department, I told Stephen even before I told my wife, Beth.

He simply said, “Dennis, take this position now before they change their mind. You’re too humble to think you should, but you’re too brilliant not to take it. That school needs you and your knowledge.”

Beth agreed and soon we moved to Chicago. Stephen was now retired from teaching, but our long conversations still regularly took place.

“How can I help you, Dr. Holden?”

“Well first, please call me Vernon. Formality among friends should never exist.” I smiled, having had this new friend for all of thirty seconds, but I could tell being friends with him would be easy.

“We are working on a project here in Jerusalem and could use someone like you to help guide us.”

I had to ask, “Now Vernon, what does a physicist need from a first-century historian? It’s not often that physics and history walk together.”

“That’s just it. They don’t mix well, but in certain situations, they do play together on the same court. We need you here, and if you are willing to visit us on this knowledge alone, I know you will be interested. Can you please come? I will book all your flights and accommodations for you. It is short notice but we’d like you here next week if possible, and we want

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you to bring your wife. We will have you here with us as long as you are interested and will take care of everything for you.”

My schedule was clear for the next few weeks as I looked up on the wall calendar. “Please give me 48 hours to discuss this with my wife. Since I had planned on doing research this summer, I imagine it will work out.”

Beth was immediately sold on the idea. We had been to Israel twice before, so she had plans and an agenda within minutes of hearing the offer. She asked very little about what I would be doing, which was fine with me since I didn’t even know.

I confirmed the following morning by replying to an email I had received from Dr. Holden soon after our phone conversation. Within an hour he replied with links to first-class tickets for Tel Aviv, Israel. He also sent us several contact numbers with instructions as to who would pick us up. Once again, he promised everything would be taken care of and that we had no need to worry about anything.

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Rev. Frank Roe has been in missions for over 45 years with a focus on teaching, mobilization, and leadership training.

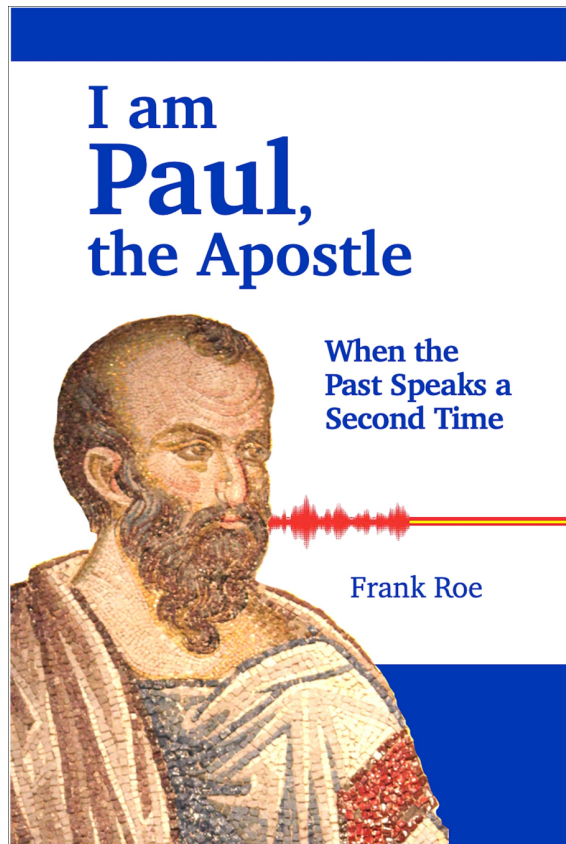
He has been a speaker and guest lecturer in more than a dozen Bible colleges and Bible institutes around the world. He primarily teaches the book of Acts but has also taught a number of other courses including Leviticus, Judges, and the gospels of Luke and John.

He has a B.S. in Christian Education, an M.A. in Christian Leadership, and a Doctorate in Practical Theology.

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