

THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF PAUL

by
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Many years ago I read an 850 page book "The Life and Epistles of St. Paul" by Conybeare and Howson. That book impacted my life in a very profound way. While this book is not like theirs in length, or scholarship, it was their monumental effort that inspired it. The word "scholar" and "school", as you know, come from the Greek word "schole" which means "leisure". In much of the world today "school" is still a luxury denied to many. In fact, most people in the world do not have the time or information for profound study. It is hoped that this small volume, though it is not scholarly, will still be of some help for those who labor in the trenches of world evangelism.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this work is to help understand the way the Holy Spirit worked in the life of the Apostle Paul. Hopefully this will help us to be more effective in our own service. The primary source of this information will come from two sources:

1. The book of Acts.
2. The letters Paul wrote.

In the course of our study we will try to place Paul's inspired letters in a chronological sequence with the book of Acts. Paul was inspired by God to write more books of the Bible than any other man. Perhaps a broader and deeper understanding of him will help us understand the working of God in our own lives..

CHAPTER 1

THE FULLNESS OF TIME

"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law . . . " (Gal 4:4)

Let us begin our study with Jesus. He is the Alpha and the Omega. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He must be the focal point of every life. Whatever we do in word or deed we are to do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father through Him (Col. 3:17). Paul wrote that God sent His Son when the time had fully come. It takes nine months for a baby to be fully developed and ready for birth. During this same period of time the body of the mother is also changing so that she can deliver and nourish her new baby. This terminology is certainly appropriate with reference to the birth of Jesus. Not only was Jesus born when Mary was fully ready, but also when the world was ready. There were many factors involved in the simple expression that Jesus was born when "the time had fully come".

Prophecies

The first prediction of the coming of Jesus is in Gen. 3:15. That promise was repeated to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3); Isaac (Gen. 26:4); and Jacob (Gen. 28:14). It was also predicted that Jesus would be born from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10). Daniel predicted that there would be four great world empires before Jesus came (Dan. 2:24-49; 7:15-28) Daniel also predicted the exact time when the Messiah would come (Daniel 9:25-27) Micah predicted the

city of His birth (Micah 5:2). Isaiah predicted that He would be born of a virgin (Is. 7:14) Etc. There were literally hundreds of prophecies about the coming of Jesus and every one of them was fulfilled. Truly, Jesus was born when the time had fully come.

Jews, Greeks, and Romans

We are told in Luke 23:38 and John 19:20 that when our blessed Savior was crucified a sign was put on His cross in letters of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. These three languages and cultures play an important role in the life and ministry of Paul.

Hebrew - We are told in Phil. 3: that Paul was born of the people of Israel, from the tribe of Benjamin, and that he was a Hebrew of Hebrews. The Hebrew language was therefore his first language, and the Hebrew culture would be an integral part of his thinking. The Old Testament Scriptures were originally written in Hebrew.

Greek - About three hundred years before Christ a Greek King by the name of Alexander the Great conquered the world. He spread the Greek language and culture throughout the world where Paul would preach. Anyone who could not speak the Greek language was considered a barbarian. Paul, of course, could speak Greek (Acts 22:37). The New Testament Scriptures were originally written in Greek.

Latin - Latin was the language of Rome. That city was founded about 753 B.C. and over the next few hundred years Rome became one of the most powerful empires in the history of the world. By 133 B.C. they had conquered Macedonia and Asia Minor. Their power would ultimately extend from Arabia to Great Britain and from Spain to Armenia. Rome ruled the world when Jesus was born. Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem because of a decree from a Roman Emperor (Lk. 2:1). Jesus was tried before Roman officials and crucified upon a Roman cross. Paul was born a Roman citizen (Acts 22:28). When he sought justice he appealed to the court of Caesar in Rome (Acts 25:10). As we mentioned before, the New Testament Scriptures were originally written in Greek, not Latin. This is even true of Paul's letter to Rome which he dictated to Tertius around A.D. 58.

Birth Place of Jesus

While all the world was influenced by powerful governments, their influence was especially significant in the land where Jesus was born. This land, as you recall, was promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob hundreds of years before it came to pass (Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-17, etc.) Perhaps one reason God promised this land to His people was because of its strategic location. It was the cross roads of the ancient world. Bounded on the west by the Mediterranean Sea and on the east by the Arabian desert the great kingdoms of this world were forced to travel through this tiny little country as they expanded their horizons. Whether their intentions were military or economic, their footsteps inevitably traversed that land which was and is a focal point of Biblical prophecy.

The Greek language

It is not by accident that the New Testament Scriptures were originally written in the Greek language. It is, perhaps, the most expressive written language ever devised by man. Most languages, for example, have only one word for love. The Greeks had four. (1) *Eros* refers to sexual love. (2) *Philia* refers to the love you have for a friend. (3) *Storge* is the word for love within a family. (4) *Agape* is that kind of love which originates with God and comes to man by means of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). It seeks only the highest good for others, even those who are enemies (Matt. 5:43-48).

Not only is the Greek language a treasure chest of uniquely descriptive words, but the Greeks also had a way of emphasizing words in writing that speakers do by voice inflection. Surely God had a reason for selecting this language to record for the first time the glorious truth of His New Covenant.

Travel

The Roman Government built thousands of miles of highways, some of which are still in use today. According to *Ludwig's Handbook of New Testament Rulers and Cities*, they began highway construction with a 12 inch foundation of small stones mixed with clay or cement. This was covered with 10 inches of rammed concrete known as *rudens*. Over this was another layer of rolled concrete from 12 to 18 inches thick. This was topped with the *summa crusta* made of slabs of lava or silex that was from 8 to 12 inches thick. In Italy alone there were 372 main routes and 12,000 miles of paved highway. Though out the empire there were 51,000 miles of primary highways supplemented by a network of secondary roads.

Normally a chariot could average 40 or 50 miles a day on these roads, but in an emergency they could move faster. At the time of Nero's suicide, for example, a messenger got the news to Galba, Spain (332 miles away) in 36 hours. Tiberias traveled even faster, covering 600 miles in 3 days to get to the bedside of his dying brother.

Travel by sea was also common in this era. Ships followed establish routes carrying both merchandise and passengers. Many of these ships were large enough to carry 600 passengers in addition to many tons of cargo. The story of Paul's travel by ship to Rome in Acts 27, and 28 provides insight on this subject. One ship Paul was on had 276 passengers in addition to other cargo (Acts 27:18, 37).

Postal System

An elaborate postal system was perfected by Augustus Caesar. It was called in Latin "*cursis publicus*". This was the emperor who was ruling when Jesus was born. The heart of the system involved the use of innumerable relays of horses. According to Acts 16:11 Paul entered Europe through the sea port called Neapolis. That city came to be known as *Kavalla* coming from the Latin word *caballa* which means "mare". The city received its name because it was one of the terminals in the Roman postal system.

Each stable was supposed to keep approximately 40 horses. With so many horses available a letter could travel 100 miles per day. In times of emergency, of course, this speed could be exceeded. The postal carrier was called the *tabellarius* because of a badge he wore on a small bronze shield. The Latin word *positus* means "placed" and refers to the way that horses were "placed" at regular intervals along the Roman highway system.

Herodotus, the Greek historian (484 - 425 B.C.), wrote about the postal couriers of his day "Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night say these couriers form the swift completion of their rounds". That motto is still used by many postal workers today.

The Dispersion

As the people of God were preparing to enter into the Promised Land, Moses warned them against disobedience and sin. If they did not obey the Lord, He promised to scatter them among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other (Deut. 28:64). Israel sinned, and God did exactly what he promised He would do.

When the Northern Kingdom was defeated, many of God's people were carried away by

the Assyrians (721 B.C.) Next came the Babylonian exile. Three different times the armies of Babylon defeated the Southern Kingdom and carried away captives (606 B.C., 596 B.C., and 586 B.C.)

It was during this period of time that the people of God were first called Jews (Esther 2:5). Evidently this name was given because they came from Judah. Many of these Jews attained positions of great power and importance in these foreign lands. Please consider the lives of such Bible heroes as Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Esther, Nehemiah, etc. When many of these exiles returned to the Promised Land, many others did not. Many remained and prospered in the land of their captivity.

The dispersion of Jews was not only to the east, but throughout the entirety of the Mediterranean world. The book of Acts gives proof of these by reminding us that devout Jews out of every nation under heaven came to Jerusalem to observe the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:5). Several nations are then specifically named: "Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs" (Acts 2:9-11). In Acts 8:27 we read of an Ethiopian Jew who had come to Jerusalem to worship. In Acts 16:14 we are told of a Jewish woman from Thyatira who was living in Philippi.

The Synagogue

When the people of God were scattered throughout the earth it was often impossible for them to return to Jerusalem to worship. Consequently they "gathered together" to worship God in many foreign countries. This gathering was called the "synagogue". This word literally means to bring together (sun - together and ago - to bring). This is remarkably similar to "ekklesia", the Bible word for church. (ek - out of , and kaleo - to call). Both words refer to an assembly of people.

It seems that God allowed His people to meet in synagogues in preparation for the coming of the church. They were quite similar in many ways. Both had elders and deacons, both studied the Bible, both sang psalms and hymns, both gave to the poor, both baptized their converts, etc. Though they appeared similar on the surface, they were dramatically different. The synagogues were like Ishmael. He was like a wild animal who was constantly creating controversy. The church was like Isaac whose name means laughter. (Gen. 16:12, Gal. 4:21-31) In Corinth the Christians in the church met next door to the Jews in the synagogue (Acts 18:7). This provided a stunning contrast that could easily be seen by the community. While the Jews were known in the community for beating the ruler of their synagogue (Acts 18:17), the Christians were known for loving one another (1 Cor. 13).

The word "synagogues" is only found one time in the Old Testament Scriptures (Ps. 74:8). but the New Testament Scriptures refer to them many times. Consider, for example, Acts 6:9 "**Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)-- Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia.**" In this one verse we have references to five different groups of foreign Jews. Rabbinical writers say that there were 480 synagogues in Jerusalem. While some think this was an exaggeration we can safely say that there were many synagogues, not only in Jerusalem, but also through the Mediterranean world.

Sects of the Jews

By the time Jesus was born the Jewish nation was divided into a number of different sects or denominations.

The **Pharisees** were the most numerous and influential. Their name literally means “separatist”. They saw themselves as the true followers of the Lord and were zealous to make converts. Jesus said they would compass sea and land to make one proselyte (Matt. 23:15). Paul said that he was a Pharisee and that they were the strictest sect of the Jewish religion (Acts 26:5).

The **Sadducees** were not as numerous as the Pharisees but were often quite rich and influential. They did not believe in angels, spirits, or the resurrection (Acts 23:8). While the Pharisees dominated the synagogues, the Sadducees dominated the Temple. In Acts 5:17, for example, we learn that the High Priest and all his associates were Sadducees.

The **Essenes** withdrew from society and lived in the desert. They separated themselves from evil and spent much time in Bible study and prayer. Though the Bible does not mention this group by name some think that John the Baptist was one of them (Lk., 1:80).

The **Zealots** were as fanatical as the Essenes, but in a militant way. They wanted to overthrow the Roman Government. They were probably the ones who wanted to come by force and make Jesus their king (John 6:15). Jesus chose one of them, Simon the Zealot, to be one of His twelve apostles (Lk. 6:15).

The **Zadokites** were a group that sought to reform the priesthood. They began about 100 B.C. and when they failed in Jerusalem they moved to Damascus and established a community there. From Damascus they sent out missionaries but were bitterly opposed. This group is not mentioned in the Bible.

The **Herodians** are mentioned three times in the Gospels (Matt. 22:16; Mk. 3:6; and Mk. 12:13). They opposed Jesus and felt that the salvation of Israel would come through the Herod family.

The confused and fragmented state of Israel helped set the stage for the appearance of Christ who would unite people from every sect and social strata.

The Apostle to the Gentiles

The God of the universe is omniscient. He knows everything and is never surprised by what man does or does not do. Jesus selected His original twelve apostles after praying all night (Lk. 6:12). Certainly His choice was not by accident. The original twelve apostles, however, were initially unable or unwilling to preach to the Gentiles. Therefore Jesus chose Paul for this noble task. Paul later came to realize that he was separated from birth to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15).

CHAPTER II

THE BACKGROUND OF SAUL OF TARSUS (Later known as the Apostle Paul)

“But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles” (Gal 1:15-16)

The Apostle Paul was set apart from birth to preach among the Gentiles. It is humbling to consider that we also may have been set apart from birth for some special purpose.

Tarsus

Tarsus is situated on the Cilician plain about ten miles inland on the River Cydnus.

Some feel that this city was named after “Tarshish” one of the sons of Javan (Gen. 10:4). Down through the years the city was under the domination of the Assyrians, Persians, Babylonians, etc. but from about 104 B.C. it was under the influence of Rome. After several decades of upheaval and strife Pompey reorganized the area about 65 B.C. and in 51 B.C. made Cicero the governor of the province. A brilliant period followed until Tarsus was considered the Athens of the Eastern Mediterranean and a place where men of learning resorted.

Paul described himself as “a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city” (Acts 21:39).

Tentmaker

Like all Jewish boys Paul learned a trade. Jesus was a carpenter (Mk. 6:3) but Paul was a “tentmaker” (Acts 18:3). This is the only reference to tent makers in the Bible and refers to Paul, Aquila and Priscilla. Cilicia was known for its high quality cloth made from goats’ hair. On many occasions Paul used his skill as a tentmaker to support himself. Please prayerfully consider his words to the elders of the church in Ephesus: **“I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” (Acts 20:33-35)**

An interesting paradox is seen in these words. At the same time Paul was supporting himself, *and the needs of his companions*, he was also experiencing great hardship and privation. Apparently Paul worked as a tentmaker during the same “three years” he had warned these men day and night with tears (Acts 20:31). It was also during this same time that the Holy Spirit inspired him to write 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 16:8). In that letter he wrote: **“We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honoured, we are dishonoured! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.” (1 Cor 4:10-13).**

Student of Gamaliel

Gamaliel was a famous Jewish teacher who is only mentioned by name two times in the New Testament Scriptures (Acts 5:34; 22:3).

In Acts 5:33-40 we are told that Gamaliel was a teacher of the law, and honored by all the people. When the apostles were arrested he argued to the Sanhedrin that they should be left alone. If their work was not of God, it would come to nought. If it was, he didn’t want to be fighting against God.

In Acts 22:3 we are told that Paul was brought up in Jerusalem under the teaching of Gamaliel. The fact that Gamaliel was his teacher was mentioned to explain why Paul was zealous for God.

To the Galatians Paul wrote: **“For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.” (Gal 1:13-14) (NIV)**

To the Philippians he wrote: **“though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more:**

circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.” (Phil 3:4-7) (NIV)

Tribe of Benjamin

Jacob, also known as Israel, had twelve sons by four different wives: Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, and Zilpah. (See Gen. 29:31-30:12). Rachel was his favorite wife and bore him two sons (Joseph and Benjamin). Benjamin was Jacob’s youngest son and Rachel died giving him birth (Gen. 35:16-20). Rachel was buried near Bethlehem. When the little children were murdered by King Herod it reminded Matthew of the words of Jeremiah: **“This is what the LORD says: "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more.” (Jer 31:15) (NIV)**

Saul, the first king of Israel, was from the tribe of Benjamin. He was amazed that God would chose him as king and said: **“But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me?” (1 Sam 9:21) (NIV)**

The book of Numbers provides a census of the people of God. At the time the first census was taken Benjamin was not the smallest tribe. Benjamin numbered 35,400 (Nu. 1:37) and Manasseh numbered 32,200 (Nu. 1:35). When the second census was taken Benjamin had grown to 45,600 (Nu. 26:41). At that time they were more numerous than the tribes of Reuben, Simeon, Gad, Ephraim, and Naphtali.

Something, however, had happened to the tribe of Benjamin to make them small. It happened during the period of the Judges. At that time the men of Benjamin raped and murdered a young woman. Her husband was so outraged that he cut her body into twelve pieces and sent them throughout the land of Israel (Judges 19:29). This resulted in a war between Benjamin and the other tribes. The Lord fought against Benjamin and on one day over 25,000 of their men died (Judges 20:35; 46). The size of their tribe was also affected by an oath that the men of Israel took to not give their daughters in marriage to the men of Benjamin (Judges 21:1).

On the positive side, when the Kingdom was divided after the death of Solomon, ten tribes followed Jeroboam into idolatry. Benjamin, however, remained true to God and continued to worship in the Temple at Jerusalem . Mordecai, the hero who helped save Israel from wicked Haman, was from the Tribe of Benjamin (Es. 2:5). By the time Paul lived and wrote his association with the tribe of Benjamin enhanced his reputation as a devout Jew (Phil. 3:5; Rom. 11:1).

Paul’s Relatives

From the very beginning God has worked through families. This is why there are so many genealogies in the Bible. Remember the promise that God made to Abraham that in his seed, or family, all the families of the earth would be blessed. This means that Jesus Christ was going to be born in his family. Abraham, however, had more than one son so the Scriptures tell us that the promise would come through Isaac. Isaac had more than one son but the promise came through Jacob, etc. Matthew’s Gospel begins with a list of 42 individuals who were the ancestors of Jesus Christ. The genealogy begins with Abraham and goes all the way to Jesus. The names are grouped into three groups of 14 so they could be more easily memorized. God

works through families!

Mary, the mother of Jesus was related to Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist (Lk. 1:36). The disciples of Jesus are identified in the Bible by references to their families. Simon Peter and Andrew were brothers and were sons of John. Remember Peter was called Simon Barjona (Matt. 16:17) Barjona literally means the "son of John". James and John were also brothers, and were the sons of Zebedee (Matt. 4:21). Judas was the brother of James (Lk. 6:16) and James was the son of Alphaeus (Matt. 10:3). When Jesus was on the cross his mother and her sister were there to comfort Him (John 19:25). God works through families.

Paul's relatives are also mention several times in Scripture:

- **"Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was." (Rom 16:7) (NIV)**
- **"Timothy, my fellow-worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my relatives." (Rom 16:21) (NIV)**
- **"Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here. But when the son of Paul's sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul." (Acts 23:15-16) (NIV)**

It seems obvious that Paul had relatives who were workers in the early church, some of whom were well known among the apostles and were in Christ before he was.

Paul the Persecutor

Since both Paul and Jesus were devout Jews it is safe to assume that for a number of years they both attended the same festivals in Jerusalem. Three times a year every man in Israel was to appear before the Lord, that is at Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Ex. 23:14-17). Every year the parents of Jesus went up to the feasts, and when Jesus was twelve years old He began going with them. When Jesus was about thirty years old He went to the Passover and took a whip and began driving sheep and cattle out of the temple. He also turned over the tables of the money changers, and scattering the coins of the money changers. If Paul was there, he apparently was not favorably impressed.

For the next three years Jesus went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil (Acts 10:38). While we see the actions of Jesus in a positive light, Paul did not. The actions and claims of Jesus were indeed outrageous and offensive to the devout Jew. Jesus repeatedly worked on the Sabbath and also commanded others to do so. Jesus spent much of His time with publicans and sinners and refused to obey Jewish traditions. Jesus not only forgave sins but claimed to be equal with God. (John 5:18) The Jews stated their case succinctly to Pilate: **"We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God." (John 19:7)**

At one point in time Paul was apparently a member of the Sanhedrin, for he said that when believers were put to death he cast his vote against them (Acts 26:10). We cannot say for certain, however, that he was a part of the Sanhedrin when Jesus was on trial. Soon after the church was founded, however, he emerged as the chief opponent to Christianity. His name at this time, as you remember, was Saul of Tarsus. He was not known in Scripture as Paul until his first evangelistic tour (Acts 13:9)

- The first mention of Saul in the New Testament Scriptures is in Acts 7:58. Here we are told that the witnesses against Stephen laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.

- Saul was consenting to his death (Acts 8:1)
- **“Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.” (Acts 8:3)**
- **“Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.” (Acts 9:1-2)**
- Paul said: **“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.” (Acts 22:3-5)**
- Paul also said: **“I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them. “On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests.” (Acts 26:9-12)**
- **“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-- of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.” (1 Tim 1:12-16)**

Saul's Conversion

The story of Saul's conversion is found three times in the book of Acts (chapters 9, 22, and 26). There is something powerful about one's own personal testimony. Our victory over the devil involves the blood of Christ, the word of our testimony, and the fact that we love not our lives even unto death (Rev. 12:11).

It is important to remember that God has ordained human involvement in the conversion of sinners. Angels do not preach the Gospel to sinners, Jesus does not preach the Gospel to sinners, God has ordained that men do that (1 Cor. 1:21). An angel appeared to Cornelius, but it was Peter that told him what to do to be saved (Acts 10:1-48). When God wanted the Macedonians to hear the Gospel He called Paul and his companions to do it (Acts 16:6-10). Jesus appeared to Saul on the Damascus Road, but He did not tell him what to do to be saved. He told him to go into Damascus and there he would be told what to do (Acts 22:10-16).

An Apostle to the Gentiles

The specific reason why Jesus appeared to Saul on the Damascus Road is given in Acts

26:15-18. Saul said to Jesus: **"Who are you, Lord?" "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," the Lord replied. "Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."**

Jesus commissioned His original twelve apostles to go to the Gentiles. In Matt. 28:18-20, for example, Jesus commanded them to make disciples of all the "nations". The Greek word translated as "nations"; is "ethnos" and is translated over 90 times in the Bible as "Gentile". Mark's version of the Great Commission commands them to preach to "all creation" (Mk. 16:15). The book of Acts indicates that they were to begin in Jerusalem and then go to Judea, Samaria, and ultimately to the ends of the earth. Peter, by inspiration, said on Pentecost that the promise was not just for Jews, but also for "all that are far off" (Act 2:39). It should have been clear to the apostles that they were to preach to Gentiles, but it was not.

Peter, who first preached the Gospel to the Jews was also called by God to first preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. The message, however, was so difficult for Peter that it took a series of miracles before he understood it. The story is found in Acts 10 and is repeated in Acts 11. As you read the story note that God gave special revelations both to the Gentile Cornelius and also to Peter. Peter's vision, however, had to be repeated three times.

Even after Peter said that he understood that God accepted men from every nation (Acts 10:34-35) the church still continued to preach to none but Jews only. Note: **"Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews."** (Acts 11:19)

God realized how hard it would be for the Jews as a whole to preach to the Gentiles and so he set apart Paul to do this work from the time of his birth (Gal. 1:15-16). The original twelve apostles had probably never been fifty miles from the place of their birth. Paul, by contrast, was born many miles from Jerusalem and his formative years in Tarsus gave him a much broader perspective.

Once Cornelius and other Gentiles were baptized, they were not immediately accepted as equal to their Jewish brethren. We will say more about this later, God used Paul to help stop this evil practice. (see Gal. 2:11-16; 3:26-28; Acts 15: etc.)

The Damascus Road

Damascus was very old and was at one time the most important city in Syria. It was watered by the Abana and Pharpar Rivers which were said to be better than the rivers of Israel (2 Ki. 5:12). Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, was from Damascus (Gen. 15:2). Since the city had a sizeable Jewish population Saul decided to go there with letters from the high priest. Since the story is found three times in the book of Acts we will give the first account from Acts 9, and combine the additional information from the other chapters.

"Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him." (Acts 9:1-3)

Acts 22:6, and 26:13 state that this happened "about noon".

"He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you

persecute me?" (Acts 9:4)

Acts 26:14 states that Jesus spoke to him in the Aramaic language.

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied." (Acts 9:5)

Acts 26:14 states that it was hard for Saul to kick against the goads. A goad was a sharp instrument used to jab the oxen and make them move. Jesus knew that something was bothering Saul. Perhaps it was his memories of the death of Stephen. When Stephen died his face was like the face of an angel (Acts 6:15) and he was praying for the forgiveness of the men who killed him (Acts 7:60). Saul, as you recall, was there giving approval to his death (Acts 8:1).

"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." (Acts 9:6)

Acts 26:16-18 adds "Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

"The men travelling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone." (Acts 9:7)

Acts 22:9 states that his companions saw the light but did not understand the voice of Jesus.

"Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord-- Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here-- has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptised," (Acts 9:8-18)

Acts 22:12-16 adds: "A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him. "Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name."

"and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who caused havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" Yet Saul grew more and more

powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.” (Acts 9:19-22)

“Many days”

The Scriptures state that: **“After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him,” (Acts 9:23)**. Saul was baptized in Damascus and many days later the Jews conspired to kill him. According to the narrative in Acts 9 he escaped from them in Damascus, and went to Jerusalem. When the Jews in Jerusalem tried to kill him the brethren took him down to Caesarea and sent him to Tarsus.

It seems probable that the “many days” of Acts 9:23 refers to time that Saul spent in Arabia. Please consider this passage of Scripture: **“But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus. Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles-- only James, the Lord's brother. I assure you before God that what I am writing to you is no lie.” (Gal 1:15-20)**

Paul's enemies accused him of being wrong about the Gospel because he was not one of the original twelve apostles who spent three years with Jesus. They assumed that he got his information second hand and was confused. Paul emphatically denied these charges. He began his letter to the Galatians by writing: **“Paul, an apostle-- sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead--” (Gal 1:1)** He later insisted: **“I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.” (Gal 1:11-12)**

Paul did not receive his Gospel from Peter or any other man. He received it directly from Jesus Christ. In Galatians 4:25 Paul said that Mt. Sinai was in Arabia. Perhaps Paul went to Mt. Sinai to sit at the feet of Jesus. Perhaps he learned about the New Covenant at the very mountain where Moses learned about the Old Covenant. At any rate, some three years went by before Paul came to Jerusalem and met with Peter.

Damascus

Paul's experience in Damascus, the city of his conversion, is mentioned several times in the Scriptures.

- The Lord told him to go into Damascus, to the house of Judas on Straight Street (Acts 9:11). At this time he was still known as Saul. Since he was blinded by his vision he had to be led to his destination.
- A disciple named Ananias was told by the Lord that Saul was a chosen instrument to carry His name before the Gentiles, their kings, and the people of Israel (Acts 9:15).
- Ananias put his hands on Saul and he was healed of blindness, filled with the Holy Spirit, and baptized (Acts 9:17-19).
- Saul at once began to preach Christ in the synagogues and grew more powerful in the Lord (Acts 9:20-22).
- Saul went to Arabia and returned to Damascus (Gal. 1:17, 18).
- The Jews in Damascus conspired to kill him (Acts 9:23).
- The Governor under King Aretas had the city guarded to arrest him (2 Cor. 11:32)

- Paul learned of their plans (Acts 9:24) and was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall of the city and so escaped from death (2 Cor. 11:33).

Jerusalem

- When Saul came to Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples but they were afraid of him, not believing that he was a true believer (Acts 9:26).
- Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. Saul stayed with them, moved about freely in Jerusalem, and spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 9:27, 28).
- While Saul was praying in the temple, he fell into a trance, and the Lord said to him: “**'Quick!' he said to me. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me.'**” “**Lord,' I replied, 'these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'**” **“Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'” (Acts 22:18-21)**
- The Grecian Jews tried to kill him, so the brothers took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus (Acts 9:29, 30).

Tarsus

Thus Paul the persecutor, became Paul the persecuted. He was not free to preach in Damascus, nor in Jerusalem, and with the guidance of God and the help of the brethren he returned to Tarsus, the city of his birth. He apparently stayed there for several years and the Bible does not tell us what he did during that time.

CHAPTER III

PREACHING TO THE GENTILES

We cannot emphasize too strongly or stress too much that the salvation of the Gentiles was always a part of God's eternal plan. The promise to Abraham, for example, was to be a blessing to all the peoples of the earth (Gen. 12:1-3). This promise was made before Abraham was circumcised and 430 years before the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai (Gen. 3:15-18). When Jesus was born the aged Simeon recognized Him as a light to the Gentiles (Lk. 2:32). When Jesus moved to Capernaum it was seen as a fulfillment of the words of Isaiah to take the gospel to the Gentiles (Matt. 4:13-16). Paul said that preaching to the Gentiles was a part of God's eternal purpose (Eph. 3:1-11). In Matt. 28:18-20 Jesus specifically commanded His apostles to preach to all the nations of the earth..

As we have said before, the original twelve apostles seemed to be unable to grasp the magnitude of God's plan. It not only involved uniting all the people of earth in Jesus Christ, but also those beings who live in heaven (Eph. 1:10). This was at least one reason why God called Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles. He was not disobedient to the vision God gave him, and he became a positive example to others. It is what God did through Paul that prevented Christianity from being divided into a Jewish church and a Gentiles church.

Barnabas

Just as Paul was uniquely qualified to preach to the Gentiles, it seems that Barnabas was uniquely qualified to encourage Paul to fulfill his calling.

- Barnabas was originally called Joseph. He was a Levite from Cyprus. When the church in Jerusalem needed money, he sold a field and brought the money to the apostles. His actions were so encouraging that they changed his name to “Barnabas”, which means “Son of Encouragement”.
- When Saul returned to Jerusalem after his conversion, it was Barnabas who helped him be accepted by the apostles (Acts 9:27).
- When the brethren in Antioch began preaching to the Grecians, the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas there (Acts 11:22).
- When Barnabas saw the evidence of the grace of God, he encouraged them to remain true to the Lord and a great number of people were brought to the Lord (Acts 11:22-24).
- Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul. When he found him he brought him back to Antioch. They continued teaching for a year and taught great numbers of people. For several years Saul had been in Tarsus. As we said earlier, the Scriptures do not tell us what he did while he was there. Apparently he was not preaching to the gentiles, which was what Christ had called him to do. Now God was using Barnabas to encourage him to accept the calling for which he had been set apart from birth (Gal. 1:15).
- The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch (Acts 11:26). Some have suggested that this was because the church in Antioch was the first church to accept Gentiles.
- In those days a prophet from Jerusalem, Agabus, prophesied a famine in Judea. When the brethren in Antioch heard this, they took up an offering and sent Barnabas and Saul with the money to the elders in Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-30).
- Barnabas and Saul continued working together until Saul assumed the position of leadership to which Christ had called him.

A Whole Year in Antioch

“So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.” (Acts 11:26)

When Paul wrote to the Romans he sent greetings to a man named Rufus, who was chosen in the Lord. He also sent greetings to his mother, of whom he said that in some regard she had also been his mother (Rom. 16:13). It is possible that Paul stayed with Rufus and his family during this year in Antioch.

The name “Rufus” means “reddish” and is only found two times in the Bible: Mk. 15:21 and Rom. 16:13. The reference in Mark explains that a man named Simon from Cyrene carried the cross for Jesus. To explain who Simon was, Mark explained that he was the father of Alexander and Rufus. These sons were apparently better known to Mark’s readers than Simon was.

People from Cyrene, in North Africa, came to Antioch. This is specifically stated in Acts 11:20. While it cannot be proven from Scripture, it is distinctly possible that Saul stayed in the home of Simon of Cyrene while ministering in Antioch.

The scenario would go something like this. Simon of Cyrene came to Jerusalem with his family and was picked out of the mob by Roman soldiers to carry the cross for Jesus. Simon witnesses the crucifixion and becomes a believer. He has two sons, Alexander and Rufus, and they also become believers.

When persecution arose after the stoning of Stephen the family emigrated to Antioch and began preaching to the Greeks. When Barnabas brought Saul from Tarsus he stayed with Simon and his family. Simon, no doubt, attained a measure of fame in the early church and staying with him would give Paul opportunity to hear first hand testimony from someone who

witnessed the crucifixion. During this year it is possible that Saul became attached to the family that he considered the mother of Rufus as his own mother.

Paul had desired for many years to preach in Rome, but never had the opportunity. In anticipation of the journey, however, he sent people ahead to prepare for his coming. Rufus, and 23 others are mentioned by name in Romans 16. Thus when Paul heard that Phoebe was going to Rome, he dictated the Roman letter to a scribe named Tertius. Among those whom Paul greeted was the mother of Rufus, who was also like his own mother.

First Evangelistic Tour

“In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” (Acts 13:1, 2)

Elders and deacons are never mentioned in association with the church in Antioch, but we are told of five prophets and teachers. They were indeed five remarkable men. A brief review will help us to understand why the Holy Spirit was able to use these men for world vision, and in particular, for preaching to the Gentiles.

- First is Barnabas, whose dedication and generosity we have just mentioned. He was born in Cyprus, was well traveled and would understand what life was like outside of Judea. The Holy Spirit would call him specifically to work with Saul of Tarsus on this evangelistic tour.
- The second man is called “niger” which means black. Simeon, was in all probability a black man. His insight and understanding would be invaluable in crossing racial and social boundaries necessary for world evangelism.
- Lucius was from Cyrene, a chief city in North Africa. This was a city renowned for commerce and medicine. He would bring to the group valuable perspectives from the great continent of Africa. A fellow countryman, Simon of Cyrene became famous as the man who carried the cross for Jesus (Matt. 27:32, Mk. 15:21).
- Next is Manaen had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch. This unique relationship would help him to think beyond the confines of a local village or society.
- Finally, Saul himself is listed. He was about to begin the work God had intended for him from the time of his birth.

“So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.” (Acts 13:3)

The laying on of hands, fasting, and prayer was a common way that men were set apart for some special service. In Old Testament times the Levites were set apart for service by the laying on of hands (Nu. 8:10). Joshua was also set apart for service by the laying on of hands (Nu. 27:18-23). In the Jerusalem church the seven men who were to serve tables were set apart by the laying on of hands and prayer (Acts 6:6). Timothy was told not to be hasty in the laying on of hands (1 Tim. 5:22). The “laying on of hands” was a rudimentary doctrine in the early church (Heb. 6:2). We should not be surprised, therefore, that Barnabas and Saul were set apart for special service by fasting, prayer, and the laying on of hands.

The Bible has much to say about fasting. It is a spiritual discipline that helps us to gain power in the spirit world. Cornelius, for example, was fasting when an angel appeared to him (Acts 10:30). There is often, however, a natural loss of appetite when faced with great

responsibility. For example, let us suppose that you are hungry and are preparing to eat a meal. Just before you eat, however, you receive word that you must leave your home, family, and friends and travel on a dangerous journey to some distant land. Those who understand the significance of their service to God may be temporarily overwhelmed by such awesome responsibility.

Saul Becomes Paul

While preaching on the Island of Cyprus they were opposed by a Jewish sorcerer named "Bar-Jesus" which means "son of Jesus". The sorcerer was also known as Elymas. It was at this point that Saul's latent gift as a spiritual leader rose to the surface and his name was changed to Paul. The Scriptures record it like this: **"But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun." Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord."** (Acts 13:8-12)

Barnabas and Saul Become Paul and Barnabas

Remember that God had called Paul from his mother's womb to be a great leader. He was going to take the gospel to the Gentiles and witness before governors and kings. Up to the time of this first evangelistic tour, however, he was not the leader that God intended him to be. Barnabas was the leader. Each time their names are mentioned together, Barnabas is mentioned first. Here are a few examples:

- Relief was sent to the elders of the church in Jerusalem by the hands of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:30).
- Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem and brought John Mark with them (Acts 12:25).
- When prophets and teachers at Antioch are mentioned, Barnabas is first and Saul is last (Acts 13:1).
- The Holy Spirit said to separate Barnabas and Saul for the work He had called them to (Acts 13:2).
- Sergius Paulus called for Barnabas and Saul to hear the word of God (Acts 13:7).

When Elymas the sorcerer tried to turn Sergius Paulus from the faith, Saul was filled with the Holy Spirit and his leadership manifested itself like a butterfly emerging from a cocoon. From this time forward Barnabas was no long the leader, Paul was. Before, Barnabas had been mentioned first, now Paul is. Note these examples:

- Paul and his company sailed to Perga in Pamphylia (Acts 13:13)
- Paul was the chief speaker at the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:16).
- The Jews and proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:43).
- Paul and Barnabas answered boldly (Acts 13:46).
- The Jews stirred up opposition to Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:50).
- The pagans called Paul "Hermes" because he was the chief speaker (Acts 14:12).

- Etc.

Note! There are a couple of exceptions. Even though Paul became the leader in the midst of their work, when speaking of their original calling Barnabas still was given priority (See Acts 14:14, and 15:25).

Barnabas and Paul Both Called Apostles

“But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: “Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you.” (Acts 14:14-15)

The word “apostle” refers to one who is sent. The Scriptures refer to three levels of apostleship.

1. Jesus was sent by God. He is therefore called the “apostle and high priest whom we confess” (Heb. 3:1.) This is the highest level of apostleship.

2. The twelve were sent out by Jesus. Judas fell away from this special position and Matthias was chosen by lot to take his place (Acts 1:18 - 26). Paul was also a part of this select group. He insisted that he was not sent by men, but by Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:1; 1 Cor. 9:1). This is the second level of apostles. These apostles had special abilities. For example, they could lay hands on people and impart miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14 - 25). The mark of an apostle was “signs, wonders, and miracles” (2 Cor. 12:12). This ability was something that Philip the evangelist did not have and Simon the sorcerer could not receive.

3. The third level of apostleship are those who were sent out by the church. This group included Barnabas (Acts 14:4,14), Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25), two unnamed brethren (2 Cor. 8:23), and possibly Andronicus and Junia (Rom. 16:7). The word translated as “messenger” in Philippians 2:25 and 2 Cor 8:23 is the Greek word for apostle).

The work of an apostle was of highest importance in the church (1 Cor. 12:28).

John Mark Returns to Jerusalem

“From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.” (Acts 13:13) We will say more about this later.

Paul is stoned

Many things happened on this tour that we will not deal with in this present study. We will try, however, to cover those events that involve Paul’s later life and ministry. His near death experience at Lystra is an interesting case in point.

Paul and Barnabas were chased out of Antioch in Pisidia, and Iconium by the enemies of the gospel. When they came to Lystra they were at first received as Grecian gods. Barnabas was thought to be Zeus, and Paul Hermes. When unbelieving Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium arrived, however, they won the crowd over and the fickle mob tried to kill Paul. They stoned Paul, and dragged him outside of the city, thinking he was dead (Acts 14:19). Paul was not dead, however, and got up and went back to the city. It seems, however, that the injuries he sustained followed him for the rest of his life.

Though it is not specifically stated in Scripture, it seems that Paul converted Timothy at this time. Later he would call Timothy his “true son in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:2). It seems also that Timothy was there when Paul was stoned. First, note that Timothy was from the vicinity of Lystra and Iconium (Acts 16:2). Secondly, note this reference to Timothy about persecution:

“You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith,

patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings-- what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted," (2 Tim 3:10-12)

Paul said that he remembered Timothy's tears (2 Tim. 1:4). Some think that the first thing Paul saw when he awoke from being stoned was the tear drenched face of young Timothy.

Remember, before Paul was stoned the pagans thought he was a Greek god (Acts 14:12). After he was stoned I think Paul was crippled and ugly. To the Corinthians he described himself as having a thorn in the flesh which the Lord would not take away. Please consider:

"I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know-- God knows. And I know that this man-- whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows--was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no-one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say. To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Cor 12:2-10)

I think that this stoning reduced Paul from the handsome, athletic man to a scarred and crippled man whose physical appearance and illnesses could have caused people to look upon him with scorn (Gal. 4:13, 14; 2 Cor. 10:10). Luke, the beloved physician (Col. 4:14) became his constant traveling companion.

When trying to kill someone with stones, it is logical to assume that some stones would be thrown at their head. This could have resulted, not only in the destruction of beauty, but also poor eyesight. Paul said that the Galatians were ready to take out their own eyes and give them to him (Gal. 4:15). He wrote to them with "large letters" (Gal. 6:11) and said that he bore on his own body the scars of the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 6:17). When Paul was on trial in Jerusalem before the High priest, he did not recognize him (Acts 23:5).

Paul believed that all who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12) and warned the early Christians that we would enter into the kingdom of God through many hardships (Acts 14:22).

Appointing Elders

"Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust." (Acts 14:23)

As we pointed out in chapter 1, the government of the synagogue was remarkably similar in appearance to the government of the church. They were, however, radically different. The difference is illustrated by Ishmael and Isaac. Both of these boys were sons of the same father and probably were similar in appearance. Ishmael, however, was the result of a fleshly relationship and symbolized a fleshly covenant. Isaac, by contrast, had a miraculous birth and symbolized the new covenant which is spiritual (see Gal. 4:21 - 31).

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders (Acts 14:23). Titus was to appoint elders (Tit. 1:5). Apparently Timothy also appointed elders and was told not to be hasty in the laying on of hands.

It seems that each congregation had elders. These men were also known as “overseers” and “pastors”. The qualifications for this function are found in 1 Tim. 3:1 - 7, and Titus 1:5 - 9).

While we are not informed exactly how these elders were selected, but it is probable that they were chosen by the congregation. The word “appoint” does not mean to choose or select, but rather to “install”. In Acts 6, for example, the congregation chose seven men full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, and the Apostles officially set them apart to their work.

Return to Antioch

“From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.” (Acts 14:26)

When Barnabas and Saul set out on this mission to which God had called them, the brethren in Antioch committed them to the grace of God. When Barnabas and Saul were in Antioch, the brethren there could minister to them in many ways. They could have given them food, clothing, comfort, money, and advice. Once the journey began, however, they had no way to help them. Therefore they “committed” them to the grace of God. God is not limited by time and space and could be with them each step of the way. Their confidence in God was well rewarded. God gave them guidance, protection, resources, and help so that their every need was satisfied.

CHAPTER IV

THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

“Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.” (Acts 15:1-2)

Those who opposed Paul and Barnabas can be divided into two groups. First there were those who were “false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ.” (2 Cor 11:13). Secondly, there were those who were weak in the faith and followed Jewish rituals as a matter of conscience. (See Rom. 14, etc.)

The magnitude of this controversy cannot be over emphasized. It is, perhaps, the most controversial and divisive subject ever experienced by the church. Even though this matter was “settled” by the Jerusalem Council, it continued to be a matter of controversy for many years to come.

It must be understood that the salvation of the Gentiles was in the mind of God from the very beginning. Paul knew this and wrote to the Romans that God was at work in history to see to it that both Jews and Gentiles could be saved (Rom. 11:1-32). Jesus said it like this: **“I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.” (John 10:16)** It is the eternal purpose of God, not just to unite Jews and Gentiles in Jesus Christ, but also all of heaven and earth (Eph. 1:10).

The Priority of Love and Unity

As we approach the Jerusalem Council it is important that we understand that Jesus

Christ made love and unity a priority. Consider, for example, His instructions to the apostles in the upper room the night before Calvary. On this occasion they were arguing among themselves as to which of them would be the greatest. Jesus washed their feet and told them to think differently about greatness. The kingdom of God is not like the kingdoms of this world. Greatness is achieved in the kingdom of God by service. On that night Jesus said to them: **“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35)**

The commandment to love, in once sense, was not new. In Leviticus 19:18, for example, the Hebrews were commanded to love their neighbors as they loved themselves. This commandment to love was “new” because the Holy Spirit would come upon them and give them power to love. They would not just love their brethren, they would even be able to love their enemies. Like Jesus they would be able to pray for those who crucified them. **THE WAY THAT ALL MEN WOULD KNOW THAT THESE MEN BELONGED TO JESUS WAS BY THE LOVE THEY HAD FOR ONE ANOTHER.**

After leaving the upper room, Jesus began to pray. This prayer is the longest recorded prayer of Jesus in the Bible and is found in John 17:1-16. In this prayer Jesus first of all prayed for Himself (vss. 1-5). Then He prayed for His disciples (vss. 6-19). Finally He prayed for all believers (vss. 20-26). The one and only request Jesus made for all believers is that we would be united. Please consider: **“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (John 17:20-23)**

All truths are equally true, but not all truths are equally important. Two times two is four, and Jesus is the Christ. Both of these statements are equally true, but they are not equally important.

Faith is essential to salvation. You cannot please God without faith (Heb. 11:6). Love, however, is greater than faith. **“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” (1 Cor 13:13)** Understanding the priority that Jesus placed upon love and unity will help put the Jerusalem Council in a proper perspective.

Two Groups of Believers

- At this time there were two groups of believers represented at the Jerusalem Council.
- First there were the Jewish believers. Remember that the church began in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, which was a Jewish Feast. All of these original converts were Jewish. Some were natural born Jews and others were proselytes, but all were Jewish.
 - Secondly, there were the Gentile believers. These men had not been circumcised and did not observe Jewish rites and rituals. Titus, for example, was a Gentile Christian who had never been circumcised (Gal. 2:1-5).

Unity between these two groups was achieved by a remarkable strategy. All people on the earth are descendants of Noah, but not all people on earth are descendants of Abraham. God made covenants with both Noah and Abraham. (See Gen. 9:8-17 and Gen. 17:1-14) With the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28) they concluded that all men should obey the covenant that God made with Noah, but only the descendants of Abraham the covenant that God made with him.

Here is the letter sent by the apostles and elders to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: **“Greetings. We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul--men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.” (Acts 15:23-29)**

This letter was delivered to the church at Antioch, and the people were glad for its encouraging message. It would be years, however, before this message was understood and believed by other churches.

CHAPTER V

Second Evangelistic Tour

Paul’s second evangelistic tour is introduced in Scripture with these words: **“But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord. Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.” Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.” (Acts 15:35-41)**

We know that the Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Saul to work together on their first evangelist tour (Acts 13:20). Now we are told that they had a “sharp disagreement” and “parted company”. Even though this disagreement involved John Mark, please consider the possibility that the Holy Spirit used this disagreement to help everyone involved toward their full potential in Christ.

We know that the Holy Spirit gives gifts to those in the Body of Christ. This truth is stated in 1 Cor. 12 and also in other places as well. It seems that both Barnabas and Saul were gifted as leaders, but Saul did not use this gift for years. Therefore the Holy Spirit called him to work with Barnabas until such time as he became the leader that God had always intended him to be. In the course of their first journey Saul became that leader. Barnabas had been used of God to help Paul become that leader and now that aspect of his ministry was no longer needed.

Even though these two men had a sharp disagreement, we may be sure that they continued to love one another and that their ministries were never in conflict. As proof of this, note that many years later Paul wanted John Mark to come to him because he was so helpful in the ministry (2 Tim. 4:11).

Paul Chose Silas

When the Jerusalem council decided that Gentile believers were not obligated to be circumcised, Silas was one of two delegates appointed to accompany Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch. He was known as a leader among the brethren (Acts 15:22, 23). In the book of Acts

he is known as “Silas”, in the letters of Paul and Peter he is called “Silvanus”. This is a Latinized form of Silas.

Note that the brothers at Antioch “commended” Paul and Silas to the grace of God (Acts 15:40). The Holy Spirit was free to direct the lives of men like Paul and Silas, Barnabas and John Mark, without interference from the church. No worker for Christ can succeed without the grace of God. To help His apostles understand this truth Jesus once commissioned them to go and preach without taking any provisions with them. They were to take no money, no bag, no extra tunic, no extra sandals, and no staff (Matt. 10:9, 10). They discovered that the grace of God was sufficient to meet their every need. Paul and Silas found that the grace of God was sufficient to meet all of their needs too!

Joined by Timothy

“He (Paul) came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.” (Acts 16:1-3)

Luke, whom God inspired to write the book of Acts, stated that Paul wanted to take Timothy along on the journey. This, of course, was true. There is, however, another dimension to the story that we learn from 1 Tim. 1:18. **“Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight,”** Please consider the possibility that just as Barnabas and Saul were set apart for their work by instructions from the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2), so also was Timothy.

Just as Barnabas and Saul were set apart by the laying on of hands, fasting, and prayer (Acts 13:3), so also Timothy was set apart for his work by the laying on of hands. Timothy apparently received two gifts at the time he was set apart for ministry. The first came from the laying on the hands of the elders: **“Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.” (1 Tim 4:14)** The second gift came through the laying on of Paul’s hands: **“For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.” (2 Tim 1:6)** It is also possible that both of these passages refer to only one gift. If this is true it would mean that Paul participated with the elders in laying hands on Timothy. The elders “ordained” him, and Paul gave him the gift. We know that special manifestations of the Spirit were given by the laying on the of the Apostle’s hands (Acts 8:18) No such promise, however, is associated with the laying on of hands by elders.

Though Paul had many helpers, none seemed so perfectly suited to work with him as Timothy. Please consider these inspired words of Paul to the Philippians: **“I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no-one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me.” (Phil 2:19-23)**

Further Guidance from the Holy Spirit

“As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. So the churches were

strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers. Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." (Acts 16:4-10)

The Holy Spirit had just set aside Timothy to be Paul's traveling companion, and now continued to give additional guidance to Paul and the others. Paul would later preach in Asia, but now the Holy Spirit specifically forbade him to do so (Acts 16:6). Neither would the Spirit allow them to preach in Bithynia (vs. 7). The Spirit was obviously guiding them to Troas. Perhaps one reason for doing so, was to meet Luke, the beloved physician.

Luke, the inspired author of the book of Acts, met Paul in Troas. This is obvious from a careful reading of the text. Luke accurately described Paul and his companions as they before they came to Troas. Acts 16:7 - "They came to the border of Mysia". Acts 16:8 - "They passed by Mysia and went down to Troas". At Troas Paul received a vision directing him to Macedonia and Luke then writes: "After Paul had seen the vision we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia" (Acts 16:10). "From Troas we put out to sea" (Acts 16:11). From Luke's use of "we" and "they" it is easy to determine when he was with Paul.

In Acts 8 an angel directed Philip to a deserted road where he met a Eunuch from Ethiopia and converted him to Christ. The timing, as you recall, was perfect. As these men met the Eunuch was reading from Isaiah the prophet. The timing was also perfect in Acts 10 when an angel instructed Cornelius to send to Joppa for Simon Peter. The messengers arrived just at the time God was giving Peter a vision. Now the Holy Spirit kept Paul from preaching in Asia and Bythynia and perhaps one reason was so they would meet Luke at just the right time. Since Luke was a physician and Paul had an infirmity in the flesh, perhaps Paul went to him for medical care. At any rate, Luke became a Christian and joined Paul on the journey. Luke, a Gentile, was inspired by God to write two books of the Bible, the Gospel of Luke, and the book of Acts.

The Holy Spirit guided Paul to Macedonia by means of a vision. All visions, however, are not from God and it is important to test all spiritual influence to see if it is from God (1 John 4:1). Obviously, Paul and his companions carefully considered the vision and concluded that it was from God.

Paul at Philippi

The journey from Troas to Neapolis, the sea port of Philippi, took only two days. At a later time the return trip would take five days (Acts 20:6). Since they were in a sailing ship the time difference is easily explained by the winds. Luke tells us that Philippi was a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia (Act 16:12).

The city of Philippi was located about ten miles from the sea and was named for Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. It was also on a very important highway, called the Via Egnatia.

Paul believed that the gospel was first for the Jews and then for the Gentiles (See Rom. 1:16). Every time he came to a new place to preach he would go first to the synagogue (See Acts 13:14; 14:1; 17:1; 18:4; etc.) If there was no synagogue, Jewish believers would often meet on the shore or by the river side. This place of prayer was called "proseucha". The practice apparently dates all the way back to the Babylonian Captivity when Ezekiel received his visions by the River Chebar (Ez. 1:1,3; 3:15, 23; 10:15, 20, 22; 43:3).

Paul and Silas “expected” to find a place of prayer, and they did. Apparently, however, only Jewish women gathered there. One of them was named Lydia, she was a seller of purple cloth from the city of Thyatira. Thyatira was a city many miles away in Asia. A letter to the church there is found in Rev. 2:18-29.

The Scriptures teach that the Lord opened Lydia’s heart, she responded to Paul’s message, and she and her whole household were baptized. She was apparently a woman of considerable wealth and invited Paul and Silas to stay in her home.

The Bible mentions a number of “households” that became Christian. The household of Cornelius (Acts 10); the household of the Philippian Jailer (Acts 16:31-33); the household of Aristobulus (Rom. 16:10); the household of Narcisus (Rom. 16:11); the household of Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:16); etc. No one was to be baptized, however, who did not believe (Mark 16:16).

Three converts to Christ are named in Acts 16. First, the rich woman Lydia, whom we have already mentioned. Next was a slave girl possessed by a spirit (vss. 16-18). Finally the Philippian jailer (vss. 25-34). Thus the church in Philippi represented the whole of Roman society - rich, slave, and middle class.

While there are many lessons to be learned from Paul and Silas at Philippi, note in particular, their optimism even while unjustly imprisoned. Believers are to expect tribulations. Jesus had warned His disciples that they would face trouble (Jn. 16:33). Paul warned his converts that they would have hardships (Acts 14:22). Believers can remain confident, however, because He that is within us is greater than he that is in the world (1 Jn. 4:4). We are more than conquerors through Him who loves us (Rom. 8:37). No matter what happens, all things still are working together for good to those who love God and are the called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28). Therefore, when unjustly beaten and imprisoned these men were singing. Note: **“The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.” (Acts 16:22-25)**

It was at this point that the power of God was unleashed and the jailer was converted. God had not made a mistake in allowing these men to suffer. God never makes mistakes! The experience of Paul and Silas was indeed a positive one. Not only were many people won to Christ, but the Philippian church became one of the strongest and most helpful to Paul of all the churches he established. For example, years later he would write to the Philippians and say: **“Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.” (Phil 4:15-16)**

When the magistrates at Philippi learned that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens they were alarmed. They could have been severely punished for unjustly beating and imprisoning Roman citizens. These officials therefore came to the prison to appease Paul and Silas and escorted them out of the prison and requested that they leave the city. The guidance of God comes in many ways. Sometimes it comes from dreams, visions, or by direct revelation. This time, it seems to have come from unconverted men who were officials in the city of Philippi.

While Paul and Silas left, Luke remained to help the infant church. Note Acts 16:11ff. Luke said “we put out to sea”, “we traveled to Philippi”, “we stayed there several days”, “we went outside the city gate” etc. Now, however, Luke writes: “they left” Philippi (Acts 16:40). “They passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia”, etc. Luke does not travel with Paul and Silas again until the third evangelistic tour when he joined Paul on the way to Troas. It was therefore several years later that Luke wrote that “we” sailed away from Philippi (Acts 20:6). It is possible that

Luke remained in Philippi during this whole period of time.

Paul and Silas traveled on the Via Egnatia, one of the greatest highways in the Empire. It connected Rome to the west with Constantinople to the east. Every thousand steps "mile" stones were erected to help the traveler know exactly where he was. The distance from Philippi to Amphipolis was 33 miles. It was 30 more miles to Apollonia, and 37 more miles to Thessalonica. These cities were so spaced as to represent a day's journey.

Thessalonica

"When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women." (Acts 17:1-4)

Thessalonica was a prominent city and the home of a great Macedonian naval base. During the Roman Civil War it was the headquarters of Pompey's army. Even though Paul stayed there only a short time the church here became a center of evangelism for the whole area. Note these inspired words of Paul: **"because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia-- your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God," (1 Thess. 1:5-9)**

Even though there were Jews in the congregation, it seems that most "turned to God from idols". Remember also that during this time the brethren in Philippi sent help more than once to Paul (Phil. 4:16).

After this initial success, unbelieving Jews stirred up the people and Paul was forced to leave town: **"Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women. But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the market-place, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. Then they put Jason and the others on bail and let them go. As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. (Acts 17:4-10)**

Even though Paul left Thessalonica, the believers there would still be subject to persecution. **"For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews," (1 Thess. 2:14)**

Berea

Berea was a small peaceful town about 60 miles from Thessalonica. The people, however, were much more open to the Gospel. **“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.” (Acts 17:11-12)**

At this time there were no New Testament Scriptures for the early church to read. Paul preached Jesus from Moses and the Prophets. (See also Lk.24:27). As it had happened so many times before, however, the unbelieving Jews forced Paul to leave: **“When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. The brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. The men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.” (Acts 17:13-15)**

The last mention of Timothy was in Philippi. Some think he remained there with Luke until the Philippians wanted to send help to Paul. If this is so, then it was Timothy who brought money from Philippi and joined Paul and Silas in Thessalonica. The fact that Paul asked them to join him as soon as possible may indicate that he was discouraged, or otherwise in need of help. Not too much later, God would speak to Paul in a vision to give him encouragement (Acts 18:9,10).

Athens

Athena was the Greek goddess of wisdom. We should not be surprised, therefore, that Athens was filled with philosophers and that people came there to discuss the latest ideas (Acts 17:21). While Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. Among the hundreds of idols there was one of particular interest to Paul. It was an altar to an “unknown god”. The story behind this altar is related by Don Richardson in his book, *Eternity in Their Hearts*. Here is a brief condensation of that story.

In the sixth century before Christ a terrible plague was killing the people of Athens. A priestess said that to escape the plague they had to send to the island of Crete for the prophet Epimenides. This prophet would tell them what to do. When Epimenides arrived he found that they had been praying to hundreds of gods without getting an answer to their prayers. He then gave them advice based upon three assumptions. 1. He assumed that there was another god. 2. He assumed that this god was great enough, and good enough to help them if they would ask him. 3. In the third place he assumed that this god, more powerful than all others, would smile upon them if they acknowledged their ignorance.

Epimenides then instructed them to turn sheep loose on the sacred slopes to graze at will. Any sheep, however, who did not eat was to be sacrificed to the “unknown god”. After this sacrifice was made, the plague was taken away. The people were so happy that they carved a statue of Epimenides and placed it before one of their temples. They also preserved the altar to the unknown god. This altar had been revered by the Athenians for 600 years without knowing the god it represented.

As a point of interest, Richardson states that Epimenides is quoted in the Bible. Paul warned Titus that certain false teachers needed to be silenced. He then wrote: **“Even one of their own prophets has said, “Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.” (Titus**

1:12)

Paul evidently knew about Epimenides, and the remarkable story of what happened in Athens. He therefore determined to tell them about the All Powerful God whom they worshiped in ignorance. His message is recorded in Acts 17:22-31, and contains at least these ten points.

1. Paul was going to tell them about the God they worshiped in ignorance.
2. The God who made the world does not live in temples made by human hands.
3. His well-being does not depend on the work of human hands.
4. God made from one man all nations of men who inhabit the earth.
5. He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they would live.
6. He did this so that men would seek Him, though He is not far from anyone.
7. God is essential to life, for in Him we live, and move, and have our being.
8. God is not like anything man can craft from gold, silver, or stone.
9. In the past, God overlooked our ignorance, but now commands all men to repent.
10. God will some day judge the world, and He has given assurance of this by raising Jesus Christ from the dead.

There were three main responses to this message:

1. Some sneered.
2. Some procrastinated and wanted to hear the message again.
3. Some became followers of Paul and believed.

It was after this that Silas and Timothy came to Paul at Athens. When Paul heard about the trials the Thessalonians were going through he sent Timothy there to find out about their faith. Please consider: **“So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God’s fellow-worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no-one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless.” (1 Thess. 3:1-5)**

It does not seem that the church in Athens prospered as did the churches in Thessalonica and Corinth. Paul wrote letters to these other churches commending them for their spiritual progress. There was no letter, however, to the church in Athens and if Paul ever returned there the Bible never mentions it. Those who focus on the wisdom of this world have difficulty receiving the wisdom of God (See 1 Cor. 1:18 - 2:16).

Corinth

“After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.” (Acts 18:1-4)

After dealing with the philosophers of Athens Paul came to Corinth with weakness, fear, and much trembling. Consider these words from 1 Cor. 2:1-5: **“When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of**

the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.”

The challenge at Corinth was different from that of Athens. In Athens the devil used intellectual temptations to keep people from Christ. In Corinth he used physical ones. The Temple of Aphrodite in Corinth had more than a thousand women known as “hierodouloi” or “sacred slaves”. Aphrodite was the Greek goddess of love and beauty and these women were prostitutes dedicated to her service. It is shocking, but true, that false religion is often the most corrupt influence in society. Fortunately, Christ delivered many people in Corinth from the terrible affects of immorality and disease (1 Cor. 6:9 - 11).

Here are some of the things that happened to Paul in Corinth:

- Paul met Aquila and Priscilla. Because they were also tent makers, Paul stayed and worked with them. Aquila was a native of Pontus (see Acts 2:9; I Peter 1:1). Aquila and Priscilla are mentioned six times in the Scriptures (Acts 18:2, 18, 26; Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19).
- Paul reasoned in the synagogue with limited success. Paul usually allowed others to baptize converts, but in Corinth he personally baptized a few prominent individuals (see 1 Cor. 1:14 - 16). Paul baptized Crispus (the ruler of the synagogue). He also baptized Gaius, whose house was large enough to accommodate the whole church (Rom. 16:23). He also baptized the household of Stephanas. These were first converts to Christ in Achaia and Stephanas became a leader to whom the brethren were urged to submit (1 Cor. 16:15).
- When the Jews rejected Paul he shook out his clothes in protest and went next door to the synagogue to the house of Titius Justus.
- The Lord spoke to Paul in a vision. He told him to not be afraid, that no one would harm him, and that He had many people in that city.
- Paul stayed there for a year and a half.
- Sosthenes, another ruler of the synagogue was publicly beaten, and later converted to Christ (See 1 Cor. 1:1).
- Timothy came from Thessalonica with news about the church (see 1 Thess. 3:6 - 10).
- It was during this time in Corinth that Paul wrote his first two inspired letters, 1st and 2nd Thessalonians.

I Thessalonians

(Written from Corinth about 52 A.D.)

Paul's wrote 13 letters that are a part of the Bible. They can be chronologically divided into four groups.

1. First, his two letters to the Thessalonians. (2nd evangelistic tour, 52 - 53 A.D.)
2. Second, his great doctrinal letters, 1 and 2nd Corinthians, Romans, and Galatians. (3rd evangelistic tour, 57 - 58 A.D.)
3. His prison letters - Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. (written from Rome around 62 - 63 A.D.)
4. His pastoral letters - 1st and 2nd Timothy, and Titus (written around 66 - 68 A.D.)

Even though the brethren in Thessalonica were enduring persecution, Timothy brought good news about their faith and love. Nevertheless, there were several areas where this young church needed instruction. Among the many important lessons taught in this short letter are instructions about the second coming of Christ and what will happen to believers at that time.

2 Thessalonians

(Written from Corinth about 52 - 53 A.D.)

Paul's first letter had mentioned the second coming of Christ in every chapter. Someone, however, had apparently written a letter to the church and forged Paul's signature (See II Thess. 2:2). Even though Paul used a scribe to write his letters, he decided to always sign them personally to prevent imposters from writing letters in his name. This is specifically stated in II Thess. 3:17). This second letter to the Thessalonians was written shortly after the first. One major reason was to correct false teaching about the second coming of Christ. As a result of this false teaching, some of the brethren had quit work and were begging food from others. Paul wrote that if a man does not work, he should not be fed (2 Thess. 3:10).

Paul Returns to Antioch in Syria

“Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken. They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. But as he left, he promised, “I will come back if it is God’s will.” Then he set sail from Ephesus. When he landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch.” (Acts 18:18-22)

Please note the following:

- Paul was sent out by the church in Antioch and after each evangelistic tour he returned there to tell them that God had done.
- It is not clear who had his hair cut off, Paul or Aquila. We do know, however, that Paul continued to practice Jewish rituals that he might win the Jews for Christ (1 Cor. 9:19 - 23; Acts 21:26, etc.)
- Priscilla and Aquila traveled with him to Ephesus as a part of his evangelistic team. They remained there when Paul left.
- Ephesus was in Asia. Paul had wanted to witness in Asia before but was kept by the Holy Spirit from doing so (Acts 16:6). Again, however, Paul felt his ministry in Ephesus needed to be postponed.
- After this trip to Antioch, Silas is not mentioned again. Perhaps he went back to the Jerusalem church where we were first introduced to him (Acts 15:22). We later read of Silas working with the Apostle Peter (1 Pet. 5:12). Some think that Paul dictated 1 and 2nd Thessalonians and that Silas was his scribe (see 1 Thess. 1:1; 2nd Thess. 1:1). Perhaps he helped Peter in the same way.

CHAPTER VI Third Evangelistic Tour

“After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.” (Acts 18:23) One important aspect of this trip was remembering the poor saints in Judea. A famine had been predicted by the prophet Agabus in Acts 11:28. Even though the famine was throughout the entire Roman world, the brethren in Judea were in special need. Remember, they were the ones who sold their possessions and goods to care for their brethren when the church began. When the famine came and the price of food got high, they would have more trouble than others. (An interesting example of food prices during a famine is found in 2 Kings 6:25) For this reason the church in Antioch took up a special offering for the brethren in Judea and sent it to the elders there with Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:29, 30). Note also that Paul promised Peter that he would remember the poor (Gal. 2:10). As he gave order to the churches of Galatia, he also gave

instructions to the church at Corinth to take up a collection every first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1, 2). Similar instructions were also given to the churches of Macedonia (See 2 Cor. 8, 9). When Paul arrived at Corinth, men chosen by the churches would accompany Paul and make sure that the money collected would arrive safely in Jerusalem.

This famine was used by God to help bring unity in the early church as we will later point out in remarks about Paul's letter to the Romans.

Ephesus

The city of Ephesus was on the mouth of the Cayster river on the west coast of Asia. The people of Ephesus believed that the image of the goddess Artemis fell from heaven and built a magnificent temple in her honor (Acts 19:35). That temple was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. A group of silversmiths in Ephesus made their living by selling silver shrines of Artemis (Acts 19:23 - 27).

Just as Jesus came to earth in the "fulness of time", Paul and his team came to Ephesus at a time when the entire area was ripe for evangelism. Note that while Paul was in Ephesus everyone in Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord (Acts 19:10). Extraordinary miracles were wrought so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that Paul touched had healing powers (Acts 19:11, 12).

Apollos

- Apollos was a Jew, learned in the Scriptures and a native of Alexandria in Egypt. (Acts 18:24)
- He spoke boldly about Jesus, knowing only the baptism of John (Acts 18:25).
- Priscilla and Aquila invited him to their home and taught him the way of the Lord more adequately (Acts 18:26).
- He went to Corinth, vigorously refuted the Jews and was a great help to believers (Acts 18:27, 28).
- He was obviously a person of great influence in the church at Corinth (see 1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4-6; 3:22; 4:6).
- Later Paul greatly desired him to go to Corinth with the brethren, but he was unwilling to do so at that time (1 Cor. 16:12).
- Paul later asked Titus to be of special help to Apollos: **"Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need. Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives."** (Titus 3:13-14)

It seems that the early church had teams of workers who served the Lord Jesus Christ. Each time had a leader. Since Timothy and Titus were on Paul's team, he could send them, or leave them, as the Lord directed. Apollos, however, was not on Paul's team. Paul referred to Zenas and Apollos as "them", and to Titus and his helpers as "our people".

Christian workers were at liberty to change teams as the Lord led. This is what happened with Paul and Barnabas. They had a disagreement and formed two evangelistic teams (Acts 15:36-41). Though different teams existed, they all served Jesus. There were no denominations in those days and the church of the Lord Jesus Christ remained one body.

John's Baptism

When Paul came to Ephesus he found certain disciples who only knew about John's

baptism. This is what the Bible says about John's baptism:

- **“And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” (Mark 1:4)**
- **“during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” (Luke 3:2-3)**
- **“Paul said, “John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” (Acts 19:4)**
- **“But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John. (Luke 7:30)**
- Those who had only received John's baptism needed to receive Christian baptism (Acts 19:5)

Christian Baptism

Christian baptism differs from John's baptism in at least four ways.

1. John's baptism was for Jews to prepare them for the coming of Jesus. Christian baptism is for all nations (Matt. 28:18-20, Mk. L6:15, 16). We have no record in the Bible of any Gentile receiving John's baptism.

2. John's baptism was temporary. It was to prepare people for the coming of Jesus, but once Jesus ascended into heaven it was no longer valid. Christian baptism is to be performed until the end of the age (Matt. 28:18 - 20).

3. John's baptism was by the authority of God. Christian baptism was in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:18 - 20), or in the name of Jesus (Acts 19:5). It was possible for a Jew to receive John's baptism, believing that the Messiah was yet to come, and still reject Jesus.

4. John's baptism had no promise of the Holy Spirit. When Paul discovered that the men in Ephesus knew nothing about the Holy Spirit, he immediately questioned their baptism. Christian baptism is associated with the gift of the Holy Spirit (See also Acts 2:38).

Great Results for Christ

- All who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:10).
- Special miracles were wrought by Paul so that even handkerchiefs he touched had healing power (Acts 19:11).
- So many people were abandoning idolatry that those who made idols felt their business was in danger (Acts 19:23 - 27).

First Letter to the Corinthians

(Written from Ephesus about A.D. 57)

By looking at a map you can see that it was a short trip across the Aegean Sea from Ephesus to Corinth. Paul was at Ephesus for three years (Acts 20:31). During this time he received some disturbing reports from the church in Corinth. We know that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus because he told them he would stay at Ephesus until Pentecost (1 Cor. 16:8) and sent greetings to them from all the churches in the province of Asia (1 Cor. 16:19). The Sosthenes who was with Paul when the letter was written (1 Cor. 1:1) is probably the same man mentioned in Acts 18:17. At that time Sosthenes was the ruler of the synagogue and was beaten by a Jewish mob.

Here are some of the problems addressed in 1 Corinthians:

- Division (chapters 1 - 4)
- Immorality (chapter 5)
- Lawsuits among brethren and more teaching on immorality (chapter 6)
- Problems about marriage (chapter 7)
- Problems about Idolatry and Paul's apostleship (chapters 8 - 10)
- Problems about the place of women and the Lord's Supper (chapter 11)
- Problems about spiritual gifts (chapters 12 - 14).
- Problems about the resurrection (chapter 15)
- Instructions about a special offering for the poor. (chapter 16)

Letter to the Galatians

Bible students do not all agree on when Paul wrote to the Galatians. There is, however, agreement that 1 and 2nd Corinthians and Romans were all written about A.D. 57 - 58 A.D. The Galatian letter is very similar to Romans. Some consider the Roman letter an expansion of Galatians as they both deal with justification by faith. For this, and other reasons, they may very well have been written about the same time.

We know from Acts 18:23 that before coming to Ephesus Paul went through Galatia and Phrygia strengthening the disciples. In Gal. 1:6 - 9 we also learn that Paul was amazed that the Galatians had so quickly accepted a perverted gospel. It seems logical, therefore, to conclude that he wrote to the Galatians a short time after visiting them.

Galatians is the only letter of Paul sent specifically to a group of churches. There is some evidence that the Ephesian letter was intended to be circulated among a group of churches, but the Galatian letter is specifically sent to all the churches in the country of Galatia (Gal. 1:2).

The theme of justification by faith, and not by works of law, is central throughout the whole letter.

In 2 Thess. 3:17 Paul promised to authenticate all future letters by personally signing his name. He signed the Galatian letter with "large letters" written by his own hand (Gal. 6:11). This, coupled with other verses, has led some to conclude that Paul had poor vision. See also Gal. 4:15, and Acts 23:5.

Paul Forced to Leave Ephesus

There are several references in Scripture to the difficulties Paul faced in Ephesus. In 1 Cor. 15:32, for example, he said that he fought wild beasts in Ephesus. Writing from Ephesus to the Corinthians he said that a great door was opened to him, but there were many adversaries (1 Cor. 16:9). It was probably at Ephesus that Priscilla and Aquila risked their lives for Paul (Rom. 16:3). Most obvious, however, is the vivid description in Acts 19:23 - 41 of a riot involving Paul and a group of silversmiths. Two of Paul's opponents are mentioned by name. First, Demetrius, who was apparently the head of the craftsmen who made idols (Acts 19:24, 38). Secondly, a man named Alexander. This man is quite possibly the same Alexander the metal worker who did Paul much harm (2 Tim. 4:14). So many people were abandoning idolatry that the idol makers feared they would go out of business. The whole city was in an uproar, and the people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and rushed into the theater. Paul wanted to appear before the crowd but some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, begged him not to enter into the theater.

At this point it is worthy of note that Paul had made friends among the most influential people in the province. As an unbelieving Jew he used his contacts with powerful people to persecute Christians. Note that he went to the high priest to get letters to present in Damascus (Acts 9:1 - 2). Now, as a believer, he used the same boldness to convert people to Christ.

Annianus, the man who baptized Paul, was told that Paul would take the name of Christ before the Gentiles and their kings, as well as the children of Israel (Acts 9:15).

At any rate, Luke reports: **“When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said good-bye and set out for Macedonia.” (Acts 20:1)**

2 Corinthians

It seems that Titus and an unnamed brother carried the first Corinthian letter (See 2 Cor. 12:18). Paul had a change of plans. He had originally planned to leave Ephesus and go directly to Corinth. Then he planned to visit Macedonia and return to Corinth on his way to Judea. (2Cor. 1:16) Apparently the riot in Ephesus forced him to change his plans and go through Macedonia on his way to Corinth.

On this lengthy journey Paul suffered great anxiety because he did not know how the Corinthians had received his first letter. It was a bold letter, addressing many serious problems in the church. Titus, after delivering the letter to Corinth, was returning through Macedonia to meet with Paul. When Paul came to Troas he expected to meet Titus, but did not. He wrote: **“Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said good-bye to them and went on to Macedonia.” (2 Cor 2:12-13)** Even in Macedonia he still had great concern: **“For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus;” (2 Cor 7:5-6)**

When they finally met, Titus had good news. This resulted in Paul writing a second letter and sending it back to Corinth with Titus.

Paul’s Suffering for Christ

There are many things in the second Corinthian letter that we will not comment about. We will, however, mention this brief summary of Paul’s suffering for Christ. **“Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.” (2 Cor 11:23-28)**

Paul’s Love for His Persecutors

“I speak the truth in Christ-- I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit--I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race,” (Rom 9:1-3)

Paul’s Thorn in the Flesh

In was in the 2 Corinthian letter that Paul spoke of his thorn in the flesh: **“To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the ‘super-apostles’, even though I am nothing.” (2 Cor 12:7-11)**

There are a number of references to Paul's physical suffering in 2 Corinthians.

- God comforted him in all his troubles (2 Cor. 1:4)
- The Corinthians shared in his suffering (2 Cor. 1:7)
- His hardships were so great that he despaired of life (2 Cor. 1:8)
- He was pressed on every side, persecuted, and always carried about in his body the death of Jesus (2 Cor. 4:7 - 12).
- In our earthly bodies we groan longing for our heavenly body (2 Cor. 5:2)
- Etc.

It is possible that Paul's "thorn in the flesh" dates back to the stoning he experienced in Lystra (Acts 14:8 - 20). Prior to the stoning Paul was thought to be the Greek god Hermes. After that he described his bodily presence as weak and his speech contemptible (2 Cor. 10:10). Those who stoned Paul thought he was dead (Acts 14:19). Obviously they threw stones at his head. This would make his scars visible to all (Gal. 6:17). At the same time these wounds could easily have impaired his vision and affected his speech. Thus the handsome young man who was thought to be a Greek god, was reduced to a scarred cripple with poor vision and an unpleasant appearance. Three times Paul asked the Lord to take away his thorn in the flesh. Each time, however, the Lord refused. Paul then came to understand that the strength of God is made perfect in our weakness.

Romans

(Written from Corinth about A.D. 58)

Paul had planned many times to go to Rome but each time was prevented from doing so (See Rom. 1:13). Even though Paul had never been to Rome he sent personal greetings to over 25 people there whom he knew by name (See Rom. 16). It is probable that he sent these people ahead to prepare for his coming. He also planned to go to Spain (Rom. 15:24, 28). After writing 2 Corinthians Paul came to Corinth and stayed there three months (Acts 20:3). During this time he not only checked on the spiritual state of the church there, but also received an offering for the poor saints in Judea.

While at Corinth Paul received word that a woman named Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea, was on her way to Rome. Paul took advantage of this opportunity and dictated a letter to the Christians in Rome, the capital of the world. His scribe was named Tertius (Rom. 16:22).

The fact that Phoebe was a servant of the church seems to imply that she had some special function to perform in the church at Cenchrea. She may have been a widow like those referred to in 1 Tim. 5:9, 10.

Even though the letter to Rome was sixth in the order that Paul wrote them, it is placed first in the Bible. This is due, no doubt, to the doctrinal importance of this letter, and the fact that it was written to the capital of the world.

We do not know who started the church in Rome. Perhaps it was started by some of the

original converts to Christ. Note in Acts 2:5 that there were devout Jews in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven. Rome is specifically mentioned in vs. 10.

It is also worthy of note that the Roman letter was not addressed to the church at Rome, but rather to **“all in Rome who are loved by God” (Rom. 1:7)**. The word “church” is not even found in the Roman letter until chapter 16. The word “church” means “assembly”. There was an assembly in Rome in the house of Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:5), but apparently no assembly there that included all believers.

Church and Churches

It is interesting to note that the Scriptures never refer to churches in a single city. The word “churches” does occur over thirty times in the Bible, but each time it refers to churches in a country. So we read of the church in Jerusalem, but churches in Judea, the church of Antioch, but churches of Syria and Cilicia, the church of Ephesus, but churches of Asia, etc.

The church in Jerusalem met in the Temple, and also house to house. The fact that all believers did meet in one place makes them one assembly, or church. The church at Corinth may have been composed of many small groups but Gaius, a believer in Corinth, was said to have been a host to Paul and also of the whole church (Rom. 16:23).

Ephesus provides a striking example. Paul left Priscilla and Aquila there while passing by on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 18:19). They continued to labor there and eventually had a church in their own house (See 1 Cor. 16:8, 19). Paul returned to Ephesus on his third evangelistic tour and stayed there for three years. Many were won to Christ and everyone in Asia heard the word of the Lord both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:10). Paul is forced to leave but several months later stops at Miletus and sends for the elders of the church in Ephesus. Please note that the word is singular and not plural. No matter how many thousands of believers there were in Ephesus they were still one church. Many years later when John the Apostle was imprisoned on the Isle of Patmos because of the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus, he received instructions to send letters to seven churches in Asia. The first letter was addressed **“to the angel of the church in Ephesus”** (Rev. 2:1). Thus we can trace the progress of Christianity in Ephesus for over 40 years and state conclusively that they remained only one church.

Paul’s Success in Preaching to the Gentiles

“I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. I have written to you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done--by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way round to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.

Rather, as it is written: ‘Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.’ This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you. But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit

you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while.” (Rom 15:14-24)

Greetings to Brethren in Rome

As we have mentioned before, even though Paul had never been to Rome, he sent greetings to many people there (See Romans 16)

- 37 individuals are mentioned - 29 were at Rome, 8 were with Paul at Corinth.
- 27 - 29 of these individuals are mentioned only here. Those who may be mentioned elsewhere are Mary and Tertius. Mary is a common name and some think that Tertius was the same as Silas. The word “Tertius” means “third”. Perhaps he was the third son in the family.
- Seven women are mentioned by name: Phoebe, Priscilla, Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, and Julia. It is also possible that Junia (v. 7) was a woman. Note also the reference to the mother of Rufus (v. 13) and the sister of Nereus (v. 15).
- Six are described as Paul’s kinsmen: Andronicus and Junia (v. 7), Herodion (v. 11), and Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater (v. 21).
- Two were of note among the apostles: Andronicus and Junia (v. 7).
- Two households are mentioned - Aristobulus (v. 10), and Narcissus (v. 11).
- One house church is mentioned in v. 5, and possibly two others in vss. 10 - 11, and vss. 14 - 15.

Offering for the Poor Saints in Judea

As we have mentioned before, this offering for the poor saints in Judea is extremely significant. It was used by God to help tear down the wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles and make them one.

God sometimes uses famines for a purpose. He used a famine in the days of Jacob to bring the Hebrews down to Egypt. He used a famine in the days of Elijah to demonstrate His power to Ahab. He used a famine in the days of Amos to try and bring a nation to repentance.

God knows the future. There is no one like Him who can make known the end from the beginning and from ancient times what is still to come (Is. 46:10).

- The famine we are talking about was predicted by Agabus (Acts 11:28).
- While the famine was through the world, the poor saints in Judea had special needs because they had sold their possessions and goods when the church began.
- Their problem was so serious that Peter urged Paul not to forget about the poor (Gal. 2:10).
- Paul was eager to take care of them and instructed the churches to take up an offering every first day of the week for the poor saints in Judea (1 Cor. 16:1 - 2).
- The brethren in Macedonia, out of their extreme poverty, gave much more than Paul expected them to (2 Cor. 8:1- 5).
- Individuals chosen by the churches were to accompany Paul and carry this offering to Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:3; Acts 20:4).
- Even after all of this Paul was not certain that this Gentile money would be accepted by Jewish Christians.

Special Request for Prayer

This request for prayer is so significant that we must review the facts and place it in its

historical context. The churches had been collecting money for many months. Corinth was one of the last churches Paul visited to receive these special offerings. Both 1 and 2nd Corinthians talk about this offering. Paul stayed in Corinth for 3 months and was preparing to return to Jerusalem with the money they so desperately needed. During this time he found out that Phoebe was going to Rome and dictated the Roman letter to a scribe named Tertius. In the last part of the Roman letter he asked for special prayer. **ONE MAJOR REASON FOR THIS PRAYER REQUEST IS THAT PAUL WAS NOT CERTAIN THE JEWS WOULD ACCEPT MONEY FROM THE Gentiles.** Please consider: **“I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there,” (Rom 15:30-31)**

We now know that the prayer was answered. Paul was delivered from unbelievers in Judea and his offering was accepted. The middle wall of partition had been broken down and God had made of both Jews and Gentiles, one new man, so making peace (Eph. 2:14 - 15).

The Trip to Jerusalem

As we have mentioned before, Paul had a change of plans. He had originally planned to go directly to Corinth from Ephesus, then to visit Macedonia and return to Corinth before departing for Judea (2 Cor. 1:16). Those plans were changed by a riot in Ephesus. Now his plans are changed again because the Jews were planning to kill him. He had originally planned to sail to Judea, but the Jews may have hired an assassin to take passage on the same ship. At any rate, Paul decided to journey by land back through Macedonia. **“He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia. These men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas.” (Acts 20:4-5)**

Note that the word “us” appears in the text. This indicates, of course, that Luke is again Paul’s traveling companion.

Meeting in Troas

“On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight.” (Acts 20:7)

Two aspects of this verse are of special interest to those interested in First Century Christian worship. (1) The disciples came together on the first day of the week. The Jewish people met on the seventh day of the week, which is the Sabbath. Christian assemblies, however, were on the first day of the week, the day our Lord was raised from the dead. (See also 1 Cor. 16:1, 2) (2) Secondly, note the purpose for their assembly. They came together “to break bread”. The night before Jesus was crucified He instituted what is known as the “Lord’s Supper” or “Communion”. (See Matt. 26:17 - 30; Mk. 14:12 - 26; Lk. 22:7 - 23). It is also worthy of note that the early church continued steadfastly in the “breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42, 46).

It is also worthy of note that a young man named Eutychus fell out of the third story window and was taken up dead. Paul, however, threw his arms around him and declared that he was alive. They went back upstairs, broke bread, and continued talking until daylight.

Paul’s Farewell to the Elders at Ephesus

- This address is recorded in Acts 20:17 - 38. Here are a few observations:
- Paul sent for the “elders” of the church (v. 17), he said the Holy Spirit had made them “overseers” (v. 28), and that they were to “shepherd” or “pastor” the church of God (v. 28). In Ephesus, the words elder, overseer, and pastor referred to the same group of people.
 - As we have said before, there was but one church in Ephesus.
 - The Holy Spirit warned Paul that prison and hardship were waiting for him in Jerusalem (vss. 22, 23).
 - Paul warned that false teachers would arise within the church and distort the truth (vss. 29, 30).
 - Paul worked at Ephesus to support himself and also the needs of his companions (vss. 34, 35).
 - While Paul was at Ephesus he experienced poverty (1 Cor. 4:8 - 13). Remember Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus.
 - Paul felt they would never see his face again (v. 38). Paul may have been wrong about this. It seems that years later Paul came back to Ephesus and left Timothy there to command certain men not to teach false doctrines (1 Tim. 1:3). This event is not mentioned in the book of Acts. In Acts, Paul did not leave Timothy in Ephesus, but sent him from Ephesus to Macedonia (Acts 19:22). There is a difference between revelation given by God and our understanding of that revelation. Apparently Paul received revelations that bonds and imprisonment waited for him in Jerusalem and assumed he would never see them again. His revelation was right and his assumptions were wrong.

On to Jerusalem

Paul’s journey took him to Cos, Rhodes, and Patara. There they found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia. They sailed south of Cyprus and came to Tyre where they found disciples and remained with them for seven days. This is precisely what they did at Troas (Acts 20:6). This leads to the assumption that in both places Paul arrived too late to be with the brethren for their regular worship on the first day of the week. In order to meet with them, therefore, Paul and his friends would have to wait seven days for the next meeting.

Continuing their voyage from Tyre they landed at Ptolemais and the next day came to Caesarea. In Caesarea they stayed in the house of Philip the evangelist. He was one of the seven (see Acts 6) and also had four virgin daughters who prophesied.

It is interesting that the word “evangelist” is only found two times in the Bible (Acts 21:8; and 2 Tim. 4:5). The plural word “evangelists” is found once (Eph. 4:11).

On this trip the Holy Spirit witnessed in every city that bonds and afflictions were waiting on him in Jerusalem (Acts 20:23). In this section of Scripture we find two more examples. The disciples at Tyre urged Paul “through the Spirit” not to go on to Jerusalem (Acts 21:4). At Caesarea a prophet named Agabus took Paul’s belt, tied his own hands and feet with it, and said: **“The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.’” (Acts 21:11)** When the disciples heard this they pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. Paul answered: **“Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:13).**

When Paul would not change his mind Luke reports: **“We gave up and said, ‘the will of the Lord be done’” (Acts 21:14).**

Again we must make a distinction between what the Holy Spirit wanted, and what the brethren wanted. The Holy Spirit wanted Jesus to go to Jerusalem and suffer, Peter did not want him too (Matt. 16:21, 22). The Holy Spirit kept repeating that Paul was going to suffer affliction

and when the brethren heard this they concluded that he should not go. They were wrong! The expression in Acts 21:4 that they urged him “through the Spirit” not to go up to Jerusalem is different from saying that the Holy Spirit urged him not to go. Paul was committed to doing the will of God, and ultimately Luke and the others agreed.

Note also that some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied Paul and his company and brought them to the home of Mnason where they were to stay. He is described as one of the early disciples from Cyprus (Acts 21:16) and may very well be one of the men who brought the gospel to Antioch (Acts 11:20).

CHAPTER VII

PAUL BECOMES A PRISONER IN JERUSALEM

Paul came to Jerusalem with a large sum of money. This money was for the poor saints in Judea and the integrity of that money was secured by men chosen by the churches who traveled with Paul. Paul’s prayers were answered and he was warmly received by the brothers in Jerusalem.

At a later time, when Paul was unjustly imprisoned, the Governor Felix kept him in prison, hoping to receive a bribe from him (Acts 24:26). Evidently he had also heard that Paul came to Jerusalem with a large sum of money.

After Paul reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles, Luke tells us something of the doctrinal strife the early church was experiencing. Please read carefully Acts 21:20 - 36). Here is a brief summary of those verses:

- Thousands of believing Jews were zealous for the law (v. 20)
- They accused Paul of teaching Jews not to circumcise their sons (v. 21)
- This was not true!
- The suggested a plan to pacify these brethren.
 - There were four men there who had taken a Jewish vow (v. 23)
- They wanted Paul to join them in this Jewish rite and pay their expenses (v. 24)
- Hopefully this would convince the Jews that Paul was not trying to get them to apostatize from Moses. (Note - the Greek word “apostasia” is found only two times in the N. T. Scriptures. Here in Acts 21:21, and also in 2 Thess. 2:3)
- Concerning the Gentiles they had already decided that they did not have to observe Jewish rituals. They only had to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. (v. 25).
- Paul’s enemies lied about him and said he had taken Greeks into the temple (v. 28).
- This caused a riot and the Jews were trying to kill Paul (v. 31).
- Roman soldiers rescued Paul from their hands and bound him with two chains (v. 33).

It is interesting to note that those who lied about Paul and said that he brought Greeks into the temple area were “Jews from the province of Asia” (Acts 21:27). These may have been some of the same men from the synagogue in Ephesus who refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way (Acts 19:9). It is easy to imagine how jealous they became when the message of Paul was so successful that everyone in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:10). Another reason for their anger was that a Jew named Alexander became the focus of pagan anger when the whole city was in an uproar (Acts 19:32 - 34). At any rate, God had plans for Paul that they were incapable of stopping. He that is within us is greater than he that is in the world (1 Jn. 4:4).

Paul Speaks to the People

There is something profound and powerful about personal testimony. The story of Paul's conversion is found three times in the book of Acts. (Chapters 9, 22, 26) Paul undoubtedly shared the story of his conversion hundreds of times in the course of his ministry. The word of our "testimony" plays an important role in overcoming Satan (Rev. 12:11).

The Ark of the Covenant was also known as the Ark of the Testimony (Ex. 25:16; 25:22; 26:33; etc.) The ark contained important evidence about God. It contained the Ten Commandments, written by the finger of God on two tablets of stone. It also contained Aaron's rod that budded and a golden pot of manna. It is interesting, however, that none of this evidence was available for inspection by the public. Anyone who looked inside the ark died (1 Sam. 6:19). The only way you could know what was in the ark was by testimony.

In similar fashion, Jesus did not appear unto everyone, but only to witness that were chosen before by God (Acts 10:41). Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, and God has written His new covenant in our minds and in our hearts. The only way someone can know what we have in our hearts is by our testimony.

Thus Paul, gave his testimony to the angry mob. They listened to Paul until he told them that God sent him far away to the Gentiles. Then Luke observes **"The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, 'Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!' As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air," (Acts 22:22-23)**

The Plot to Kill Paul

"The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." The next morning the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. More than forty men were involved in this plot. They went to the chief priests and elders and said, "We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here." (Acts 23:11 - 15).

Paul's Nephew Helps Save His Life

"But when the son of Paul's sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul. Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, 'Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him.' So he took him to the commander. The centurion said, 'Paul, the prisoner, sent for me and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you.' The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside and asked, 'What is it you want to tell me?' He said: 'The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about him. Don't give in to them, because more than forty of them are waiting in ambush for him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent to their request.' The commander dismissed the young man and cautioned him, 'Don't tell anyone that you have reported this to me.' " (Acts 23:16-22)

Paul Transferred to the Prison in Caesarea

The Roman government went to great trouble in order to save Paul's life. They assigned

200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spear men to protect Paul. They began their journey at 9:00 at night. The next day they let the soldiers return to Jerusalem and the cavalry escorted Paul on to Caesarea.

The Trial Before Felix

The governor, Felix, was described in secular history as “a master of cruelty and lust who exercised the powers of a king in the spirit of a slave”. His wife, Drusilla, was a Jewess. At 16 years of age she was married to Azizus of Emesa. Felix, however, persuaded her to leave her husband and she became his third wife.

The Jews had secured the services of a lawyer named Tertullus. He charged Paul with three distinct accusations:

1. That he was a troublemaker stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world.
2. That he was a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes (This is one way the Jews described Christians)
3. That he was attempting to desecrate the temple.

Paul responded by pointing out:

1. He had been in Jerusalem no more than 12 days at the time of his arrest.
2. He went up to Jerusalem to worship and had not argued with anyone.
3. His opponents could not prove any of their accusations.
4. The Jews from Asia who originally accused him were not even present.
5. Paul felt he was on trial because he believed in the resurrection of the dead.

Felix was well acquainted with the Way and promised to decide the case later. A centurion was ordered to keep Paul under guard but to allow his friends to take care of his needs. After the trial Paul spoke to Felix and Drusilla about righteousness, self control, and judgment to come (Acts 24:25) Here is a brief summary of what happened while Paul was in prison under Felix.

- Even though Paul had done nothing wrong Felix kept him in prison in order to please the Jews (Acts 24:27)
- Felix knew that Paul had come to Jerusalem with money for the poor saints in Judea. Since Paul had access to money, Felix hoped to receive a bribe from him. (Acts 24:26)
- Felix sent often for Paul, but was waiting until it was “convenient” before obeying the gospel. (Acts 24:25). As far as we know he never became a Christian. Becoming a Christian is never convenient because it involves denying ourselves and taking up a cross (Matt. 16:24 - 28)
- After two years Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus.

The Trial Before Festus

According to Josephus, the Jewish historian, Festus was a welcome relief to the vicious Felix who preceded him, and the equally corrupt Albinus who succeeded him. Festus did not live long, however, and died while in office. He did have an opportunity, however, to hear the gospel from perhaps the greatest preacher of all time. As far as we know, he never became a Christian.

Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up to Jerusalem where the chief priests and Jewish leaders brought charges against Paul. They urgently requested Festus, as a favor to them, to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem for they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way. Remember, more than two years before, more than 40 men had taken a vow that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul (Acts 23:12, 13). It is probable that these “experts in law” found a way to avoid the consequences of their imprudent oath. Remember that Jesus said this type of men would strain at a gnat and swallow a camel

(Matt. 23:24). They could devour widow's houses and for a pretense make a long prayer. The original assassins were therefore, in all probability, a part of this new strategy to kill Paul.

After spending eight or ten days with Paul's accusers, Festus returned to Caesarea and convened his court. Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, asked Paul if he was willing to face his accusers in Jerusalem. (Acts 25:6 - 9).

At this point, Paul appealed his case to Caesar's court in Rome. He knew that the Jews would have killed him en route to Jerusalem. Since Paul was a Roman citizen, Festus had to honor his request.

Paul's appeal solved the immediate problem for Festus, but created another. Since Paul had done nothing wrong, he had no specific charges to make against him. As the new governor he felt that his career might be in jeopardy if he sent a Roman citizen to the highest court in the land without knowing what he had done wrong.

For this reason Festus sought the help of King Agrippa, who was an expert in Jewish law.

Paul Before Agrippa

There are many different members of the Herodian family mentioned in the Bible. Herod the Great was the king who wanted to kill the baby Jesus (Matt. 2:1 - 18). Herod Philip was married to Herodias and had a daughter named Salome. Herod Antipas took Philip's wife as his own. John the Baptist rebuked him for his sin and was imprisoned and beheaded for preaching the truth. (Matt. 14:1 - 12). Herod Agrippa I beheaded James the son of Zebedee (Acts 12:1 - 3). This was the man who died because he failed to glorify God (Acts 12:19 - 23).

The king whom Festus asked to help him was Herod Agrippa II. Nero became the emperor in A. D. 54 and shortly after his accession he gave Agrippa the Galilean cities of Tiberias and Tarichea and their surrounding land. He also gave him the Perea cities of Julias and Abila and their surrounding land. Like his uncle Herod, king of Chalcis, Agrippa II was in control of the temple treasury and could appoint high priests. Luke calls him "King Agrippa" (Acts 25:13).

Agrippa came with his sister, Bernice. She became a widow in A.D. 48 when her second husband, uncle Herod king of Chalcis died. Josephus said that she moved in with her brother, Agrippa II, and their incestuous relationship became the talk of Rome.

Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the high ranking officers and the leading men of the city. It was a wonderful opportunity for Paul to preach the gospel. Remember, Paul was destined to carry the name of Jesus before the Gentiles and their kings (Acts 9:15). Paul considered himself fortunate to stand before Agrippa for he considered him to be well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies.

Then Paul simply recounted his testimony. As we have said before, Paul's testimony is recorded three times in the book of Acts. There is something both simple and profound about personal testimony. Remember the story of the blind man whom Jesus healed. He didn't know anything about deep theological controversies. He merely said: "**One thing I do know, I was blind but now I see**" (John 9:25). In similar fashion the dramatic change in Paul's life was obvious and could not be denied. He was a "living letter" that could easily be read by all men (2 Cor. 3:1 - 6). Our ultimate victory over Satan will come through the blood of the Lamb, the word of our testimony, and the fact that we do not love our lives so much that we shrink from death (Rev. 12:11).

Paul's message was so fervent that Festus interrupted him and accused him of being insane (Acts 26:24). Paul responded: "**I am not insane, most excellent Festus, Paul replied. What I am saying is true and reasonable. The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know**

you do.’ Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?’ Paul replied, ‘Short time or long-- I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.’” (Acts 26:25-29)

After Paul defense the King, the governor, Bernice, and those sitting with them left the room and talked with one another. They all knew that Paul had done nothing worthy of death or imprisonment and concluded that if he had not appealed to Rome he could have been released.

All Things Were Working Together for good

It is important to remember that the Devil cannot do anything to us without God's permission. This principle is made crystal clear in the book of Job (See chapters 1 & 2 of Job). On the surface it may seem that Paul's great witness was being hidden. It may seem that several years of his life were being wasted while being locked up in prison. Paul's years in prison may well have been some of the most productive of his entire life and ministry. We now know that while he was in prison he wrote four inspired books of the Bible, and even made converts for Christ in the household of Caesar. Paul was absolutely correct when he wrote: **“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Rom 8:28)**

CHAPTER VIII PAUL'S IMPRISONMENT IN ROME

Luke informs us that Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius. This Roman officer, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment, was responsible for transporting these prisoners to Rome.

The word “centurion” refers to an officer in charge of 100 soldiers. There are over 20 references to centurions in the New Testament Scriptures. Each time these men appear to have integrity and good character.

- In Matt. 8:8 - 13 and Lk. 7:1 - 10 we read of a centurion who came and asked Jesus to heal his servant. The Jews liked him because he had built them a synagogue. Jesus liked him too and said that he found more faith in that centurion than he did among the people of Israel.
- In Matt. 27:54, Mk. 15:39, and Lk. 23:47 the centurion who saw Jesus die considered him a righteous man and the Son of God.
- In Mk. 15:44, 45 Pilate would not believe that Jesus was already dead until he heard it from the centurion.
- In Acts 10 we are told of a centurion named Cornelius who was the first Gentile to become a Christian without first of all becoming a Jew.
- In Acts 22:25 ff. we are told of a centurion who kept Paul from being beaten.
- In Acts 24:23 the Governor Felix placed Paul in the custody of a centurion who was ordered to let Paul's friends minister to him.
- Finally, we are introduced to the centurion named Julius who accompanied Paul all the way to Rome. He too was a man of integrity who saved Paul's life (Acts 27:43).

Though there were many passengers on the ship, only a few are mentioned by name. The centurion named Julius, Paul, and Aristarchus (a Macedonian from Thessalonica. (Acts 27:1). We know that Luke was also there because he constantly used the words “us” and “we” to describe their journey (See acts 27:2, 4, 7, 15, etc.)

They began their journey on a ship from Adramyttium (Acts 27:2), but when they landed

at Myra in Lycia they boarded an Alexandrian ship that was sailing for Italy. This ship was large enough to accommodate 276 passengers in addition to its cargo (Acts 27:37).

The Shipwreck

A series of events began to unfold that Paul was powerless to stop. When they arrived at a place called Fair Havens, Paul had a premonition that something bad was going to happen if they set sail. He did his best to get them to spend the winter there. The centurion, however, listened to the pilot and the owner of the ship and decided to sail on to Phoenix. It was a disastrous decision that resulted in the loss of the ship and its cargo. God, however, used these men's poor judgment to bring the gospel to an island called Malta. It is important to remember that our Sovereign God is in control of all things, even the wind and the waves.

A gentle south wind lured the unsuspecting ship out to sea and then a great storm hit them with the force of a hurricane. The ship was "out of control" to the men who were trying to steer it, but it was not out of control to God. God directed that ship to precisely the place where He wanted it to be. Paul put it like this: **"Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."** (Acts 27:23-26)

This ship had been driven across the Mediterranean Sea for 14 days. Because of the storm clouds they had not seen the sun or stars during this time and thus had no idea where they were or where they were going. As we have said before, however, from God's perspective they were not "lost". The storm was taking them to the very place where God wanted them to be.

Even though the sailors could not navigate they did what they could to keep the ship from sinking or being stranded on the quick sands of north Africa. The Bible states:

- They hoisted the life boat on board the ship.
- They passed ropes under the ship to hold it together.
- They lowered a sea anchor.
- They threw their cargo overboard.
- They threw the ship's tackling overboard.
- Like the sailors mentioned in Ps. 107:27, they were at their "wits end".

As they approached the destination chosen for them by God, they sensed that they were approaching land. Their first sounding was taken about midnight and indicated that the water was 120 feet deep. Their next sounding indicated 90 feet. Fearing they would be dashed upon the rocks they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight.

At this point in time the sailors tried to escape. They let down the lifeboat, pretending to lower some anchors. Paul, either by divine revelation or his own careful observations, realized that these men were seeking to escape from the ship. Paul wisely said nothing to them, but warned his friend, the centurion, that unless these men stayed on the ship they could not be saved. The centurion then ordered the soldiers to cut the ropes and let the life boat fall away.

Then Luke wrote: **"Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. "For the last fourteen days," he said, "you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food-- you haven't eaten anything. Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head." After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves."** (Acts 27:33-36)

When dawn finally came they did three things simultaneously. They cut loose the anchors, they untied the ropes that held the rudders, and they hoisted the foresail to the wind.

As we have mentioned before, the soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners to prevent them from escaping. It was the centurion who wanted to save Paul's life and would not allow them to do so. Those who could swim were ordered to jump overboard, and the rest held on to planks and pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land in safety.

Ashore on Malta

The Island of Malta is located between Sicily and Africa. It is about 18 miles long and 8 miles wide. It came under Roman control about 218 B.C. and ultimately became a place of considerable prosperity, civilization and wealth. It was not only in a strategic location but also was endowed with good harbors.

The islanders were unusually kind, and because it was raining and cold, they built a fire and welcomed everyone. Paul was gathering brushwood to put on the fire when a viper was driven out by the heat and fastened itself on his hand. When the islanders saw this they assumed that Paul was a murderer and even though he had escaped from the sea Justice would not allow him to live. When Paul did not swell up, or fall down dead, they changed their minds and concluded that he was a god.

The chief official on the island was a man named Publius. His estate was near by and Luke said he welcomed "us" into his home and for three days entertained "us" hospitably. It seems obvious that this man did not have all 276 passengers in his home so the word "us" probably refers only to a select group of important passengers.

The father of Publius was sick in bed, suffering from a fever and dysentery. Even though Luke was a physician, it seems that he was not consulted on the case. Rather Paul prayed, placed his hands upon him, and he was healed. When this happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured.

The emphasis of Paul's ministry was not on eloquence and human wisdom, but on the power of God. Please consider these inspired words which he wrote to the Corinthians: **"When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power."** (1 Cor 2:1-5)

Paul Arrives in Rome

After staying three months in Malta the winter was passed and it was safe again to sail. Paul and his company set out on an Alexandrian ship that had wintered on the island. They put in at Syracuse and stayed there for three days. Then they set sail for Rhegium, and then on to Puteoli. There they found some brothers and spent a week with them. The Roman Centurion who was in charge of Paul, was obviously doing everything he could to accommodate the great apostle.

Other brothers in the faith heard that he was coming and traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet them. At the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged.

Paul Allowed to Live by Himself

The statement of Luke that Paul was allowed to live "by himself" is followed by a reminder

that there was also a soldier there to guard him (Acts 28:16). Luke later explained that Paul rented the house where he was staying (Acts 28:30). Even though Paul lived in his own rented house, he was still a Roman prisoner and was constantly in chains. During these two years of imprisonment Paul wrote four inspired letters that are now a part of the Bible. In every one of these letters he makes reference to his "chains". (See Eph. 6:20; Phil. 1:7, 13, 14, 16; Col. 4:3, 18; Philemon 1:10, 13).

The fact that Paul had his own home, however, gave him a wonderful opportunity to preach the gospel. People were free to come and listen to him without being hindered (Acts 28:30). Since he was constantly under guard by Roman soldiers he also made converts in Caesar's household (Phil. 4:22).

Paul and the Jews

Paul referred often to his Jewish heritage. Even though he was an apostle to the Gentiles, he always preached to the Jews first when he had an opportunity to do so (See Rom. 1:16). The books of Acts also confirms that every time Paul came to a new city he sought out the Jews to tell them about Jesus. Paul's persecution by the Jews is well known - the Jews beat him five times with a whip, three times with rods, and once they stoned him and left him for dead (2 Cor. 11:24, 25). They chased him out of Damascus, Jerusalem, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Thessalonica, and Berea. In Corinth Paul discovered that the Jews were plotting against him (Acts 20:3) and in Jerusalem more than 40 Jews made a vow that they would not eat or drink anything until they had killed him (Acts 23:12, 13) It was a plot of the Jews to kill him that caused Paul to appeal his case to Caesar. In spite of their hatred for him, however, Paul loved them.

Please prayerfully consider these inspired words by Paul: **"I speak the truth in Christ-- I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit-- I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel."** (Rom 9:1-4).

Note that these words come from Paul's letter to Rome that he had dictated just a few years before. In fact, Paul's letter to Rome is filled with teaching about the Jews and God's promises to Israel. Paul considered God's promises to Israel as valid and that the salvation of the Gentiles was intended to provoke Israel to jealousy (Rom. 10:19; 11:11).

CHAPTER VIII THE PRISON LETTERS

During the two whole years that Paul was a prisoner in his own hired house in Rome (A.D. 62 - 63), he wrote four inspired letters that are now a part of the New Testament Scriptures (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon). During these two years Paul welcomed all who came to him and spoke boldly and without hindrance about the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Though Paul was bound, the word of God was not. These two years, therefore, are among the most productive in his entire ministry. In addition to writing these inspired letters he also taught many people and made converts like Onesimus (Phm. 1:10) and the soldiers in Caesar's household (Phil. 4:22). His chains even inspired the brethren in Rome to speak the word of God more courageously (Phil. 1:14). The exact order in which his prison letters were written is not clear. It is possible that Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon were written at the same time and delivered on the same trip. By comparing Col. 4:7 and Eph. 6:21 it seems that Tychicus delivered both of these letters. Since Philemon lived in the city of Colosse (Col. 4:9) it is also possible that Onesimus traveled with Tychicus and delivered this third letter to

Philemon.

The Letter to Philemon

- Written from prison in Rome by Paul around A. D. 62 - 63.
- Probably carried by Onesimus, a converted slave..
- This is the shortest of Paul's letters. The Greek text contains only 335 words.
- The purpose for the letter can be understood by reading it. Onesimus, the slave, had wronged his master, Philemon. Onesimus was converted to Christ by Paul, and Paul sent him back to his master.
- This letter is a courteous appeal for Philemon to receive his converted slave as a brother in Christ.

The name **Onesimus** means "useful", it is found only two times in the Bible (Col. 4:9; Phm. 1:10). The name of his master, **Philemon**, means "affectionate". His name is only found one time in the Bible (Phm. 1:1). **Apphia**, a sister in the Lord is mentioned only here. She was obviously a part of the church that met in the home of Philemon and may have been his wife. **Archippus** (master of the horse) is mentioned two times in the Bible (Col. 4:17 and Phm. 1:2). These two Scriptures indicate that he was a fellow soldier of Paul with a ministry to fulfill. Based upon the letter to Philemon, Onesimus was his slave who evidently ran away. Somehow he came in contact with Paul and was converted to Christ. Paul would like to have kept him in Rome but, instead, sent him back to his master. When Onesimus ran away he was merely a slave. Paul sent him back, however, not merely as a slave, but as a dear brother in Christ. Paul had never been to Colosse (See Col. 2:1), but was bold enough to ask Philemon to prepare a guest room for him as he hoped to be released from prison soon (Phm. 1:22). Onesimus returned to Colosse with Tychicus (Col. 4:7 - 9).

It is remarkable that Paul did not openly condemn slavery. Perhaps one reason he did not do so, was that slavery was so prevalent in the Roman Empire that such teaching could have caused a political revolution and led to much bloodshed. Christianity did do away with slavery, but by love rather than by violence. Here are Paul's inspired words written to the church in Colossae: **"Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism. 4:1 Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven."**

Consider also these inspired words to the Ephesians, written at about the same time Paul wrote to Philemon: **"Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favour when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him."** (Eph 6:5-9)

Paul repeatedly referred to himself as a "slave" of Jesus Christ (See Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; 2 Tim. 2:24; Tit. 1:1 etc.) The Bible word translated as "servant" in these passages is "doulos", which is the Greek word for slave. As we have said before, Christianity did do away with slavery. The influence of Christ brings liberty to the captives (See Lk. 4:18 - 21). There did come a time in Roman history when slavery ceased to be and the influence of Christ was an integral part of

their emancipation. Slavery will come to a peaceful end when both masters and slaves love one another as brothers in Christ.

The Letter to the Colossians

- Written from prison in Rome by Paul about A.D. 62 - 63.
- Carried by Tychicus (Col. 4:7).
- Paul had never been to Colossae (Col. 2:1)
- He evidently heard about the church there from Epaphras (Col. 1:7, 8)
- The design of the letter was to correct false teaching and to emphasize the Headship of Christ.

The name **Epaphras** is a contracted form of Epaphroditus and means “charming”. This man is different from the Epaphroditus from Philippi whom we will discuss later. Epaphras is mentioned by name three times in the Scriptures (Col. 1:7; 4:12; and Phm. 1:23). He was a native of Colosse and may have been converted while Paul was at Ephesus on his third evangelistic tour. Remember that while Paul was in Ephesus everyone in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:10:). Epaphras probably founded the church in Colosse and also worked with the brethren at Laodicea and Hierapopolis (Col. 4:12, 13).

Epaphras and Aristarchus are both called Paul’s “fellow prisoners” (See Phm. 1:23 and Col. 4:10). This may mean that they spent so much time ministering to Paul in prison that he considered them as prisoners of Christ just as he was.

Since Paul had never been to Colosse, Epaphras undoubtedly explained to him the serious doctrinal errors facing the brethren there. This led Paul to write this letter warning about an emphasis on law and the worship of angels. The supremacy of Christ is stressed many times in the letter.

The Letter to the Ephesians

- Written by Paul from prison in Rome about A. D. 62 - 63.
- Carried by Tychicus (Eph. 6:21).
- Probably a circular letter, sent first to Ephesus then to all the churches of Asia.
- May also be called the letter from Laodicea (Col. 4:16).
- Written primarily to Gentiles (Eph. 2:11; 3:1; 4:17).
- Emphasizes the unity of all believers in Christ.

Circular Letter

Paul spent over two years in Ephesus on his third evangelistic tour. As you recall, he was forced to leave when a pagan silversmith, Demetrius, instigated an uproar among those who worshiped the goddess Diana. Later, on his way to Jerusalem, Paul stopped at Miletus and sent for the elders of the Ephesian church (Acts 20:17). Paul obviously had many close friends in the church at Ephesus, yet the letter contains no personal greetings as do his other letters. Neither does he deal with prevailing errors as he did in Galatians, Colossians, Philippians, etc.

For these, and other reasons, it is believed that this letter was not written exclusively for the brethren at Ephesus. It is thought to have been sent there first, and then circulated throughout all the churches of Asia. As we mentioned before, Paul asked the Colossians to read his letter to them and then cause that it be also read by the brethren in Laodicea. In turn, he also asked the brethren in Colossae to read the letter from Laodicea. Since we know of no letter written to the Laodiceans at this time, it is assumed that it was the circular letter we call Ephesians. The letter to the Laodiceans mentioned in Rev. 3:14 - 22, was written many years

later.

Written to Gentiles

Chapter 1 makes a distinction between “us” and “you”. Paul, as a Jew wrote that the Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us, chose us, predestined us, etc. In verse 13, however, he points out that “you also were included in Christ”. In 2:11 he noted that his readers were Gentiles by birth. In 3:1 he said that he was a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles. He did not want them to walk as other Gentiles walked (4:17) etc.

Unity in Christ

The theme of the letter is ambitious beyond human comprehension. God not only wants to unite Jews and Gentiles, but also all the fragmented beings in heaven and earth (1:10). Repeatedly Paul makes reference to the “heavenly realms” (2:6; 3:10; 6:12). Our ultimate struggle is not with flesh and blood, but with spiritual forces in the heavenly realms. It is in these heavenly realms that God has chosen to make known his manifold wisdom through the church. His love surpasses knowledge (3:19) and His power is able to accomplish more than we can ask or imagine (3:20).

The Armor of God

Our victory in Christ is insured when we put on the whole armor of God (6:10 - 18). This includes the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, shoes for battle, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. It is interesting to realize that Paul wrote these words as a prisoner who was chained to a Roman soldier. The Holy Spirit enabled Paul to look at physical armor and discern a spiritual application for every item he saw.

The Letter to the Philippians

- Written by Paul from prison in Rome (A.D. 62 - 63)
- Even though the letter was written from prison it is filled with references to joy and rejoicing. The noun for joy “kara” is found five times (1:4, 28; 2:2, 29; 4:1). The verb “karein” is found 11 times (1:18, 18; 2:17, 17, 18, 18, 28; 3:1; 4:4, 4, 10)
- Carried by Epaphroditus.
- Paul expected to get out of prison (1:25; 2:24).
- Emphasizes the humility of Christ and appeals for unity in the church.
- Gratitude for support that Paul had received from them.

Philippi was a Roman colony. It was here that Paul first preached the Gospel in Europe (Acts 16). The Philippian church loved Paul and at one time was the only church that sent him help. When he was in Thessalonica, for example, they sent help more than once (Phil. 4:15, 16). Now that Paul was in Rome the Philippian church sent one of their men, Epaphroditus, to help him. Here is the way Paul wrote about it:

“And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon. But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow-worker and fellow-soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see

him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honour men like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.” (Phil 2:24-30)

You may be interested to know that the Greek word translated as “messenger” in v. 25 is their word for apostle.

From reading the letter it is obvious that there was strife in the church. Some preached Christ out of envy and rivalry (1:15); some with selfish ambition (1:17); Paul encouraged them to do nothing through selfish ambition or vain deceit (2:3); he reminded them of the humility of Christ (2:5 - 8); he admonished them to do everything without complaining and arguing (2:14); etc. Two women are specifically asked to get along with one another (4:2).

CHAPTER IX PAUL IS RELEASED FROM PRISON

Though we have mentioned it before, let us repeat several verses that indicate that Paul expected to be released from prison.

- **“And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.” (Phm. 1:22)**
- **“I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.” (Phil 1:23-26)**
- **“And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.” (Phil 2:24)**
- Luke concludes the book of Acts by stating that Paul spent “two years” in his own hired house while a prisoner in Rome (Acts 28:30, 31). This is consistent with the idea that Paul spent two years in prison and was then released. It is also probable that Luke wrote the book of Acts at the time of Paul’s release.
- There are references to places in 1 and 2nd Timothy and Titus which cannot be harmonized with Paul’s journeys as recorded in the book of Acts : Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3; Crete (Titus 1:5); Macedonia (1 Tim. 1:8); Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20); Nicopolis (Titus 3:12); Troaz (2 Tim. 4:13); etc.
- In addition to this evidence in Scripture it is the testimony of secular historians as well that Paul was released from prison - traveled extensively - wrote 1st Timothy and Titus, was again imprisoned in Rome where he wrote 2 Timothy and was then executed about A.D. 68.

After being liberated from prison it is logical to assume that Paul did what he intended to do. He planned to visit Philemon in Colosse (Phm. 22) and also the Philippians (Phil. 2:24).

It is also fair to assume that he went to Spain as he hoped to do when he wrote to the Romans: **“I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while.” (Rom 15:24)** **“So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way.” (Rom 15:28)**

Some historians also believe that Paul also traveled to England.

First Letter to Timothy

- Written by Paul to Timothy about A.D. 67.
- Probably written from Macedonia.
- Timothy was at Ephesus when he received the letter.
- The letter was intended to help with the problems in Ephesus but also provide guidance for all churches everywhere and in all generations.
- Contains qualifications for overseers and deacons (chapter 3)
- Contains qualifications for women to serve (chapter 5)
- 1 and 2nd Timothy and Titus are called “Pastoral Letters”.

Since this letter was written to Timothy while he was in Ephesus let us review again the chronology of Paul and this great city. All dates, of course, can only be approximated.

A. D. 50 - Paul desires to preach in Asia but is forbidden to do so by the Spirit (Acts 16:6).

A. D. 53 - Paul makes a brief stop in Ephesus on his way to Jerusalem and left Priscilla and Aquila.

A. D. 56 - Paul returns to Ephesus, and stays there approximately 3 years. All Asia hears the word of the Lord Jesus and Paul is driven from town by a riot of silver smiths. (Acts 19)

A. D. 58 - Paul calls the Ephesian elders to Miletus and warns them that savage wolves would come into their church. He also warned that from their own number men would arise and distort the truth (Acts 20:29, 30).

A. D. 66 - Paul returns to Ephesus after his first imprisonment in Rome. He discovers that his prophecies about corrupt leaders has come true. He therefore departs for Macedonia and leaves Timothy behind to charge certain men not to teach false doctrines (1 Tim. 1:3). (Note that on this occasion Paul went into Macedonia and left Timothy in Ephesus. Earlier he had sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia while he stayed in Ephesus - Acts 19:22).

A. D. 67 - Paul arrives in Macedonia, receives word about the situation in Ephesus and writes 1 Timothy.

It is interesting to note that a major emphasis of Paul’s first letter to Timothy was to eliminate arguing.

- The Ephesians were arguing about myths and endless genealogies and Timothy was to stop the controversy and get them to focus on love (1:3 - 7).
- He wanted believers to live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness (2:2).
- He wanted men to pray without wrath and disputing (2:8).
- Overseers in the church must not be quarrelsome (3:3).
- Deacons are to be the same kind of men, and their wives must not be malicious talkers (3:8 - 13).
- Timothy was to be an example to them in his speech (4:12).
- Older men were not to be rebuked harshly (5:1).
- Young widows are encouraged to get married and avoid idleness and gossip (5:13).
- False teachers are the ones who have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words. Their influence creates constant friction rather than godly edifying (6:3 - 5).
- Timothy was to guard this teaching and turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge (6:20).

There is obviously something wrong when we have arguments, friction, and debates over what Paul wrote in 1 Timothy!

Letter to Titus

- Written by Paul to Titus while Titus was in Crete (about A.D. 67)
- Probably written from Ephesus
- Contains qualifications for elders (chapter 1).
- Designed to help Titus deal with deceivers who were ruining whole households, teachings things they ought not to teach for the sake of dishonest gain (1:10 - 16).

Possible Chronology

- In early A.D. 67 Paul left Timothy in Ephesus, and wrote 1 Timothy to him a short time later from Macedonia.
- Paul intended to return to Ephesus (see 1 Tim. 3:14). It is logical to assume that he did so, and that on the way he stopped by Troas, met Carpus and left with him his cloak, the scrolls and the parchments (2 Tim. 4:13).
- From Ephesus he made a short trip to Crete, leaving Titus behind to ordain elders in every city and to help stabilize the church (Tit. 1:5).
- Upon his return to Ephesus he wrote to Titus. It was in the fall of the year and Paul had hoped to spend the winter in Nicopolis. He urged Titus to join him there (Tit. 3:12).
- Paul went to Nicopolis by way of Miletus, where he left Trophimus sick, and Corinth where he left Erastus (2 Tim. 4:20).

Who was Titus?

- Titus was an uncircumcised Greek (Gal. 2:3).
- His name is found 8 times in 2 Corinthians, twice in Galatians, once in Titus, and once in 2 Timothy.
- Even though he was an intimate associate with Paul his name is not found in the book of Acts.
- We do not know when Titus joined Paul but he did journey with Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem (Gal. 2:1).
- Specific information about Titus is not known until Paul's third evangelistic tour. At this time Titus was Paul's special envoy to Corinth.
- It seems that Titus and an unnamed brother carried 1 Corinthians (2 Cor. 12:18).
- Paul had apparently intended to meet with Titus at Troas and hear how the Corinthians had accepted his letter. When he was not there Paul declined the open door at Troas, and his concern for the Corinthians prompted him to proceed on to Macedonia (2 Cor. 2:12, 13).
- Titus met Paul in Macedonia and gave him a good report about the Corinthians. Paul then wrote 2 Corinthians and sent Titus back to Corinth with that letter.
- Titus also visited the churches of Macedonia making preparations to raise money for the poor saints in Judea (See 2 Cor. 8, and 9).
- Paul said that he and Titus walked in the same spirit (2 Cor. 12:18).
- Paul described Titus as his true son in the common faith (Tit. 1:4).
- Paul left him at Crete to ordain elders and help the brethren there (Tit. 1:5).
- Paul hoped to spend the winter with him in Nicopolis (Titus 3:12).
- Just before Paul's death in Rome, Titus left him and went to Dalmatia (2 Tim. 4:10).

The Cretans

Crete is a large island in the eastern Mediterranean. It is about 160 miles long and 7 to 35 miles wide. It was at Crete that Paul's wise counsel was rejected resulting in a ship wreck

(See Acts 27:7ff). We do not know how the gospel came to Crete but it is logical to assume that the Cretans at Pentecost returned there after being converted to Christ (Acts 2:11). We have no record of any apostle visiting these brethren until this visit by Paul (over 30 years after the church was started).

The problems of the church there were magnified by the nature of the people. We have written before about the prophet Epimenides in our remarks about Paul in Athens. We remind you again that Paul quoted him in Titus 1:12 - 13: **“Even one of their own prophets has said, “Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.” This testimony is true. . .”** Titus was admonished to rebuke them sharply that they might be sound in the faith.

Even though there are some people who need a sharp rebuke, the letter to Titus, like those to Timothy, stresses a calm and quiet approach to most of the problems of life.

- Elders are not to be overbearing, quick-tempered, wild and disobedient, etc. (1:6 - 9).
- Older men are to be temperate and self controlled (2:1)
- Older women are to train the younger women to not be slanderers, but to be self-controlled, pure, kind, and subject to their own husbands (2:3 - 5).
- Young men are also to be self-controlled (2:6).
- Titus was to set the proper example so that his critics would have nothing bad to say about him (2:7, 8).
- Slaves were to be subject to their masters in everything (2:9).
- All men are to say “no” to ungodliness and worldly passions and are to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives (2:12).
- The people are to be subject to rulers and authorities (3:1).
- We have been saved from malice, envy, and hatred (3:3).
- Paul stressed that those who trust in God must devote themselves to doing what is good (3:8).
- Titus was to avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, and arguments and quarrels about the law (3:9).
- Even the divisive man is to be treated gently. He is to be warned twice and then left alone. (3:10). A one man division does not hurt the Body of Christ. In fact, it may be helpful. 1 Cor. 11:19 indicates that our differences indicate who really belongs to Christ. Factious people cling to different doctrines while the approved cling to Christ.

Our People

“Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need. Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives.” (Titus 3:13-14)

We know nothing of Zenas the lawyer, but we do have several references to Apollos. 1 Cor. 16:12 is of particular interest: **“Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity.”**

The Holy Spirit distributes gifts to every believer (Rom. 12:3 - 8; 1 Cor. 12:4 - 31; 1 Pet. 4:10; etc.) Some people are called by the Holy Spirit to be leaders. These leaders selected individuals to work with them. Paul was a leader who had a team of men like Silas, Timothy, Titus, Luke, and others who worked with him. Barnabas was also a leader to chose men like John Mark to work with him. As we have pointed out before, God used Barnabas on their first evangelistic tour to help Paul develop his gift of leadership. Since both Paul and Barnabas were leaders, neither had the right to order the other around.

This simple truth helps us to understand both 1 Cor. 16:12 and Titus 3:13, 14. Since

Apollos was a leader Paul could only give him suggestions about when and where he should travel. Even though Paul “strongly” urged him, he simply refused to go. Zenas was apparently a part of the team led by Apollos and when they visited Crete, Christian courtesy demanded that Titus help them in any way he could. Paul explained that “our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good”. The simple explanation of this is that Titus was on Paul’s team and Zenas and Apollos were not. Since both Paul and Apollos were members of Christ’s Body, and obedient to Him, their actions were always in harmony and complemented one another in accomplishing the work of Christ.

Second Timothy

- Written by Paul from prison in Rome about A.D. 68.
- Paul’s last letter before his execution.
- Similar to 1 Timothy and Titus in urging Timothy to promote harmony in the church.
- Plainly predicted Paul’s death.
- Encouraged Timothy to not be afraid.

As we have mentioned before, after writing to Titus, Paul left Ephesus and went to Nicopolis to spend the winter. This journey was made by way of Miletus and Corinth. It seems that not only did Titus meet him in Nicopolis, but also Demas, Crescens, and Luke.

We have surmised that Paul was first imprisoned in Rome in A.D. 61 and that he was released in A.D. 63. The next year, A.D. 64, a large part of Rome was destroyed by fire. According to historian Philip Schaff the fire broke out on the night between the 18th and 19th of July. It started among the wooden shops in the south-eastern end of the Great Circus, near the Palatine hill. Lashed by the wind, it defied all efforts by fireman and soldiers to put it out and burned for seven nights and six days. Then it burst out again near the field of Mars, burned three more days, and devastated two more districts of the city.

While the origin of the fire remains a mystery, public rumor held that the fire was set by Nero himself. This demented ruler, it was said, wanted to rid the city of slums and rebuild it on a grand scale, and call the new city, Neropolis. The fire was a quick and easy way to accomplish his purpose. To divert from himself the general suspicions of the people, however, he blamed the Christians for setting the fire.

The Christians were an easy and convenient target. First, they steadfastly refused to worship the Roman gods. Secondly, because they met each week to take communion, the ignorant masses were led to believe that their meetings involved eating human flesh and drinking human blood. When Nero charged the Christians with destroying the city, the masses cried out for retribution. Literally thousands of Christians were put to death in the most cruel ways. Some were crucified, others were covered with animal skins and exposed to the voracity of mad dogs in the arena. Still others were covered with pitch or oil and set on fire that their burning bodies might illuminate the imperial gardens.

The historian Tacitus described what happened with these words: *“Therefore, Nero, to get rid of the rumor, substituted as criminals, and punished with exquisite tortures, those persons, odious for shameful practices, whom the common people call Christians. Christ, the author of that name was punished by the Procurator Pontius Pilate, in the reign of Tiberius; and the deadly superstition, repressed for a while, broke out again, not only in Judea, the original seat of that evil, but thru the city (Rome), whither from every side all things horrible or shameful flow together and come into vogue.”*

Nero committed suicide in June A.D. 68. This was about the same time that Paul was executed.

It was approximately A.D. 67 - 68 when Paul was arrested the final time. He wrote: “**for**

Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. . . ” (2 Tim. 4:10-11)

Paul’s Martyrdom

Paul was not afraid to die. Consider these verses:

- **“For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God,” (2 Tim 1:7-8)**
- **“That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.” (2 Tim 1:12)**
- **“You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes. May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.” (2 Tim 1:15-16)**
- **“Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.” (2 Tim 2:8-10)**
- **“You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings-- what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,” (2 Tim 3:10-12)**
- **“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day-- and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.” (2 Tim 4:6-8)**
- **“At my first defense, no-one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (2 Tim 4:16-18)**

During Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome he was chained to a soldier and allowed to live in a rented house. Even though he was a prisoner he had opportunity to preach and teach about Jesus (Acts 28:30, 31). This time, however, secular history tells us that he was placed in a grim building called the Mamertine Prison. It was constructed 100 years before Paul was there and still exists today.

In addition to the profound doctrinal teaching in 2 Timothy, Paul asked Timothy to bring the cloak that he left with Carpus at Troas, and his scrolls, but especially the parchments (2 Tim. 4:13). He encouraged him to “come before winter” (2 Tim. 4:21).

History testifies that Paul was taken from his cell and beheaded just outside the Ostian Gate. Please prayerfully consider Paul's teaching to the Thessalonians: **"Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord for ever. Therefore encourage each other with these words."** (1 Thess. 4:13-18)

Possible Chronology of Paul's Life

What happened	Approximate date	Bible reference
Born in Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia	A.D. 1 - 5	Acts 22:3
Learns to be a tentmaker		Acts 18:3
Educated at the feet of Gamaliel in Jerusalem		Acts 22:3
Church started in Jerusalem	A.D. 30	Acts 2
Stephen martyred and church scattered	A.D. 31 - 32	Acts 7, 8
Saul's conversion on Damascus Road	A.D. 33	Acts 9, 22, 26
Saul in Arabia	A.D. 33 - 36	Gal. 1:16 - 18
After "many days" Saul escapes from Damascus	A.D. 36	Acts 9:23 - 25
Grecian Jews in Jerusalem seek to kill him	A.D. 37	Acts 9:26 - 30
Saul in Tarsus for several years	A.D. 37 - 44	Acts 9:30
Greeks are preached to in Antioch		Acts 11:19 - 21
Barnabas brings Saul to Antioch in Syria	A.D. 44 - 45	Acts 11:25, 26
Saul and Barnabas go to Jerusalem	A.D. 45	Acts 11:27 - 30
First evangelistic tour	A.D. 47 - 49	Acts 13:1 - 14:28
Jerusalem council	A.D. 50	Acts 15
Second evangelistic tour	A.D. 50 - 53	Acts 15:40 - 18:28
Wrote 1 & 2nd Thessalonians	A.D. 51 - 52	
Third evangelistic tour	A.D. 54 - 59	Acts 19:1 - 21:16
Wrote Galatians, 1 & 2nd Corinthians, & Romans	A.D. 57 - 58	
Imprisoned in Jerusalem and Caesarea	A.D. 59 - 61	Acts 22:23 - 26:32
Imprisoned in Rome	A.D. 61 - 63	Acts 28:15 - 30
Wrote Philemon, Ephesians, Phillipians, and Colossians	A.D. 61 - 63	
Released from prison	A.D. 64	
Travels to various places including Ephesus, Macedonia, Troas, Crete, Miletus, Nicopolis, and possibly Spain.	A.D. 64 - 67	
Wrote 1 Timothy & Titus	A.D. 67	
Imprisoned a final time in Rome	A.D. 68	
Wrote 2nd Timothy and was executed	A.D. 68	