

## **PAUL. THE PRISONER OF JESUS FOR THE GENTILES. Eph.3v1. 4v1.**

### **Paul's consuming pain and sorrowing love for his people.**

This consuming love continually drove Paul back to Jerusalem, even against the express warning of Christ that the Jews would not receive Paul's testimony, and against Christ's clear command to leave the Jews and go and preach to the Gentiles. Paul clearly remembered the warning and direction that the Lord gave him, when He appeared to Paul in a wonderful open vision in Jerusalem in A.D. 37, for he refers to this vision when he gave his testimony to the Jews in Jerusalem, in Acts.22v17-22., some 21 years later in A.D. 58. Such a vision was impossible to forget, but Paul hoped that the Jews would listen to him and went to Jerusalem and gave his testimony to them, in spite of Christ's warning that they would not listen to him. Paul's love for his people, and his desire to win them through his own testimony, caused him to neglect the ministry to the Gentiles that the Lord Jesus had given him. So Paul ended up in being taken back to his Gentile charges in chains. The events that led up to this are as follows.

### **God's continuous and clear warnings to Paul not to go back to Jerusalem.**

As Paul travelled back to Jerusalem, the Lord tried to stop him by a series of solemn and serious prophetic warnings through the body of Christ. Paul told the elders of Ephesus, at Miletus, in Acts.20v22,23., that in every city, the Holy Spirit had solemnly and emphatically kept warning him, that imprisonment, persecution and suffering awaited him at Jerusalem. "Witnesses" is "diamarturetai," the third person singular present indicative of "diamarturomai," to make solemn affirmation, to declare solemnly and earnestly, to protest, to make a solemn and earnest charge. The Holy Spirit protested and testified repeatedly, fully, solemnly and earnestly, of the consequences of Paul's visit to Jerusalem. "Bonds and afflictions," is "desma kai thlipseis," (both are used together as in 2Cor.1v18. Phil.1v17. See "desma," Lk.8v29. and Acts.16v26.), real bonds and fearful pressures were awaiting him at Jerusalem. When Paul disobeyed these warnings from the Holy Spirit he went "bound in the spirit" to Jerusalem. He is not referring to the Holy Spirit, but to his own spirit, for the mention of the Holy Spirit in Acts.20v23., is in definite contrast to his own spirit in v22.. "Bound", is "dedemenos", the perfect passive participle of "deo," to bind, the perfect showing the continuing state or condition. When Paul, in Acts.19v21., "purposed in spirit" to go to Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit started a series of warnings which Paul ignored, and the result was that he was bound in his spirit, which was certainly not good and desirable. Paul was disobeying his own teaching that the peace of God should rule our hearts in our decisions and guidance; his bondage in spirit was the very opposite of this peace, and was another proof that he was disobeying the Holy Spirit. Col.3v15.

### **Paul sails from Miletus to Tyre.**

Paul sailed from Miletus, probably in a small coasting vessel, some forty nautical miles due south to Cos, then about fifty miles from Cos to Rhodes, and about fifty miles from Rhodes to Patara. Probably anchoring each night at these three ports. At Patara Paul sailed in a much larger vessel, a sea-going merchantman about 400 miles to Tyre, the journey would take about two days. Paul spent seven days at Tyre, after searching for and finding the Christians there. "Finding," is "aneurontes," the aorist active participle of "aneurisko," to seek for, to find by searching. As soon as Paul had found the Christians at Tyre the Holy Spirit used them to warn Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. They kept on warning Paul "through the Spirit, ('dia tou pneumatou,') not to go up to, or set foot in Jerusalem." Acts.21v4. These warnings were very specific and continual, for the word "said" is "elegon," the third person plural indicative imperfect active of "lego." It means "to lay forth, to relate, usually in a systematic and set discourse." It is a speaking that links and knits together in a connected discourse the deepest thoughts and inward feelings of the mind. They conveyed to Paul the deepest feelings and thoughts of Jesus about Paul's visit to Jerusalem. (The word "logos," is derived from the verb "lego;" "logos" means "something said, including the thought; intelligence, and word as the expression of intelligence. "Logos" is reasoned speech, "rhema," an utterance.) The imperfect shows that they continually warned Paul not to go to Jerusalem for the whole of the seven days that he was a Tyre. This was done through the Holy Spirit, and in a systematic and heartfelt way, by Christians who had no axe to grind, and out of a deep concern for Paul. Paul disobeyed the express commands and warnings of the Holy Spirit through these warm-hearted Christians and set out for Jerusalem.

It seems Paul could have stayed seven days at Tyre while the ship was unloaded and its other business matters were completed; so did the providence of God order events in order to speak to Paul and try to prevent him from going out of His will. There are many theologians who try to justify Paul's determination to go to Jerusalem. They say that the prophecy in Acts.21v4., was a warning and not a prohibition, and so Paul was not disobeying the Holy Spirit. All theologians agree that Paul was forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach in Asia and Bithynia in Acts.16v6,7.; they should also accept as equally authoritative and correct the Holy Spirit's command in Acts.21v4., that Paul was not to go up to Jerusalem.

Paul finished his sea journey with the thirty miles voyage from Tyre to Ptolemais, the modern Acre, they stayed only one day there, and the next day they went the 35 miles to Caesarea by land. They stayed "many days" at the home of Philip the evangelist, who had four daughters who prophesied. Acts.21v6-10. One wonders why Paul hurried past Ephesus and neglected the Christians there, when he could spend so much time in Philip's home?

### **Paul stays at the Home of Philip the evangelist and meets Agabus the prophet there.**

While Paul was at the home of Philip at Caesarea, the prophet Agabus accurately warned Paul, by the striking symbolic binding of Paul's feet and hands, of the evil consequences that would follow if Paul went to Jerusalem. When they heard this the disciples tried to persuade Paul not to go up to Jerusalem, but he would not be persuaded, and his earnest words convinced them he was right, and they said, "The will of the Lord be done!" It seems they were in such awe of Paul's mighty apostolic ministry, and his willingness to die for Christ, that they laid on one side their first God-given spiritual feelings and warnings and sacrificed their judgement in the matter. Paul tells us in 1Thes.5v21., that we must never fail to exercise correct judgement over spiritual revelation; indeed, we are to test supposed revelations very carefully, we are "to prove all things;" "prove," is "dokimizo," and it is used of the testing of metals in the fire. When a whole group of godly and spiritual people say the same thing, it is often the voice of God trying to save us from danger and distress and from going out of God's will. Peter also said with the very same earnestness that he was prepared to die for the Lord Jesus, and was not prepared to listen to the prophetic warning. Strong affirmation and earnestness do not mean a person is right. Luke.22v31-34, 54-62.

### **Paul rehearses all that God had done among the Gentiles.**

After Paul arrived in Jerusalem, he gave an account to the Church leaders of what God had done among the Gentiles. They glorified God for it. All seemed so well and so promising, and the Spirit's warnings so incongruous and unnecessary. Then the trouble started, the Jewish Christian leaders asked Paul to show that he was a good Jew and kept the Law by performing a Nazarite vow, which involved the offering of sacrifices in the Temple. Acts.21v17-24. This was obviously an attempt to reconcile Paul with the Jews; but it shows how deficient the Church leaders at Jerusalem were in their knowledge of our Lord's plans for His Church, and the theology about the Church and its relation to Judaism. Fulfilling their request meant that Paul had to deny the theology about the Church and the New Covenant and its relationship to Judaism, that Christ had revealed to him, and entrusted him to reveal to the Church, the theology revealed in Paul's epistles to the Galatians and Ephesians.

### **Paul should have taught the Christian leaders at Jerusalem the theology of Galatians.**

Paul should have told them, as he did the Galatians in Gal.5v4., "If you try to be justified by the Law, you automatically cut yourself off from the power of Christ; you put yourself outside the range of His grace." Phillips Translation. Instead of teaching them the truths Christ had taught him, Paul went along with their expediency, and bound himself with a Nazarite vow and offered sacrifices in the Temple, which he knew had been fulfilled in Christ. Acts.19v21. 21v26. Paul had rebuked Peter and Barnabus for this same hypocrisy in Gal.2v11-18., and yet we see him showing the Jews that he is "zealous for the Law." Acts.21v20-24.

Paul said in Gal.2v18,21., "For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. v21. I do not frustrate the grace of God; for if righteousness come by the Law, then Christ is dead in vain." Again in Gal.3v1-14., Paul calls the Galatians foolish for going back on justification by faith, by keeping the Law, and says in v10., "Those who take their stand on observance of the Law are all under a curse." In Gal.5v1., Paul calls the Law a yoke of slavery, from which Christ has made us free, and tells the Galatians not to be entangled again with it. The New English Bible translation of Gal.5v4. is very instructive; "When you seek to be justified by way of Law, your relation with Christ is completely severed: you have fallen outside the domain of God's grace."

If the Church leaders at Jerusalem had grasped the truth of these Scriptures, they would not have asked Paul to show he was a good Jew and kept the Law. The fact they did so, makes it clear that they were still in bondage to Jewish tradition, and were to a large extent, either still ignorant of, or unwilling to receive, the theology that had been revealed to Paul by our Lord, regarding the New Covenant and the Church. These Scriptures also reveal the very definite disobedience of Paul to the truths that he believed. It is not surprising that the Holy Spirit tried to stop Paul from going to Jerusalem, for he knew that it would result in Paul seriously sinning by denying and compromising vital New Covenant truth.

From the above facts we can see that the church leaders request to Paul was a carnal human expedient to try to reconcile the Jews to Paul and the Church. This human expedient was definitely a stratagem inspired by Satan to destroy the Church by compromise with Judaism. Satan knew well that if the Church tried to justify itself by the Law, it would come under the curse of the Law and be doomed. Gal.3v10.

### **The request of the Church leaders can also be judged by its fruits.**

The result was not their hoped for reconciliation between the Jews, Paul and the Church, but a riot, and a terrible exacerbation of relations between Judaism and the Church. There could be no compromise between the New Covenant and the Old Covenant, it was as impossible as reconciliation between the two sons of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, as Paul taught in Gal.4v21-31.. This hypocrisy and carnal expediency had several horrific effects on the early Church.

### **1. The truth Jesus gave to Paul about the Church and New Covenant was going to be greatly hindered.**

Satan used Paul's actions to veil truth from both the Church and the world. Gal.1v11,12. 2Cor.11v1 to 12v12. Eph.3v1-12. Is.25v6-9. His actions had denied the truths in Galatians, and as a result Judaism took a firm hold

on the Church. The conflict between the advocates of the New Covenant and the Old Covenant was one of the biggest problems of the early Church.

## **2. Paul gave the Judaizers the ammunition to attack him, and bring the Church in bondage to the Law.**

The Judaizers said that Paul's example showed that Christians had to keep the law to be saved, and that Paul was guilty of double standards and hypocrisy. The result was disastrous, for the Judaizers turned many churches to their way of thinking, it appears that even Ephesus followed them for a while, for Paul wrote in 2Tim.1v15., "all they which are in Asia be turned away from me." Paul's converts turned against him, and it broke his heart, his visit to Jerusalem was undoubtedly the cause of their disaffection. When Paul warned of the wolves that would attack the Church, he did not realise that it was his own actions that would set the Judaistic wolves free to attack the Church. Acts.20v28-32.

## **3. Paul's visit to Jerusalem resulted in his ministry to his Gentile converts being permanently restricted.**

Paul had neglected his ministry to his Gentile converts, to get to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost, even though he knew that many of them would never see him again. Acts.20v16,17,36-38. This permanent separation from many of his converts was the result of Paul going to Jerusalem. Paul's ministry was greatly restricted by this disobedience to Jesus he spent five years in custody with a greatly restricted ministry, and he was unable to visit His converts, and protect them from the wolves he said would attack them. In Eph.3v1., Paul said he was "the prisoner of Jesus for you Gentiles," he said that Jesus had used the bonds and imprisonment to send him back to his calling and work among the Gentiles, unfortunately this was on a very restricted basis. See Eph.4v1. Paul was in detention at Caesarea for two years from A.D. 58 to 60, Acts.24v27.. Festus sends Paul to Rome by sea in the Autumn of A.D. 60. After the shipwreck, Paul winters at Malta, Acts.28v11., and arrives at Rome in the Spring of A.D. 61. At Rome Paul was confined to house imprisonment for two years, from the Spring of A.D. 61 to the Spring of A.D. 63. Acts.28v30. Here he wrote; Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philipians.

There is no clear evidence regarding what happened to Paul on his acquittal and release from prison in A.D.63. There is some patristic evidence from Jerome, Theodoret,( 2nd. Century), and Clement of Rome, to indicate that Paul fulfilled the desire expressed in Rom.15v24,28. and went westward to Spain from A.D. 64 to 66, but this is disputed by others. Clement, a contemporary of Paul, (Origen, who died 254 A.D., says Clement helped Paul at Philippi) says Paul went on his missionary journeys "to the extreme limit of the West" and became "a herald of the Gospel to the Eastern and Western world." Jerome, who died 420 A.D., also spent time at Rome, said that Paul, "after his first imprisonment he preached the Gospel in Spain. The Muratorian Canon written in about the middle of the second century, appears to take it for granted that Paul went to Spain. Eusebius, who died 341 A.D., says that Paul preached the Gospel after his release from imprisonment, and that he wrote his second epistle to Timothy while he was imprisoned at Rome for the second time, and then suffered martyrdom there just after writing it. This would be in May or June of A.D. 68.

## **4. Paul's action fogged and confused the minds of the Church leaders about coming prophetic events.**

The apostles and Church elders at Jerusalem were obviously deficient in their theology about prophetic events regarding Jerusalem and the Temple. The prophetic warnings of Jesus seemed to be far from their minds when they asked Paul to take a Nazarite vow in the Temple. They should have been warning the Christians that the Temple was soon to be destroyed, but they were acting as if the Old Covenant still applied, and Judaism would go on for ever. The truth was that God's protection of the chosen people was gone, God had forsaken Israel because of their sinfulness and wilful unbelief, and both Temple and Jerusalem would be destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70, within twelve years of Paul's Nazarite vow in the Temple at Jerusalem. Mt.22v7. 23v38,39. 27v51. The actual start of the war with the Romans was only eight years away in A.D. 66, so the Church at Jerusalem was rapidly approaching the worst crisis that Israel had faced in their history. The Church leaders at Jerusalem failed to appreciate Christ's warning in Lk.19v41-44., of the impending destruction of Jerusalem, which was so dramatically emphasised by our Lord's heart-broken sobbing and lamentation. Jesus clearly saw the fearful carnage that would occur, and His great grief makes it clear that this was not His or the Father's will. The one blessing to come out of this dreadful suffering, was that the destruction of the Jewish Temple and religion delivered the Church from the Judaizers, and stopped it from becoming just another part of Judaism.

The whole story demonstrates the strength of the ties of race and tradition. Even the leading theologian of the Church found it difficult to escape the chains of misguided love, nationalism and tradition. We need to take heed to the warnings of these Scriptures, and watch our traditions and our strong and loving desires, for they can lead us out of the will of God, just as they did Paul. If we insist on going our own way after our heart's desire, the Lord may give us the desire of our hearts, but send leanness into our souls. Ps.106v15. In spite of this determined rebellion by Paul, the great grace of our Lord was manifested to Paul in a vision in the night, "The Lord stood by him, and said, Take courage, Paul; for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." Acts.23v11. There was no rebuke, only encouragement, the grace and love of Jesus and our heavenly Father are beyond all human thought, their kindness pours out to us even in our failures. But one does wonder what wonderful plans our Lord had for Paul, if he had obeyed the voice of the Lord and kept away from Jerusalem. We can also wonder how often God has had to modify His plans for us,

because we have not obeyed or listened to His warning voice or plans for us. The most lovely plans of our Lord Jesus for us are often frustrated by us; He still has to say, "How often would I---and ye would not," Mt.23v37.; and "Oh, that you had heeded my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, And your righteousness like the waves of the sea." Is.48v18.

**There is some evidence in the Scriptures to indicate that Paul might have visited the following places.**

Some think that Paul may have fulfilled the desire expressed in Heb.13v23. to take Timothy with him to Jerusalem, and left Titus at Crete on his way there. Titus.1v5. However, there is no record that Paul ever saw Jerusalem or the Temple again, the Jewish revolt against the Romans, and the consequent war from A.D. 66 to 70, made travel there difficult and dangerous.

Wordsworth deduces from Heb.13v23., that Paul possibly wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews in the Spring of A.D. 64, just before Nero started his vicious persecution of the Church; Bullinger in "The Companion Bible," says it was written in A.D. 53 to 54. The churches of Jerusalem, Palestine, Syria, Asia and Alexandria, say that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews. Jerome says, "All the Greek writers received it as his." The churches of both East and West said it was written by Paul. It is easy to see why Paul wrote this great work anonymously. No one was better qualified to write this work, but no one was hated so much, if his name had appeared on the epistle, it would have made many unwilling to read it. Paul had real enemies both inside and outside of the Church, and if his name had been on the epistle, it would have hindered its message. Paul also may have fulfilled his intention of visiting Colosse; Philemon.v22., and performed his promise to go to Philippi in Macedonia. Phil.2v24. 1Tim.1v3.

Paul certainly did visit Troas in Asia, 2Tim.4v13.; and Miletus, 2Tim.4v20.; and Nicopolis, Titus.3v12.; and Greece, 2Tim.4v20.; before he was imprisoned for a second time in Rome. 2Tim.1v16,17..

When Paul wrote his first epistle to Timothy from Macedonia in A.D. 67, it appears that Timothy was at Ephesus from 1Tim.1v3.. The fact that Paul expresses a desire in 1Tim.3v14. to see Timothy, does not mean that Paul went to Ephesus, for in 1Tim.3v15. he makes it clear that he may not be able to visit Timothy, and in Acts.20v36-38., Paul had said he that he would never see the Ephesians again. It seems that Paul went close by Ephesus when he left Trophimus sick at Miletus and may have seen Timothy there, but there is no definite record that he visited Ephesus. 2Tim.4v20.

From these fact we can see that Paul was released from approximately A.D. 64 to 67, and only had between three and four years liberty to minister to his converts at a time of great crisis for the Church. The monster Nero set fire to Rome on July 19th. A.D. 64, and blamed it on the Christians, and persecuted them with terrible ferocity and cruelty until his death on June 9th. A.D. 68, at almost the same time as Paul.

**NOTE:**

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