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FROM MALTA TO ROME

– *NOVEMBER 19. – ACTS 28:11-24,30,31. –*

THE JOURNEY TO ROME ACCOMPLISHED – MEETING WITH THE BRETHREN – FRESH EVIDENCES OF BROTHERLY LOVE – ST. PAUL CALLS TOGETHER THE LEADERS AMONGST THE JEWS AT ROME – THE GOSPEL PROCLAIMED AND EXPOUNDED – AS USUAL, SOME REFUSED TO ACCEPT THE MESSAGE.

"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." – Romans 1:16.

EARLY in the spring, A.D. 60, Centurion Julius and his soldiers of the Augustan Band started from Malta with St. Paul and the other prisoners for Rome in another ship, Luke and Aristarchus accompanying the Apostle. The voyage was effected without special incident, the landing being made in the Bay of Naples, at Puteoli, the seaport of Rome, which is one hundred and fifty miles inland. Here they tarried for seven days, the centurion awaiting orders from Rome respecting the disposal of his prisoners.

This delay afforded St. Paul an opportunity to meet with a little band of Christians residing at Puteoli. Doubtless he took the opportunity also to send word to the Christians residing at Rome, whom he had repeatedly declared that he longed to meet, and whom the Lord promised that he should meet. The journey to Rome was made on foot. En route the Apostle was frequently cheered by evidences of the Christian love of the brethren. Some of them met him at Appii Forum, forty-three miles distant from Rome; and another delegation met him at Three Taverns, thirty miles from the great city.

Many famous generals had come this same way with [R5975 : page 315] their troops to the imperial city, to receive honors and

applause. But few preachers have had so great honors as were accorded to St. Paul. The journey to and from Rome was sixty miles for one delegation and eighty-six miles for the other; and the record shows us that by these manifestations of loving interest the Apostle was made acquainted with the true spirit of brotherhood amongst the Christians at Rome. The brethren doubtless came on the journey for their own refreshment and joy, not realizing, perhaps, that the Apostle needed this evidence of their love.

Commenting along these lines a gifted writer says, "We often forget that great men are often very lonely; and while we hesitate to say kind words to them, yet words of recognition for what they have done are refreshing to those who receive more criticism than praise. A few days ago an editor showed me a letter which he had just received from one who had held nearly the highest position in the gift of the American people, thanking him for his kindly words in a late editorial. My friend said that at first he was astonished that so great a man should care for anything that he could say; but that on further thought he understood the value of generous appreciation even to the greatest and wisest of men."

"IN HIS OWN HIRED HOUSE"

The fact that there were no charges of an evil character against St. Paul, and the further fact that the centurion who had him in charge during the voyage became his friend, were quite sufficient reasons why the Apostle should not be treated as an ordinary prisoner, but permitted to live in his own hired house under the care of a soldier to whom he was lightly chained. Although not permitted to go at liberty, he was allowed, however, to receive his friends and others who called upon him.

It is difficult to estimate how much Divine providence had to do with all these arrangements. Moreover, the soldier on guard was changed every few hours, so that probably the Apostle came into contact with at least six every day. Thus gradually he probably came

into close contact with the entire imperial guard, and thus many were made acquainted with Christian teachings and example. It is claimed that through these soldiers the Gospel Message was carried to France, Germany and Great Britain. Truly, "God works in a mysterious way!"

St. Paul must have had some financial means. It is assumed that ere this he had come into his patrimony. The Scriptures intimate that Felix had held him captive at Caesarea in hope of receiving a bribe for his release, implying some knowledge respecting St. Paul's finances.

PREACHING TO THE JEWS OF ROME

The Lord's servant was not slow in using his God-granted privileges. He knew not when they might be taken away. First of all, of course, he met the Christian brethren. But, as early as the third day after his arrival at Rome, he sent for the Jewish leaders and officers of the synagogue; for at that time there were seven synagogues in the imperial city. He desired to give them information at first-hand respecting why he was there and a prisoner. Then he wished to preach to them the Gospel of Christ.

The Jewish leaders accepted his invitation and visited the Apostle. Doubtless they came readily for several reasons. First, the Jews at Rome had been subject to persecution, which some three years previous had driven Aquila and Priscilla from the city. This persecution had now to some extent abated; but doubtless it had left the hearts of the Jews in a much humbler condition than otherwise they would have been. Second, the Jews doubtless were interested in a fellow countryman in distress, especially one whom they found to be so peculiarly treated by the Roman government – one granted so great liberty as St. Paul enjoyed.

The Lord's providence was certainly in this matter; and the Apostle's peculiar form of restraint was evidently favorable to the

cause which he represented. The Jews would certainly beware how they would raise a commotion against one who, although a prisoner, was treated with such consideration, one who was under the direct protection of a soldier, and one for violence to whom they would be directly responsible to Julius, supposed to have been the prefect of the Praetorium – "the captain of the guard."

St. Paul explained to his guests that, although a prisoner at the instance of the Jews of Palestine, he was not disloyal to his nation or to its customs. He had been pronounced innocent at the Roman Court, but had been compelled to appeal to Caesar for his safety. Even then, however, he was making no accusation against his countrymen. He proposed that gladly he would explain to them the good news that the long-expected Messiah had come, in whom the Jewish expectations had rested.

Mark the Apostle's wisdom in handling his subject. He not only showed no unkindness of sentiment toward those who had been the cause of his imprisonment, but he declared to his hearers that he was suffering imprisonment because of his loyalty to Israel and to the hope of Israel. Kindness often begets kindness. The Jewish leaders responded in most considerate terms that they knew nothing against the Apostle, and that they would be pleased to hear his story from his own lips. They admitted, however, that they had some prejudice against the doctrines which he advocated; for they had unfavorable reports concerning Christianity – that "everywhere it is spoken against."

TESTIFYING FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD

On the day appointed, the Jews came to hear the Apostle's Message. From morning until evening he quoted, explained and expounded, showing from the Law and from the Prophets that Jesus is the Messiah; that He is now gathering a Spiritual Seed of Abraham to be His Kingdom; that when this Kingdom class is complete, it will be glorified in the First Resurrection; and that then will begin

the work allotted to the Seed of Abraham – the blessing of all the families of the earth. – Gal. 3:8,16,29.

Doubtless, too, the Apostle gave an account of the purity of our Lord's life and teachings, and narrated the facts proving His resurrection from the dead. Doubtless he witnessed that the Lord was no longer a man, but a glorious spirit being, whose presence, when seen by St. Paul himself, shone above the brightness of the sun at noonday. Doubtless, also, he pointed out the High Calling of the Church, and explained that this opportunity for becoming Spiritual Israel was accorded first of all to Fleshly Israel; and that the Gentiles, nevertheless, according to the words of the Prophets, would be called in to fill up the elect number which God had predestinated to this glory. Doubtless he showed that the Call involved suffering, sacrifice and self-denial now on the part of those who desired to share in the glories of the Heavenly Kingdom as it will be established at the Second Coming of Messiah and the resurrection of the one true Church. – Rom. 8:28-30,17-19.

When some of his audience refused the Message, St. Paul sought further to influence them, or at least to influence the believing ones, by quoting from the Prophet Isaiah (6:9,10), showing that God had foreknown and had foretold that the majority of the Jews would reject the Message when it should come to them. As our Lord said of them, "Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive." The Apostle was not responsible for the effect of the **[R5975 : page 316]** Truth upon his hearers. He earnestly desired to do them good, and used his very best endeavors to present the Truth wisely. The responsibility then lay with the hearers, not with St. Paul, not with the Lord.

The Apostle did not mean that those who are deaf to the Gospel will be eternally tormented; but that they will lose a great blessing – the wonderful privilege of becoming heirs of God and joint-heirs

with Jesus Christ the Redeemer in His Millennial Kingdom. They lose a share with the saints in the glorious work of human uplift, which will then be in progress. They lose this privilege because not worthy of it. For this cause they were blind to the Truth. Had the unworthy ones been permitted to see, hear and understand the Gospel Message, their responsibilities would have been increased, and possibly the outworkings of the Divine purposes would have been to some extent hindered.

WHY THE GOSPEL IS REJECTED

Some of the Jewish leaders believed St. Paul's Message, and some did not. It is always thus. The Truth is a searcher and discernor of the hearts; it is also a separator. It is the Lord's purpose that the Truth shall attract only the one class – the pure in heart, the "Israelites indeed"; and that it shall separate and antagonize those who are not in the right condition of heart, but who are moved even in their religious life by selfishness. Not all are ready for the Present Truth. Some who are noble and generous in many respects have a prejudice of mind or of heart, which hinders them from receiving the Good Tidings. With others it is love of the sect, the party, with which they are identified, and whose teachings must be more or less antagonistic to the Truth because of the error they contain. With still others it is the fear of man, which bringeth a snare – the fear of unpopularity, and the realization that faithfulness to the Gospel of Christ would mean self-sacrifice, the giving up of the will.

Now, as then, the Lord is using just such testings to separate the wheat from the tares, the gold from the dross. We cannot expect that He will do otherwise. Therefore our prayers and our endeavors must be in the direction of thorough honesty with the Lord, with the brethren, and with His Truth – the love of the Truth being above all things else. The Lord's declaration respecting the class that will fall during this time of testing is that He will send them strong delusion,

that they will believe the lie, because they received not the Truth in the love of it. – 2 Thessalonians 2:10,11.

For nearly two years St. Paul remained under these conditions, preaching the Kingdom of God, and explaining how it may be attained at the present time by becoming members of the Elect Little Flock, the Bride of Christ, and how the Kingdom, when established, will during the Millennium bless the whole earth. He taught that all these things were dependent upon the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrifice; that without the redemption which is in Christ Jesus there could be no remission of sins, no everlasting life, no Kingdom class upon the spirit plane, but only everlasting destruction. – Acts 3:23.

Here the narrative of St. Paul's work ends. Tradition tells us that at the end of two years he was liberated; that again he visited the churches of Asia Minor and subsequently went to Spain; that, later on, he came back to Rome as a prisoner without favor; and that after spending a considerable time in the Mamertine prison, a dread dungeon, he finally suffered martyrdom. Tradition also says that his Roman citizenship saved him from crucifixion; and that instead he was decapitated. St. Paul's Cathedral at Rome is said to have been built near the place of his execution.

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