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Trouble in Judea

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With his third journey now behind him, Paul (and his traveling companions) went to see James, head of the Jerusalem congregation and the other elders in Jerusalem (Acts 21:17-18). The apostles not present at this meeting probably were preaching to the lost House of Israel at this time—see Chapter 6 of this book.

Paul greeted the church leaders in Jerusalem and gave them a complete report of what God had done among the Gentiles through his work. He also brought them the collection he had gathered from brethren on his trip. The Jerusalem brethren praised God for the success He had given Paul (Acts 21:19-20).

Then the brethren warned Paul that word had spread among the Jews in Jerusalem that he was teaching Jews who lived in Gentile regions not to circumcise and not to follow Jewish customs. They would be sure to learn that Paul was in Jerusalem.

Paul Is Arrested

The church leaders suggested Paul go with four men who had taken a Nazarite vow and

join in their ceremony of purification. Then the Jews would not believe what they had heard about Paul.

So the next day Paul went with the men and performed the ceremony of purification with them. Paul also agreed to pay the cost of the vow for the four men (Acts 21:23-26).

Barclay describes the Nazarite vow: “If a Jew had been saved from some great peril or delivered from some great sickness, or if he wanted in a special way to show his self dedication to God, he took this vow upon himself. He bound himself, very likely for a period of 30 days, not to eat meat and not to drink wine and not to cut his hair. It seems that he had to spend the last week actually in the temple premises and when the 30 days were over he had to offer an unblemished year-old lamb for a sin offering, an unblemished ram for a peace offering, a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mixed with oil, and a cereal offering and a drink offering. He then had to shave his head and the shaven hair must be burned on the altar with the sacrifice. The regulations are in Numbers 6. Clearly this would be an expensive business and quite impossible for a poor man to perform. It was

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therefore looked on as a specially pious and credible action for some wealthy man to defray the expenses when some poor person took this vow" (Barclay, p. 127).

When Paul went with the four men into the Temple, they gave notice of how many days it would be until the end of the period of purification when the sacrifice for each one of them would be offered (Acts 21:26).

All went well until just before time to sacrifice.

"When the seven days were about to come to an end, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul in the Temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and grabbed Paul. 'Men of Israel,' they shouted, 'Help! This is the man who goes everywhere teaching everyone against the people of Israel, the Law of Moses, and this Temple. And now he has even brought some Gentiles into the Temple and defiled this holy place!' (They said this because they had seen Trophimus [a Gentile Christian] from Ephesus with Paul in the city, and they thought Paul had taken him into the Temple)" (vv. 27-29).

"For Gentiles to trespass into the inner court was a capital offense, and so would be the aiding and abetting of such a trespass" (Bruce, p. 356).

"Confusion spread through the whole city, and the people all ran together, grabbed Paul, and dragged him out of the Temple. At once the Temple doors were closed. The mob was trying to kill Paul when a report was sent up to [Claudius Lysias,] the commander of the Roman troops, that all of Jerusalem was rioting.

"At once [Lysias] took some soldiers and rushed down to the crowd. When the people saw him with the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. The commander went over to Paul, arrested him, and ordered him to be tied up with two chains. Then he asked, 'Who is this man, and what has he done?' Some of the crowd shouted one thing and others shouted something else. There was such confusion that the commander could not find out exactly what had happened; so he ordered his men to take Paul up to the fort" (Acts 21:30-34).

This fort was the fortress of Antonia, appropriated to the soldiers. The fort was built by Herod on a high rock at the north-west corner of the great Temple area. It was named after Mark Antony, a Roman general and friend of Caesar, who lived 83-30 B.C. (JFB, p. 1125).

When they got to the steps of the fortress of Antonia, the soldiers had to lift up Paul and carry him because the mob was so wild. They were all screaming, "Kill him!"

As they were about to take Paul into the fort, Paul asked the commander in Greek, "May I say something to you?"

The commander was startled to hear Greek. "Do you speak Greek?" he asked. "Then you are not that Egyptian fellow who some time ago started a revolution and led 4,000 armed terrorists into the desert?"

Paul answered, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cicillia, a citizen of an important city. Please, let me speak to the people."

The commander consented. Paul stood on the steps and motioned with his hands to the people. When they had quieted down, Paul spoke to them in Hebrew (Acts 21:35-40).

When the Jews heard the Hebrew words, they grew quieter still. And they listened intently as Paul told them the story of his life—his Jewish background, how he persecuted the Church of God until he was converted by the resurrected Jesus Christ. But then he told of his commission to the Gentiles (Acts 22:1-21).

As soon as the Jews heard the word "Gentiles" they stopped listening and started shouting at the top of their voices, "Away with him! Kill him! He's not fit to live!" They screamed, waved their clothes and threw dust in the air.

The Roman commander ordered his men to take Paul into the fort and scourge him to find out why the crowd acted like it did (vv. 22-24).

In Philippi Paul had been beaten with the lictor's rods but a scourging was much different. The scourge was a long strip of leather studded with pieces of sharpened bone and weighted with lead. Sometimes a

blow was made to the face and an eye would be ripped out. Almost always men fainted under the lash (Barclay, p. 131).

When the soldiers had Paul tied up to be scourged, he asked a nearby officer, "Is it lawful for you to whip a Roman citizen who hasn't even been tried for any crime?"

When the officer heard this, he went to Commander Lysias. "What are you doing?" he asked. "That man is a Roman citizen!" Lysias went to Paul and asked him if he were indeed a Roman citizen. Paul replied that he was.

"I became one by paying a large amount of money," the commander told the apostle (Acts 22:25-28).

Roman citizenship was bought and sold at a great price during the reign of Emperor Claudius. Later, under other emperors, the cost of citizenship would be reduced to next to nothing. But to falsely claim citizenship was a capital crime (JFB, p. 1126).

Paul told Lysias that he was a citizen by birth. At once the men who were going to question Paul drew back from him and the commander was afraid because he had a Roman citizen in chains.

Paul before the Sanhedrin

Commander Lysias wanted to know what the Jews were accusing Paul of doing. The next day he had the chains removed from Paul and ordered the chief priests and the whole council of the Sanhedrin to meet. Then he took Paul and made him stand before Sanhedrin (Acts 22:30).

The Sanhedrin was the supreme court of the Jews and had jurisdiction over Jews throughout the world. It had 70 members consisting of priests, scribes, rabbis, Pharisees and Saducees. The high priest served as president of the court. In the time of Jesus the high priest was Caiaphas. During Paul's day Ananias served in this position (Barclay, p. 132; "Sanhedrin," *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, p. 1127).

Paul looked straight at the members of the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers! My conscience is perfectly clear about my whole

life before God, to this very day."

Ananias ordered those standing close to Paul to strike him on the mouth. But Paul answered, "God will certainly strike you—you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the Law, yet you break the Law by ordering them to strike me!"

Those close to Paul let him know he was insulting the high priest. Paul backed down. "I did not know, my brothers, that he was the high priest," Paul apologized. "For the scripture says 'You must not speak evil of the ruler of your people'" (Acts 23:1-5).

Several explanations have been given why Paul did not know the high priest. Josephus tells us that the priesthood was in confusion and in a continual state of change at that time. And Paul had been gone for nearly five years. Or perhaps he did not recognize the high priest because he was not wearing the usual garb or was sitting in a different seat than would be expected (JFB, p. 1126).

In any event, Paul backed down, quoting Ex. 22:28. He had long abandoned any hope of obtaining justice or a fair hearing. So he went on the offensive, and dropped an intellectual bomb in their midst. By now he recognized the two main groups represented in the Sanhedrin were the Pharisees who believed in life after death and the Saducees who did not. So he said, "My brothers! I am a Pharisee, the son of Pharisees. I am on trial here because I hope that the dead should be raised to life!"

As soon as he said this, the Pharisees and Saducees started quarreling and the group was divided. The shouting grew louder. Then some Pharisees who were teachers of the Law shouted, "We cannot find a thing wrong with this man!" And because Pharisees also believed in angels and spirits but Saducees did not, they added this barb: "Perhaps a spirit or an angel really did speak to him!"

When talk failed, the Sanhedrin turned to violence, the typical human progression of an argument. But it became so violent that Commander Lysias was afraid members of the Sanhedrin would tear Paul to

pieces. He ordered his soldiers into the group to grab Paul and take him back to the fortress (Acts 23:5-10).

Jews Plot to Kill Paul

The following night Christ stood by Paul in prison and said, "Courage! You have given your witness to me here in Jerusalem, and you must do the same in Rome also."

The next day more than 40 Jews got together and vowed not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. They went to the Sanhedrin and asked it to request that Lysias bring Paul again before it. They would kill Paul before he ever got to the council chambers.

But one of Paul's nephews heard of the plot and revealed it to Paul, who summoned one of the officers and said, "Take this man to the commander, he has something to tell him."

Paul's nephew was taken to Lysias. The commander was told of the Jews' plot. He told the young man to tell no one of this secret and sent him away (Acts 23:11-22).

Paul Sent to Caesarea

Then Lysias called two officers and said, "Get 200 soldiers ready to go to Caesarea, together with 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen, and be ready to leave by 9:00 tonight. Provide some horses for Paul to ride, and get him safely through to Governor Felix" (Acts 23:23-24).

This was a "formidable guard" for such an occasion but Roman officials felt a great need to protect the public peace. The abundance of military escort would keep Paul safe from any violence and the military force at Jerusalem was large enough to spare this convoy (JFB, p. 1127).

Felix was procurator over Judea from A.D. 53 to about 60. He ruled the province in a mean, cruel, immoral and extravagant way. His term was full of troubles and seditions. Felix was married to Drusilla, daughter of Herod Agrippa I, and had a son, Agrippa ("Felix," Smith, p. 189). He was a

ruthless ruler, known for quickly stamping out signs of rebellion (Bruce, pp. 344-345).

Lysias sent the following letter to accompany Paul to Felix:

"Claudius Lysias to his Excellency, the Governor Felix: Greetings. The Jews seized this man and were about to kill him. I learned that he is a Roman citizen, so I went with my soldiers and rescued him. I wanted to know what they were accusing him of, so I took him down to their Council. I found out he had not done a thing for which he deserved to die or be put in prison, the accusation against him had to do with questions about their own law. And when I was informed that the Jews were making a plot against him, I decided to send him to you. I told his accusers to make their charge against him before you" (Acts 23:25-30).

The soldiers carried out their commander's orders. They departed Jerusalem for the seat of Roman government in that area at 9 p.m. They traveled to Antipatris, nearly 40 miles away, and spent the night. (The city was named by Herod to honor his father, Antipater.) The next morning it was determined that the infantry was no longer needed and the foot soldiers returned to Jerusalem. The horsemen accompanied Paul the remaining 25 miles to Caesarea (vv. 31-32; JFB, p. 1127).

The soldiers delivered the letter and Paul to Felix. He read the letter and asked Paul from which province he had come. When he learned Paul was from Cilicia, Felix promised him a full hearing when his accusers arrived. He gave orders for Paul to be kept under guard in Herod's Palace (vv. 33-35).

Paul on Trial before Felix

Roman citizens were to go on trial within three days of their arrest. The trial could last as long as needed but it must begin within three days. It was five days before the Jewish delegation arrived from Jerusalem to bring accusations against Paul. Ananias and his henchmen were there. But they also had hired a professional Roman pleader named Tertullus.

The orator “began with the most fulsome flattery of Felix which everyone, including Felix, knew was a complete and nauseating lie” (Barclay, p. 138). He praised the corrupt leader up one side and down the other.

Then Tertullus laid his charge against Paul. He accused him of being a revolutionary, a Christian, and a defiler of the Temple courts (Barclay, p. 138).

Notice his words: “Your Excellency! Your wise leadership has brought us a period of peace, and many necessary reforms are being made for the good of our country. We welcome this everywhere at all times and we are deeply grateful to you. I do not want to take up too much of your time, however, so I beg you to be kind and listen to our brief account. We found this man to be a dangerous nuisance; he starts riots among the Jews all over the world, and is leader of the party of the Nazarenes. He also tried to defile the Temple, and we arrested him. [We planned to judge him according to our own Law, but the commander Lysias came in and with great violence took him from us. Then Lysias gave orders that his accusers should come before you.] If you question this man, you yourself will be able to learn from him all the things that we are accusing him of.” The Jews also joined in the accusation and said all this was true (Acts 24:2-9).

Then Paul was given the nod from Felix to defend himself. Paul avoided the puffery that Tertullus had used. “Paul began his defense with the simple statement that he was glad Felix had been long enough in Palestine to understand the life and thought of the country; then he went on without difficulty to rebut the charges made against him” (Barclay, p. 138).

“I know that you have been a judge over this nation for many years, and so I am happy to defend myself before you,” began Paul. “As you can find out for yourself, it was no more than 12 days ago that I went up to Jerusalem to worship. The Jews did not find me arguing with anyone in the Temple, nor did they find me stirring up the people, either in the synagogues or anywhere else in

the city. Nor can they give you any proof of the accusations they now bring against me. I do admit this to you: I worship the God of our ancestors by following that Way which they say is false. But I also believe in the things written in the Law of Moses and the books of the prophets. I have the same hope in God that these themselves hold, that all men, both the good and the bad, will be raised from death. And so I do my best always to have a clear conscience before God and men.

“After being away from Jerusalem for several years, I went there to take some money to my own people and to offer sacrifices. It was while I was doing this that they found me in the Temple, after I had completed the ceremony of purification. There was no crowd with me and no disorder. But some Jews from the province of Asia were there; they themselves ought to come before you and make their accusations, if they have anything against me. Or let these men here tell what crime they found me guilty of when I stood before the Council—except for the one thing I called out when I stood before them: ‘I am being judged by you today for believing that the dead will be raised to life’ ” (Acts 24:10-21).

Then Felix brought the hearing to a close. He was well-informed about the Church of God—more than the Jews had given him credit for. Perhaps he had come across some of Philip’s teachings, for he was an evangelist in Caesarea. Or perhaps he had met one of Philip’s prophetess daughters.

Imprisoned in Caesarea

Felix did not decide on Paul’s case. He put off a decision until Lysias could arrive but the commander never came. Paul spent two years in prison (A.D. 57-59) until Porcius Festus took over as proconsul.

During his two years of imprisonment in Caesarea Paul kept busy. Felix had ordered the officer in charge of Paul to keep him under guard but also give him some freedom and allow his friends to provide for his needs

(Acts 24:22-23, 27).

“We can be certain that the soldiers in Caesarea heard the gospel and that his churches received letters which we no longer possess; and if, as is likely, Luke was with Paul, it may well have been during these two years that he collected the material which he afterward used to write his gospel” (Barclay, p. 139).

Even Felix and Drusilla did not leave Paul alone. They sent for him and listened as he talked about faith in Jesus Christ. “But as Paul went on discussing about goodness, self-control and the coming Day of Judgment, Felix was afraid and said, ‘You may leave now. I will call you again when I get the chance.’ At the same time he was hoping that Paul would give him some money; for this reason he would call for him often and talk with him” (Acts 24:24-26).

Gospel of Luke Written

During the two years in which Paul was in prison in Caesarea, Luke wrote his book of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (*The New Unger’s Bible Handbook*, revised by Gary N. Larson, p. 399).

The book was written to Theophilus, who was Luke’s literary patron. He was a Roman or Greek of high rank, for Luke calls him “most excellent” (Larson, p. 401).

Luke’s story of Christ’s life has a special slant. Being a physician by trade, he concentrated more on the healings which Christ performed.

Luke also is the only Gospel writer to describe Christ’s birth night. (Matthew, in his Gospel, describes the visit of the wise men from the east, but this may have occurred days or weeks after Christ’s birth.) Luke’s interest in Christ’s birth may have been medical, or it may have been because Luke was of pagan origin (Col. 4:10-14), and pagans were known to celebrate birthdays, while the other Gospel writers were of Jewish background and birthdays were of little significance.

Matthew’s Gospel had been around for about seven years by the time Luke wrote

his account. It is possible that Luke had read a copy of Matthew’s Gospel which had been circulated, and even had borrowed pieces from it, causing the two to be similar in nature.

Both included genealogies of Christ. Matthew began with Abraham and worked forward through Joseph, Christ’s step-father (Matt. 1:1-17). This was the Jewish way of looking at Christ’s heritage. Luke, a Gentile, worked backwards and went all the way to Adam (Luke 3:23-38).

Felix Recalled to Rome

After Paul had been in prison two years, there was a quarrel between Jewish and Greek communities in Caesarea. Felix violently intervened and lost his job. He was called back to Rome. “The date of the recall and replacement by Porcius Festus is disputed, but a change in the provincial coinage of Judea attested for Nero’s fifth year points to A.D. 59” (Bruce, pp. 345-346).

Felix, upon his return to Rome, “would have suffered the penalty due to his atrocities, had not his brother, Pallas, prevailed with the Emperor Nero to spare him” (“Felix,” Smith, p. 189). Pallas was a powerful man in Rome. He was a lover of Nero’s wife, Agrippina (*Who’s Who in the Bible*, by Peter Calvocoressi, p. 72).

Paul’s heart must have leaped for joy when he heard of Felix’s departure. It was a well-known custom that departing governors set free those in prison as a final act of clemency (Barclay, p. 139).

But Felix did not release Paul. When the departing governor left Caesarea, he left Paul in prison so he (Felix) could gain favor with the Jews (Acts 24:27).

Paul before Festus

Festus is known to us only from the accounts of Luke (Acts 25:1-26:32) and Josephus (*Jewish War*, ii, 271; *Antiquities*, xx, 182-197).

“He appears to have been a man of higher principle than his predecessor, but was unable to do anything effective to allay the

mounting popular resentment against Rome which Felix's repressive actions had stimulated" (Bruce, p. 346).

(Festus eventually died A.D. 62, after only two years in office [Bruce, p. 347].)

Three days after Festus arrived in the province, he went from Caesarea to Jerusalem. There the chief priests and Jewish leaders brought charges against Paul and begged Festus to bring Paul to Jerusalem, for they had planned to kill him on the way. But Festus answered, "Paul is being kept a prisoner in Caesarea, and I myself will be going back there soon. Let your leaders go to Caesarea with me and accuse the man, if he has done anything wrong."

After spending another eight or 10 days in Jerusalem, Festus returned to Caesarea. On the day after his return, Festus sat in the judgment court and ordered Paul to be brought in.

Once again Paul found himself surrounded by Jews from Jerusalem who were making false and unprovable accusations against him before a Roman ruler. Once again Paul claimed innocence: "I have done nothing wrong against the Law of the Jews, or the Temple, or the Roman Emperor," he stated (Acts 25:1-8).

"Festus, not knowing the background of the case and willing to conciliate these turbulent Jews, asked Paul if he was willing to go to Jerusalem to stand his trial before the Sanhedrin. Paul knew there would be no justice there and played the last card that he had left, a winning one. 'I appeal to Caesar,' he said.

"It was Roman law that any citizen, if he felt that he was not getting justice in the provincial courts, might appeal direct to the emperor. If the man was a murderer or a pirate or a bandit caught in the act, that appeal was disallowed; but otherwise the appeal was valid and at once it stopped all local proceedings. Festus took counsel with his assessors; there was nothing to hinder Paul's appeal. 'You have appealed to Caesar,' said the governor. 'To Caesar you shall go.' The die was cast. Nothing could stop Paul's journey to Rome" (Barclay, p. 140).

Paul before King Agrippa

Some time later King Herod Agrippa (the grandson of Herod the Great, and Drusilla's brother) and his sister, Bernice, visited Festus to salute his accession to the governorship (JFB, p. 1130).

After several days of visiting, Festus brought up the subject of Paul (Acts 25: 13-14). Festus knew if he were to send Paul to Rome, he would have to send a report of the case with him. And, being a just man, Festus did not know what to write (vv. 25-27). So Festus explained the case as he understood it to King Agrippa:

"His opponents stood up, but they did not accuse him of any of the evil crimes that I thought they would. All they had were some arguments with him about their own religion and about a certain dead man named Jesus; Paul claims that he is alive," Festus explained (vv. 18-19).

"I myself would like to hear this man," Agrippa told Festus.

"You will hear him tomorrow," Festus responded.

The next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great ceremony and honor, and entered the audience hall with the military chiefs and leading men of the city (vv. 20-23).

"What a scene that must have been! Agrippa and [Bernice] were wearing their purple robes of state; they glittered and glistened with jewels; the thin gold circlet of the royal crown was on their brows. Festus himself, wishing to leave no courtesy undone, had on his scarlet robe of state... In the background stood motionless the tall Roman legionaries, fully accoutred.

"Into this scintillating scene entered the little Jewish tentmaker whose name was Paul, his hands in chains; and from the moment of entry it is clear that he dominated them all" (Barclay, p. 141).

King Agrippa told Paul, "You have permission to speak on your own behalf."

Paul, stretching out his hand, defended himself in verses 24-27 against the charges Festus had explained to Agrippa. He began, "King Agrippa! I consider myself fortunate

that today I am to defend myself before you from all the things the Jews accuse me of. This is especially true because you know so well all the Jewish customs and questions. I ask you, then, to listen to me with patience.”

Paul spoke of his days as a Pharisee and how he persecuted the Church of God. He told how Christ struck him blind on the road to Damascus, and commissioned him to take the Gospel to the Israelites and Gentiles wherever Christ would send him. He briefly described his journeys to Gentile regions, preaching repentance. “It was for this reason that the Jews seized me while I was in the Temple, and tried to kill me. But to this very day I have been helped by God, and so I stand here giving my witness to all, to the small and great alike” (Acts 26:2-22).

“Festus had been listening with ever increasing astonishment. The intensity and passion of Paul were plain to see; the atmosphere was electric. Festus had seen Paul’s cell littered with books and had seen him poring over them” (Barclay, p. 141).

Festus interrupted Paul’s defense by shouting, “You are mad, Paul! Your great

learning is driving you mad!”

Paul answered, “I am not mad, your Excellency. The words I speak are true and sober.” Then he turned to Agrippa. “King Agrippa! I can speak to you with all boldness, because you know about these things. I am sure you have taken notice of every one of them, for this thing has not happened hidden away in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do!” (Acts 26:24-27).

Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian” (v. 28, *NKJ*).

And Paul replied, “My prayer to God is that you and all the rest of you who are listening to me today might become what I am—except, of course, for these chains!” (v. 29).

The king, governor, Bernice and the others with them got up and left. Among themselves they said, “This man has not done anything for which he should die or be put in prison.” And Agrippa told Festus, “This man could have been released if he had not appealed to the Emperor” (vv. 30-32).

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Paul Journeys to Rome

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Fall A.D. 59 arrived and it was decided that Paul should be sent to Rome with some other prisoners. Luke, the author of Acts, and Aristarchus, a Thessalonian, accompanied Paul (Acts 27:1, 2).

Aristarchus was one of two Macedonians who had been traveling with Paul. He was grabbed by the mob in Ephesus and hauled into the theater there amidst the shouts of “Great is Artemis of Ephesus!” (Acts 19:29). He was with Paul again when the apostle returned to Asia after spending time in Macedonia and Achaia (Acts 20:4).

Paul and the other prisoners were handed over to Julius, an officer in the Roman regiment called “the Emperor’s Regiment.” Julius was so courteous to Paul, it has led some scholars to believe he must have been present when Paul made his defense before Agrippa. The honorary title given to Julius’ force implied it may have acted as bodyguard for the emperor or procurator on occasion.

They boarded a coasting ship from Adramyttium and it was no doubt bound for its home port on the northeast coast of the Aegean Sea. It was Julius’ plan to find another ship in one of the stops along the

way—one that would take him and his prisoners to Rome (JFB, p. 1132).

The ship set sail and the next day it arrived in Sidon, 100 miles up the Mediterranean coast. While docked in Sidon, Paul was allowed to visit his friends, to be given what he needed, and to be refreshed.

The ship sailed from Sidon in a northwesterly direction. Because the wind was blowing against them out of the west, the ship sailed on the sheltered (east) side of Cyprus. The ship then headed west, crossing the sea off Cilicia and Pamphylia and came to the seaport of Myra in Lycia. There, Julius found a ship from Alexandria, Egypt getting ready to sail to Rome. Paul, Luke, Aristarchus and the prisoners were put on board (Acts 27:2-6).

Roman Ships

“The Roman ships were not as small as we might think. They averaged about 50 tons burthen. But the ships that brought the corn supply from Egypt to Italy were much bigger than that. We know of one, whose name was the ‘Isis,’ which was 140 feet long, 36 feet wide and with a draft of 33 feet. She was no

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less than 3,250 tons burthen.

“They were rather unwieldy vessels. They were the same at the prow and the stern, except that the stern was brought up and bent round like a goose’s neck. Usually at the prow they had two great eyes painted, as if the ship had to see her own way across the sea. Often they were called after some god whose image was at the front of the prow like a figurehead. They had no hinged rudder as our ships have, but were steered with two great paddles coming out, one from each side, from the hull near the stern.

“Usually they had only one mast, to which was attached a great yard-arm with one great square sail made of linen or sometimes of hides stitched together. With all the spread of the canvas on one mast there was a terrific strain on the timbers of the ship; and the commonest way for a Roman ship to be lost was for her to spring a leak and founder at sea. With the one great square sail these unwieldy ships found it almost impossible to sail into the wind and often had to go long distances out of their true course to find a wind that was suitable. Of course, the Romans had no compasses and no instruments of navigation, so they could sail only when they could see the sun and the stars for it was by them they had to set the course...”

The grain ships “could carry as many as 600 passengers and had so many sailors that the ship looked like a camp” (Barclay, pp. 144-145).

To Crete

This ship carrying wheat and the prisoners attempted to sail west toward Italy but the going was slow. After several days and with much difficulty the ship sailed past the Asian seaport of Cnidus, about 175 miles from Myra.

“The wind would not let us go any farther in that direction,” wrote Luke, “So we sailed down the sheltered side of the island of Crete, passing by Cape Salmone [on the island’s eastern tip]. We kept close to the coast, and with great difficulty came to a

place called Safe Harbors [Fair Havens—*KJV*], not far from the town of Lasea.”

The ship spent a long time at Safe Harbors because the Day of Atonement, which comes in late September, was now past and sailing became dangerous (Acts 27:7-9).

“In ancient times sailing was strictly limited after 15th September and was abandoned altogether after 11th November. From then on it was too dangerous to sail. The corn [or wheat] ship was very late and cutting things very fine. So they decided that they must abandon the voyage to Rome for that year and seek a harbor in which to lie for the winter. It is likely that Paul was the most experienced traveler of them all. Prisoner though he was, they sought his advice but when they got it, they did not take it. He told them it was at the peril of their lives that they would go farther. But the master of the ship came to another decision. Fair Havens was not a very secure harbor; there was no sizable town nearby where the crew and passengers might find relaxation in the winter days. Not far along the coast there was a much more commodious harbor called Phoenix and it was decided, against Paul’s advice, to go and winter there” (Barclay, p. 146).

Phoenix was a harbor 40 miles to the west of Safe Harbors, and offered some protection from the winter winds (JFB, p. 1132).

A soft wind from the south began to blow and the men thought they could carry out their plans. They pulled up anchor and sailed as close as possible to the shore along the southern coast of Crete.

Storm at Sea

The good conditions did not last long. Soon a very strong wind called “Euroclydon” or “northeaster” blew from the island. It was impossible to sail into this wind to get back to Crete. So the crew let the ship be carried by the wind.

As it passed the south side of a small island called Cauda, 23 miles southwest of Crete, the ship found a little shelter from the wind. With great difficulty, the crew pulled on board the dinghy which up to now had



Paul's journey to Rome began in Caesarea and included a shipwreck off the island of Malta (Melita). After spending the winter on this island, another ship finished the journey to Rome.

dragged behind them. The job was hard work because the dinghy had filled with water. The crew also strengthened the mother ship by passing four or five turns of a cable-laid rope around the hull or frame of the ship so it could resist the violent forces of the sea (JFB, pp. 1132-1133).

The crew began to fear running into sand banks off the coast of Libya, so they lowered the sail and let the ship be carried by the wind. The storm's violence continued and the next day the crew began to jettison cargo and the ship's equipment.

For nearly two weeks the clouds filled the sky and the crew had no means of navigation. Neither crew nor passengers knew where they were. "We finally gave up all hope of being saved," wrote Luke (Acts 27: 18-20).

The men had gone a long time without food because they were busy keeping the ship from taking on water. Paul stood up and proclaimed, "Men, you should have listened to me and not have sailed from Crete; then

we would have avoided all this damage and loss. But now I beg you, take courage! Not one of you will lose his life; only the ship will be lost. For last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship came to me and said, 'Don't be afraid, Paul! You must stand before the emperor; and God, in his goodness, has given you the lives of all those who are sailing with you.' And so, men, take courage! For I trust in God that it will be just as I was told. But we will be driven ashore on some island" (vv. 21-26).

In two weeks time the ship drifted more than 450 miles due west. About midnight on the 14th night, the sailors heard the crash of the breakers and knew that land was near (Barclay, p. 147). The sailors dropped a line with a weight attached and found the water was 120 feet deep. A little later another sounding was made and the water was 90 feet deep. Afraid the ship would break up on the rocks, the sailors lowered four anchors from the back of the ship.

The crew tried to escape in the dinghy

but Paul told Julius and his soldiers that if the sailors did not stay on board the soldiers would die. The soldiers cut the ropes to the dinghy and let it go.

Just before dawn Paul encouraged everyone to eat. "You have been waiting for 14 days now, and all this time you have not eaten a thing. I beg you, then, eat some food; you need it in order to survive. Not even a hair of your heads will be lost."

Paul asked the blessing on some bread and they all ate their fill. Nourished and strengthened, the 276 on board regained their courage. They then lightened the ship by throwing the wheat into the sea.

When day came, the sailors did not recognize the coast but noticed a bay with a beach and decided to try to run the ship aground there. They cut the ropes to the anchors and untied the ropes holding the steering oars (Acts 27:27-40).

"Ancient ships were steered by two large paddles, one on each quarter. When anchored by the stern in a gale, it would be necessary to lift them out of the water and secure them by lashings... and to loose these when the ship was again got under way" (JFB, p. 1134).

Then the ship's crew raised the sail at the front of the ship so the wind would blow the ship toward the shore. But the front of the ship got stuck on a sandbank while the back was broken to pieces by the violent waves.

The soldiers were afraid the prisoners would swim to shore and escape so they planned to kill them. But Julius wanted to save Paul so he stopped the soldiers from carrying out their plan. Instead, he ordered those who could swim to jump overboard and swim ashore. The rest were to go ashore holding onto planks or broken pieces of the ship (vv. 41-44).

On Malta

When all were safely ashore, they learned they had shipwrecked on the island of Malta. The natives were friendly. It began to rain and was cold so the natives built a fire and

made their unexpected guests welcome (Acts 28:1-2).

There were plenty of other coasts where the inhabitants would ghoulishly wait for shipwrecks. They would murder the survivors for their possessions and take their cargo (Barclay, p. 150).

Paul gathered up a bundle of sticks and was putting them on the fire. A snake slithered out because of the heat and fastened its fangs into Paul's hand. The natives saw the dangling snake and said to one another, "This man must be a murderer, but Fate will not let him live, even though he escaped from the sea."

Paul shook off the snake and it fell into the sizzling fire. He was not harmed at all. The natives waited for him to drop dead. But after waiting a long time and nothing happened, the natives changed their minds and said, "He is a god!"

Not far from the bonfire were fields belonging to Publius, chief of the island. He welcomed the shipwreck survivors and they stayed with him three days. Publius' father was bedridden with fever and dysentery. Paul went into his room, prayed, placed his hands on him and God healed him. After that, all the sick on the island came and were healed. They gave Paul and his party many gifts. Three months later, in the spring of 60, they put on board a ship what Paul would need for his journey to Rome (Acts 28:3-10).

From Malta to Rome

When spring of 60 came, the shipwreck survivors sailed from Malta on another ship from Alexandria called "The Twin Gods." This ship had as its figurehead Castor and Pollux, the "tutelar gods of mariners, to whom all their good fortune was ascribed" (JFB, p. 1135).

From the tiny island of Malta the ship sailed nearly 100 miles north to the much larger island of Sicily, which lies off the toe of the giant Italian boot. The ship put in at Syracuse, capital of Sicily and a seaport on the eastern coast. The ship stayed three days (Acts 28:12).

“The site of Syracuse rendered it a convenient place for the African corn-ships to touch at, for the harbor was an excellent one, and the fountain Arethusa in the island furnished an unfailing supply of excellent water” (“Syracuse,” Smith, p. 669).

From Syracuse the ship sailed northeast to the tip of the Italian boot, docking in Rhegium, 100 miles away. The straits of Messina between Sicily and Rhegium was about six miles across.

The next day the wind turned more favorable. The ship took advantage of it as it blew from the south. In two days it arrived in Puteoli, 182 miles up the Italian coast (Acts 28:13).

“At that moment there must have been tremors even in the heart of Paul. As they sailed into the bay, there to the north lay Lisenum. One of Rome’s two fleets was stationed there and Paul must have seen the warships riding at anchor and felt again the sheer might of Rome. On the one side of the bay lay Baiæ, which someone has called the Brighton of Rome. As Paul saw in the distance the crowded beaches and colored sails of the yachts of the rich Romans he must have wondered what chance he had, a little unknown Jewish tentmaker, in face of the wealth and aristocracy of Rome. And there ahead lay Puteoli. Someone has called that city the Liverpool of Italy; and as Paul saw the quays and storehouses and thronging streets, he must have wondered what would happen to him when he was caught up in the vortex which was Rome” (Barclay, pp. 150-151).

Paul found some brethren of the Church of God in Puteoli. They asked him and his companions to stay a week. Julius, commander in charge, agreed. Then the group traveled northwest toward Rome on the Via Appia (Appian Way).

After 65 miles they came to Appii Forum, where the brethren greeted Paul. He was now just 41 miles from Rome. This stop was a well-known station on the Appian Way which ran from Rome to Naples (“Appii Forum,” Smith, p. 44).

From there they traveled to Three Taverns, just 30 miles from Rome. More brethren greeted Paul there. This city was a frequent meeting place of travelers. A road from Antium on the coast intersected the Appian Way in Three Taverns (“Three Taverns,” Smith, p. 694).

When Paul saw the brethren in these three cities he “thanked God and took courage” (Acts 28:14-15).

Matthew Martyred

Matthew the tax collector had written his Gospel by this time and had preached in Parthia and Ethiopia.

While in Ethiopia, he was slain in the city of Nadabah with a halberd, a battle-axe-spear combination, A.D. 60A *History of the True Religion* by A. N. Dugger and C. O. Dodd, p. 52).

We are nearing the end of the book of Acts but much more history of God’s church lies ahead.

14

James Writes to the Church

60

We pause for a moment from Luke's account of Paul's journeys. Paul, Luke and Aristarchus entered Rome in spring A.D. 60. This was the same year James, half-brother of Christ and leader of the Jerusalem church, wrote his epistle (*Halley's Bible Handbook* by Henry H. Halley, p. 546).

James wrote to members of the Church of God (James 1:2) who were converted from among the lost 10 tribes of the House of Israel (v. 1). These people were converted during the travels of the original apostles (see Chapter 6 of this book).

The Apostle James

James was brought up in the same environment as Jesus—the same Jewish home—and was in close touch with Jesus during the years which led up to his ministry. He is presumed to be the eldest of Jesus' brothers, followed by Joseph, Simon, Judas, and two sisters (*A Commentary on the General Epistle of James* by J. W. Roberts, p. 9). His background was nearly the same as that of Jesus. He was not a believer during Christ's life (John 7:2-8) but witnessed the resurrec-

tion (1 Cor. 15:7) and was in Jerusalem on Pentecost A.D. 31 waiting for the Holy Spirit.

While Peter may have been the chief apostle over all the churches, James was given the Jerusalem Church to administer (Acts 12:17). He was noted for his strict adherence to the Law (Gal. 2:12).

“James' later life is revealed to us only from Josephus and Hegesippus (*Eccl. History*, 2:23). He is seen as a man of great piety, commanding by reputation the respect of Jew and Christian alike and exercising great influence not only in Jerusalem among his nation and the church but also among Christians of the Dispersion who came to Jerusalem for the Jewish feasts. He is pictured as rigorous in his religious exercises, living the life of a Nazarite” (Roberts, pp. 12-13).

Salutation

James, like Paul, began his letter with a salutation. But unlike Paul's letters, which were addressed to a specific congregation of the Church of God, James' letter was written to “all of God's people, scattered over the whole world” (v. 1). We already have mentioned in this chapter who these people were.

Nature of Religion

Chapter 1 of James discussed the nature of true religion—stability (vv. 2-11), endurance (vv. 12-18) and action (vv. 19-27).

James encouraged Christians suffering through trials: “My brothers! Consider yourselves fortunate when all kinds of trials come your way, for you know that when your faith succeeds in facing such trials, the result is the ability to endure... Happy is the man who remains faithful under trials; for when he succeeds in passing the test he will be given life, the prize which God has promised to those who love him. If a man is tempted by such testing, he must not say, ‘This temptation comes from God.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. But a person is tempted when he is drawn away and trapped by his own evil desire; then his evil desire conceives and gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death” (vv. 3, 12-15).

James told the church it must be quick to listen but slow to speak and slow to anger (v. 19). And the brethren should rid themselves of “every filthy habit and all wicked conduct” (v. 21). Christianity is not a part-time religion but a full-time cleaning job—cleaning the self. True Christians do more than listen to sermons. They put them into practice! (v. 22-25). James defined pure and genuine religion: “to take care of orphans and widows in their suffering, and to keep oneself from being corrupted by the world” (v. 27).

The Nature of True Faith

From Chapter 2:1 to 3:12, James discussed the nature of true faith. He told the scattered converted Israelites to avoid discrimination (Ch. 2:1-13), avoid inactive profession (Ch. 2:14-26) and avoid boastful officiousness (Ch. 3:1-12).

James told the brethren not to treat the rich better than the poor or they would be “guilty of creating distinctions among yourselves and making judgments based on evil motives.” He added, “God chose the poor

people of this world to be rich in faith and to possess the kingdom... ‘Love your neighbors as yourself.’ But if you treat people according to their outward appearance, you are guilty of sin, and the law condemns you as a lawbreaker” (Ch. 2:1-10).

James said a true Christian’s faith is substantiated by action. “What good is it for a man to say, ‘I have faith’ if his actions do not prove it?... ‘This is how it is with faith: if it is alone and has no actions with it, then it is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have actions.’ My answer is, ‘Show me how you can have faith without actions; I show you my faith by my actions’ ” (vv. 14-18).

Simply having “faith in God” is not enough to be a Christian, though self-professing Christians may think so. James wrote that it is good to believe in God—but that’s not enough. The demons also believe—and tremble with fear (v. 19).

The false minister Martin Luther would later call this letter “an epistle of straw” because it seems to contradict Paul’s writings that only faith is needed. Martin Luther chose not to believe the whole story but chose to believe half. James didn’t deny a need for faith—but he emphasized the need for works in addition. “The two principles are supplementary, not contradictory” (Tenney, p. 264).

James used the example of Abraham’s faith, the same example Paul used when writing his epistles to the Galatians (Gal. 3:6-14) and Romans (Rom. 4). James told the Christians that Abraham’s faith and actions worked together. His faith was made perfect through his actions (James 2:21-24).

A major problem among the scattered brethren in James’ day must have been the misuse of the tongue, for James concentrates on that subject throughout most of Chapter 3. Like a bit in a horse’s mouth or a rudder on a ship, the tongue is a small thing but can boast about great things. It is like a fire and is untamable. It is full of deadly poison. The same mouth which praises God curses fellow humans who are created in the likeness of God (vv. 1-9). James commands

the brethren, “This should not happen! No spring of water pours out sweet and bitter water from the same opening!” (v. 11).

The Nature of True Wisdom

James discussed the nature of true wisdom for most of the remainder of his epistle. He defined wisdom (Ch. 3:13-18) and discussed its relation to spiritual life (Ch. 4:1-10), legal relationships (4:11-12), commercial plans (Ch. 4:13-17), labor problems (Ch. 5:1-6), waiting for the Lord (Ch. 5:7-11), language (Ch. 5:12) and in affliction (Ch. 5:13-18).

James attacked jealousy, bitterness and selfishness. “This kind of wisdom does not come down from heaven, it belongs to the world, it is unspiritual and demonic. For where there is jealousy and selfishness there is also disorder and every kind of evil.

“But the wisdom from above is pure, first of all; it is also peaceful, gentle, and friendly; it is full of compassion and produces a harvest of good deeds; it is free from prejudice and hypocrisy” (Ch. 3:13-18).

“From where do wars and fights come from among you?” asked James. “Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war, yet you do not have because you do not ask” (Ch. 4:1-2 *NKJ*).

Surely Christians were not warring, fighting and murdering. But some were living in an area where active fighting was going on around them. At this time (A.D. 60), most of the world was in relative peace under Roman rule. But there were wars in the British isles and in the Parthian Empire near the Caspian Sea. This is where the lost 10 tribes of Israel settled after being released from Assyrian captivity.

James told Christians to be separate from the world and not to love it (Ch. 4:4). He said to submit to God and God will draw near to Christians. Resist the devil and he will flee from them. “Humble yourselves before God, and he will lift you up,” he wrote (vv. 5-10).

James instructed Christians not to judge or criticize each other (vv. 11-12).

Commercial ventures will succeed if God wills it, James wrote. Those who make plans should not boast or make promises they can’t keep—they never know what the future may bring.

James, in Chapter 5, discussed the wealthy of the world. While it is a warning to those in the church who may admire the world’s wealthy, the condemnation is aimed at non-church members. “The rich directly in mind are not Christians. They are such as the rich men who were visiting the congregation (2:2) who dragged them before judges and blasphemed the name called upon them (2:6). They are not the humble rich of 1:10” (Roberts, p. 180).

“And now, you rich people, listen to me!” warned James. “Weep and wail over your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches have rotted away and your clothes have been eaten by moths. Your gold and silver are covered with rust, and this rust will be a witness against you... You have piled up riches in these last days. You have not paid the wages to the men who work in the fields. Hear the complaints! And the cries of those who gather in your crops have reached the ears of God, the Lord Almighty! (Gal 5:1-6).

James then told Christians to be patient until Christ returns. The farmer waits, the prophets waited and endured, and Job also waited and endured (vv. 7, 10-11).

As for wisdom in language, James wrote: “Above all, my brothers, do not use an oath when you make a promise; do not swear by heaven, or by earth, or by anything else. Say only ‘Yes’ when you mean yes and ‘No’ when you mean no, so that you will not come under God’s judgment” (v. 12).

Instructions to the afflicted were given in the final verses of this section on the nature of true wisdom. Those in trouble should pray (v. 13). Those who are sick “should call on the church elders who will pray for him and pour oil in him in the name of the Lord. This prayer, made in faith, will save the man: the Lord will restore him to

his health, and the sins he has committed will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins one to another, and pray for one-another, so that you will be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has a powerful effect” (vv. 14-16). And James told the story how God answered Elijah’s prayers—and “Elijah was the same kind of person that we are” (vv. 17-18).

Conclusion

The final two verses of James’ letter concerned helping a brother who left the Truth to come back into the church: “Whoever turns a sinner back from his wrong ways will save that sinner’s soul from [eternal] death, and cause a great number of sins to be forgiven” (v. 20).

The Missing ‘Amen’

In the original Greek, all of Paul’s letters

ended with the word “amen,” signifying completion.

James’ letter has neither the customary salutations nor the “amen” at its end.

“Each missing ‘Amen’ is a special sign. It indicates God wants us to understand that certain knowledge was not made known to the world—until now, when the Gospel is being sent around the world as a final witness before the end of this age... If the book of James had ended with the ordinary salutation, the nations of Israel would have been disclosed. See the last verses of Romans, Colossians and Hebrews for example. This is the very part missing, purposely, from James” (Hoeh, Part 1, pp. 4-5).

God did not want the identity of the lost 10 tribes revealed until this end time. The final verses of James’ epistle were not canonized.

Meanwhile, Paul, in chains, was arriving in Rome in the spring A.D. 60. We continue his story in the next chapter.

15

Paul's First Roman Imprisonment

60

When Paul, Luke and Aristarchus arrived in Rome in spring A.D. 60, Paul was allowed to live under house arrest. He lived by himself, guarded by a soldier. Others could visit him but he could not leave the house (Acts 28:16).

“This privilege was allowed in the case of the better class of prisoners, not accused of any flagrant offense, on finding security—which in Paul’s case would not be difficult among the Christians. The extension of this privilege to the apostle may have been due to the terms in which Festus wrote about him; but far more probably it was owing to the high terms in which Julius spoke of him...” (JFB, p. 1136).

While going through the experience of being lost at sea and shipwrecked, it may have been difficult for Paul to see any good coming from this trial. Paul had been anxious to get to Rome and the delays must have been frustrating. But God had a greater purpose. By letting his light shine through that three-and-a-half month trial, Paul was rewarded with a house arrest in Rome—enabling the Gospel to be preached even though he was a prisoner! This was one more example of all things working out for the

good of them who love God and who are called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28).

Paul Preaches to Jews

After three days Paul called the Jewish leaders in Rome to a meeting. He explained why he was a prisoner and declared his innocence of any crime against Jews.

The leaders told Paul, “We have not received any letters from Judea about you, nor have any of our brothers come from there with any news, or to say anything bad about you. But we would like to hear your ideas, for we do know that everywhere people speak against this party (*King James Version* uses the word ‘sect’) that you belong to.”

So they set a date with Paul and a large number came that day to where Paul was staying. From morning until night Paul explained to them the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Using Old Testament Scriptures, Paul tried to convince them Jesus was the Christ. Some were convinced. Others were not.

When Paul saw their unbelief, he said, “How well the Holy Spirit spoke through the prophet Isaiah to your ancestors! For he

said,

'Go and say to this people:
You will listen and listen, but do not understand;
You will look and look, but will not see.
Because this people's mind is dull;
They have stopped up their ears,
And they have closed their eyes.
Otherwise their eyes might see,
Their ears might hear,
Their minds might understand,
And they might turn to me, says God,
And I would heal them' [Isa. 6:9-10].

"You are to know then, that God's message of salvation has been sent to the Gentiles. They will listen!"

After this the Jews left, arguing violently among themselves.

Luke concluded his account with these words: "For two years Paul lived there in a place he rented for himself, and welcomed all who came to see him. He preached about the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ, speaking with all boldness and freedom" (Acts 28:23-31).

"This period of enforced inactivity was by no means fruitless... He could not travel but he had liberty to teach and to write within the limits of his own cell or house. The epistles that were written during this period testify that the growth of the church was not brought to a halt by Paul's imprisonment, and that the literature which Paul produced was of more solid and didactic (instructive) nature than anything he had written up to that time, with the possible exception of Romans. The Prison Epistles as a group deal more with the general teachings and less with individual questions than so the earlier Travel Epistles. They reveal a church which was not simply the initial aggregation of converts, eager, uncertain, perplexed by current problems and somewhat disorganized, but a church which was maturing rapidly. There are indications that the second generation of Christians was beginning to emerge whose problems were those of complacency rather than of confusion. They had already been instructed in the elements of the faith, and they needed to

receive the deeper teaching which would enlighten and stabilize them" (Tenney, pp. 311-312).

There is no doubt the four prison epistles—Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians and Philemon—were written about A.D. 57-61, while Paul was in prison. All refer to Paul's bonds (Phil. 1:12, 13; Eph. 3:1, 4:1, 6:20; Col. 1:24; Philemon 1). Some scholars feel these letters may have been written during Paul's two-year imprisonment at Caesarea.

"Probably the traditional view that they were written from Rome is correct, for the allusions to Caesar's household (Phil. 4:22) and to the Praetorian guard (1:13) would apply better to Rome than to Caesarea. He seemed to be in a center of travel, where his friends came and went with ease, which would be much more characteristic of Rome than Caesarea" (Tenney, p. 314).

Paul Writes to Philemon

During Paul's preachings while under house arrest in Rome, a young run-away slave from Colossae was converted to the truth. His name was Onesimus and he became a good friend of Paul and a wonderful helper (Philemon 11-13). Paul wanted to keep Onesimus with him. But when he learned the slave's master was a member of the church in Colossae, he felt he should send him back. So he wrote a letter to the slave master, Philemon.

Paul greeted Philemon with complimentary terms: "From Paul, a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus and from our brother Timothy—to our friend and fellow worker Philemon, and to the church that meets in your house, and our sister Apphia, and our fellow soldier Archippus:

"Every time I pray, brother Philemon, I mention you and give thanks to my God. For I hear of your love for all God's people, and the faith you have in the Lord Jesus... Your love, dear brother, has brought me great joy and much encouragement! For you have cheered the hearts of all God's people" (Philemon 1-2, 4, 7).

Paul then made his request: “So I make a request to you on behalf of Onesimus, who is my own son in Christ; for while in prison I became his spiritual father. At one time he was of no use to you, but now he is useful both to you and to me.

“I am sending him back to you now, and with him goes my heart. I would like to keep him here with me, while I am in prison for the Gospel’s sake, so that he could help me in your place. However, I do not want to force you to help me; rather, I would like for you to do it of your own free will. So I will not do a thing unless you agree” (vv. 10-14).

Paul told Philemon that Onesimus had become more than a slave—he was a “dear brother in Christ.” Onesimus was not to be welcomed as a slave, but as if he were Paul himself (v. 17).

“If he has done you any wrong, or owes you anything, charge it to my account. Here, I will write this with my own hand: *I, Paul will pay you back.* (I should not have to remind you, of course, that you owe your very life to me.)...

“I am sure, as I write this, that you will do what I ask—In fact I know that you will do even more,” wrote Paul. Then he added a clincher: “At the same time, get a room ready for me, because I hope that God will answer the prayers of all of you and give me back to you” (vv. 18-21). How could Philemon refuse this request if Paul himself were coming to check on him?

Paul’s final greetings reveal who were with him in Rome: “Epaphras, who is in prison with me for the sake of Christ Jesus, sends you his greetings, and so do my fellow workers Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all” (vv. 23-25).

People With Paul

Epaphras was a minister who had taught the Colossian church the grace of God in truth. He was a native of that city (Smith, “Epaphras,” p. 175). What charges were pending against him are not explained except that he was in prison for the sake of

Jesus Christ. Paul never had been to Colossae. But he probably learned much about that church from Onesimus (who was not a church member when he lived there as a slave) and from Epaphras, its minister who was imprisoned with Paul.

Others with Paul included Aristarchus, who was one of the delegates from Thessalonica that went with Paul to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4).

We know very little about Demas except that he was Paul’s companion at this time but would later be lured away from the church by the love of the world, and would go to Thessalonica (2 Tim. 4:10).

The Mark mentioned here is John Mark, who had deserted Paul and Barnabas on their first journey (Acts 13:13). He was now in Rome assisting Paul. It was probably at this time that Mark penned the Gospel According to Mark (*JFB*, p. 952). Frank S. Meade, in *Who’s Who in the Bible*, described Mark as “a lukewarm missionary, but a remarkable historian” (p. 219).

Tychicus also was with Paul in Rome. He was a native of Asia who was with Paul in Corinth in A.D. 56 and traveled part of the way back to Jerusalem with him (Acts 20:4). While Paul and the others had continued on, Tychicus apparently remained behind in Miletus where Paul had last visited with the elders from Ephesus (Acts 20:15, 38; Smith, “Tychicus” p. 713).

“The necessity for the writing of Philemon and of sending a letter back to Asia afforded an opportunity to send others also. Ephesians, as a general encyclical to be distributed through the Ephesian church, and Colossians, a direct communication to the church at Colossae, were composed at this time, probably A.D. 60 or 61. The messenger was Tychicus, whom Onesimus accompanied (Eph. 6:21, Col. 4:7-9)” (Tenney, p. 317).

Paul Writes Ephesians

“Throughout the Epistle to the Ephesians runs the one theme of the church. The epistle was not directed to novices in the Christian

faith, but to those who, having achieved some maturity in spiritual experience, wished to go on to a fuller knowledge and life" (Tenney, p. 318).

Tenney describes Ephesians as "the Epistle of the Church." Paul's introduction in the first two verses described his audience as "God's people who live in Ephesus."

In verses 3-14, Paul described the constitution of the church by the Father (vv. 3-6), by the Son (vv. 6-12) and through the Spirit (vv. 13-14).

The remainder of the first chapter discussed the consciousness of the church: It is a prayer of hope of calling, of inheritance in saints, of greatness of power, of leadership of Christ.

Paul next discussed the creation of the Church from children of wrath by the grace of God unto good works (Ch. 2:1-10).

Paul explained how the world is deceived by Satan, who broadcasts attitudes of disobedience through the air like radio waves: "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2, *KJV*). But true Christians are God's workmanship. "God is our Maker, and in our union with Christ Jesus he has created us for a life of good works, which he has already prepared for us to do" (v. 10).

Next Paul described the union of Jew and Gentile in Christ as he discussed the concord of the church in verses 11 to 22 of Chapter 2.

In Chapter 3, Paul discussed the calling of the church to 1) reveal the wisdom of God (vv. 1-13) and 2) to experience the fullness of God (vv. 14-21).

From Chapter 4 (the "Unity Chapter") through Chapter 6:9 Paul discussed the conduct of the church. He wrote of its ministry: diversity in unity (4:1-16), its moral standards (4:17-5:14), its corporate behavior toward the world (5:15-21), and its domestic standards (5:22-6:9).

In Ch. 4:1 as in Ch. 3:1 Paul referred to his Roman imprisonment: "I urge you then— I who am a prisoner because I serve the

Lord: live a life that measures up to the standard God set when he called you." He continued, "Be humble, gentle and patient always. Show your love by being helpful to one another. Do your best to preserve the unity which the Spirit gives by the peace that binds you together. There is *one body* and *one Spirit*, just as there is *one hope* to which God has called you" (Ch. 4:1-4). Note that Paul said God's church is *one* body. Today there are many bodies of churches claiming to be Christian. All cannot be the one true church. For God inspired Paul to write there is *one* body.

God's church is not a scattered flock without shepherds. Some believe they can be solitary Christians—they don't need to be part of "organized religion." Paul disputed that as God inspired him to write that Christ is the head of the body and He "gave gifts to men"; he appointed some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, others to be pastors and teachers. He did this to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service, to build up the body of Christ. And so shall we come together in the oneness in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God; we shall become mature men, reaching to the very height of Christ's full stature. We shall no longer be children, carried by the waves, and blown about by every shifting wind of the teaching of deceitful men, who led others to errors by the tricks they invent" (vv. 11-14).

Paul clearly defined the titles or ranks in the ministry of God's church and the importance of a unified ministry. Without that ministry, God's church would soon cease to exist as the brethren would depart their own way, following their own "pet" doctrines!

Christians, like others, tend to let their tongues get them in trouble. Paul warned the Ephesians: "No more lying then! Everyone must tell the truth to his brother, for we are all members together in the body of Christ. If you become angry, do not let your anger lead you into sin; and do not stay angry all day [or, 'Do not let the sun go down on your wrath'—*NKJ*]... Do not use harmful

words in talking. Use only helpful words, the kind that build up people and provide what is needed, so that what you say will be good to those who hear you... No more shouting insults!... Nor is it fitting for you to use obscene, foolish or dirty words. Rather, you should give thanks to God” (vv. 25-26, 29, 31; 5:4).

Paul, A.D. 60-61, supported not only the ninth commandment (you shall not bear false witness) but also the eighth: “The man who used to rob must stop robbing and start working, to earn an honest living for himself and be able to help the poor” (v. 28); the seventh and tenth: “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for the saints (Ch. 5:2, *NKJ*); and the second: “For this you know that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an *idolater*; has any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and God” (Ch. 5:5, *NKJ*); and the fifth: “Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise” (Ch. 6:2, *NKJ*).

Were the Commandments nailed to the cross 30 years before Paul wrote to the Ephesians? Obviously not! Paul commanded Christians to keep the Commandments in his day and they are in force today!

Paul told the Ephesians to “Pay close attention to how you live. Don’t live like ignorant men. Make good use of every opportunity you get, because these are bad days” (Ch. 5:16).

He warned Christians against alcohol abuse: “Do not get drunk with wine, which will only ruin you; instead, be filled with the Spirit” (v. 18).

Paul gave his most complete dissertation on marital and family relations from Ch. 5:21 to 6:4. Husbands and wives should submit to each other (v. 21) but the wife’s role is to “submit yourselves to your husbands, as to the Lord. For a husband has authority over his wife in the same way that Christ has authority over the church” (vv. 22-23). Husbands, who are the leaders of the family, are not to be evil dictators but must “love your wives in the same way that Christ

loved the church and gave his life for it... Men ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies” (vv. 25, 28). He sums it up: “Every husband must love his wife as himself, and every wife must respect her husband” (v. 33). Paul then told children: “It is your Christian duty to obey your parents, for this is the right thing to do. ‘Honor your father and mother’ is the first commandment that has a promise added: ‘so that all may be well with you, and you may live a long time in the land.’” To parents Paul wrote: “Do not treat your children in such a way as to make them angry. Instead, raise them with Christian discipline and instruction” (Ch. 6:1-4).

Paul continued with similar instructions to slaves and masters which also is good advice for employees and employers: “Slaves, obey your human masters, with fear and trembling; and do it with a sincere heart, as though you were serving Christ. Do this not only when they are watching you, to gain their approval; but with all your heart do what God wants, as slaves of Christ. Do your work cheerfully, then, as though you served the Lord, and not nearly men. Remember that the Lord will reward every man, whether slave or free, for the good work he does. Masters, behave in the same way toward your slaves; and stop using threats. Remember that you and your slaves belong to the same Master in heaven, who treats everyone alike” (vv. 5-9).

Perhaps it was the slave Onesimus who taught Paul the conditions of slavery in Asia.

Paul gave some final words of encouragement in this letter to the church where he had spent three and a half years (Acts 19), and had had one final teary-eyed reunion before his arrest in Jerusalem (Acts 20:17-38). He told them to put on the whole armor of God to protect them from Satan’s tricks. “For we are not fighting against human beings, but against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers of this dark age” (v. 12). The armor includes truth for a belt, righteousness for a breastplate, readiness to

announce the good news of peace as shoes, faith as a shield, salvation as a helmet and God's Spirit as a sword (vv. 14-17).

"Pray always for God's people," wrote Paul. "And pray also for me, that God will give me a message, when I am ready to speak, that I may speak boldly and make known the gospel's secret. For the sake of this gospel I am an ambassador, though now I am in prison. Pray, therefore, that I may be bold in speaking of it, as I should" (vv. 18-20).

"These words might refer not only to Paul's general apostolic activity but to his expected appearance before the supreme court, if not before Caesar himself. It was of utmost importance—for the sake of the gospel rather than for his own release—that on this occasion the right words should be spoken the right way" (Bruce, p. 365).

Paul wrapped up his letter to the Ephesians by telling them, "Tychicus, our dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord's work, will give you all the news about me, so that you may know how I am getting along. That is why I am sending him to you—to tell you of how all of us are getting along, and so bring courage to your hearts..." (Eph. 6:21-22).

Paul Writes Colossians

Tychicus already had a letter to deliver to Philemon and one to the church at Ephesus but Paul was not finished. He took this opportunity to write a letter similar to Ephesians to the church at Colossae. This was a church in Asia which Paul had never visited but was the home of Onesimus and Philemon.

Colossians and Ephesians are the "twin epistles" because their resemblance is so great (Tenney, p. 320).

"The town of Colosse [Colossae] was located in the hinterland of Asia, on a rocky ridge overlooking the valley of the Lycus River, not far from the cities of Heierapolis and Laodicea. During the period of the Persian Wars in the fifth century B.C., Colosse had been a town of considerable importance,

but as Heierapolis and Laodicea grew, its commerce declined. It had been especially noted for the glossy black wool that was grown by the shepherds in the adjoining hill country. In Paul's day it was decadent, although still a good-sized city" (Tenney, pp. 320-321).

If Paul never visited Colossae, who started the church there? "It must have been evangelized during his [Paul's] stay in Asia [at Ephesus], perhaps by Timothy and Epaphras (1:7) who itinerated while Paul preached in Ephesus" (Tenney, p. 321).

"The heresy of Colosse which evoked this epistle was a local development which arose because of the particular situation of the city. Colosse was on the trade route from the East, along which oriental religions as well as oriental merchandise were transported to Rome. The Colossians were Phrygian Gentiles (1:27) whose religious antecedents were highly emotional and mystical. They were seeking to attain the fullness of God, and when teachers came among them with a philosophy that promised a mystic knowledge of God, they were entranced by it. Among its tenets were voluntary humiliation, probably by ascetic practices (2:18, 20-21), the worship of angels, who may have been reputed intermediaries between God and man (2:18), abstinence from certain foods and drinks, and the observance of feasts and ceremonial days (2:16). It is quite likely that in these teachings there was also a strain of Jewish legalism, brought in from contacts with the Jewish population of Asia Minor. Paul's references to ceremonialism (2:11) sound more like Judaism than heathenism..."

"The answer to this heresy lay not in extended argument, but in a positive presentation by the person of Christ. Paul pointed out that all philosophies, spiritual powers, ceremonial observances and restrictions were secondary to the pre-eminence of Christ" (Tenney, p. 321).

Paul included greetings from himself and Timothy but none from the others with him in Rome (Ch. 1:1). He sent grace and peace from God the Father and Jesus Christ,

but makes no mention of the Holy Spirit, dispelling the myth that the Holy Spirit is part of the God-head, and supporting the fact that the Holy Spirit is instead the power of God—not a being (v. 2).

In Chapter 1:16 Paul told the Colossians that Jesus Christ was the God of the Old Testament. He created all things under the direction of the Father.

Paul reminded the Colossians of their need for Christ's sacrifice and great future which lies ahead if they remain faithful: "At one time you were far away from God and made yourselves his enemies by the evil things you did and thought. But now, by the means of the physical death of his Son, God has made you his friends, in order to bring you, holy and pure and innocent, into his presence. You must, of course, continue faithful on the firm and sure foundation, and not allow yourselves to be shaken from the hope you gained when you heard the gospel" (vv. 21-23).

Paul got to the point of his letter in Chapter 2, verse 8: "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ" (NKJ).

He told the church that in spite of false teachings of others, they did not need physical circumcision, for they had been spiritually circumcised, having their sins cut off from their bodies through Christ's sacrifice (vv. 11-13).

Many theologians have misunderstood Paul's next comments, thinking God's holy law was nailed to the cross and done away. But later in the letter, Paul showed support for the 10 Commandments, showing the law was still in force (Ch. 3:5, 8-9).

Notice Paul's misunderstood comments in *Today's English Version*: "You were at one time spiritually dead because of your sins, and because you were Gentiles outside the Law. But God has now brought you to life with Christ! God forgave us all our sins. He cancelled the unfavorable record of our debts, with its binding rules [the death penalty] and did away with it completely by nailing it

[not God's Law but the record of our sins and the accompanying death penalty] to the cross" (Ch. 2:13-14).

Because Paul is writing to Gentiles who never were "under" God's Law, another explanation for the "handwriting of requirements" in v. 14 is a list of stoic and ascetic requirements that these pagans had lived under. What were they? Notice v. 21—"Do not touch, do not taste, to not handle" (NKJ).

Paul then told the Colossians to "let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths which are a shadow of things to come, but the body *is* of Christ" (vv. 16-17, NKJ). The word "is" in the *King James Version* is not in the original Greek. Paul was not saying the "body is of Christ" but was saying the body of Christ—or the church—is the only body of people that should judge a Christian regarding food or drink, festivals, new moons and sabbaths.

Gentiles who died with Christ (through baptism) are dead to the stoic regulations (Ch. 2:20-23). And if raised from the baptismal "grave," then Christians should fix their minds on heavenly things. A true Christian keeps God's commandments: "You must put to death then, the earthly desires at work in you, such as such as immorality, indecency, lust, evil passions, and greed (for greediness is a form of idol worship)... But now you must get rid of all these things: anger, passion, and hateful feelings. No insults or obscene talk must come from your lips. Do not lie to one another, for you have put off the old self with its habits, and have put on the new self" (Ch. 3:5, 8-10).

Paul gave the Colossians instructions in family relations similar to those he wrote to the Ephesians.

"Wives, be obedient to your husbands... Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, it is your Christian duty to obey your parents always... Parents, do not irritate your children, or they might become discouraged... slaves, obey your human masters in all things, and do it not only when they are watching you... but do it with a sincere heart, because of

your reverence for the Lord (vv. 18-22). Slave masters (and employers) are to “give your servants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a master in heaven” (Ch. 4:1).

Paul also asked the Colossians to pray for him, so he would have the right words to say when he came to trial: “Be persistent in prayer, and keep alert as you pray, with thanks to God. At the same time pray also for us, that God will give us a good opportunity to preach his message, to tell the secret of Christ. For that is why I am now in prison. Pray, then, that I may speak in such a way as to make it clear, as I should.”

Paul then sent his final greetings. He told them Tychicus would be bringing them news about him. Onesimus would be accompanying him. Aristarchus (Paul's fellow prisoner), John Mark (Barnabas' cousin), Joshua (called Justus) and Epaphras (their minister) all sent their greetings as did Luke and Demas (vv. 7-14).

“Give our best wishes to the brothers in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church that meets in her house. After you read this letter, make sure that it is read also in the church of Laodicea. At the same time, you are to read the letter Laodicea will send you. And tell Archippus: ‘Be sure to finish the task you were given in the Lord's service.’ With my own hand I write this: *Greetings from Paul*, Do not forget my chains! May God's grace be with you” (vv. 15-18).

The churches at Laodicea and Hierapolis probably were founded by Epaphras, just as Colossae's church was.

Laodicea was named after Laodice, queen of Antiochus II, and was a city on the Lycus River. It was, according to the subscription to 1 Timothy, “the chieftest city of Phrygia Pacatiana.” The three cities were destroyed by an earthquake A.D. 62 [Tacitus, *Annals*, 14.27] (JFB, p. 1328).

Archippus was a Christian minister at Colossae called Paul's “fellow soldier” in Philemon 2 and probably was a member of Philemon's family (Smith, “Archippus,” p. 48). “Bengel suggests that Archippus was perhaps prevented from going to the church assembly by weak health or age. The word,

‘fulfil,’ accords with his ministry being near its close. However, ‘fulfil’ may mean, as in 2 Tim 4:5, *make full proof of thy ministry* ‘Give diligence to follow it out fully’; a monition perhaps needed by Archippus” (JFB, p. 1328).

Paul Writes Laodiceans

The Bible does not contain Paul's letter to the Laodiceans. But there is an apocryphal letter of which the Quakers have printed a translation. There is a very old translation of this 19-verse epistle in the British Museum (*The Lost Books of the Bible*, p. 94.)

This epistle may not be authentic, for in it Paul told the Laodiceans, “Let not the vain speeches of any trouble you who pervert the truth, that they draw you aside from the truth of the Gospel which I have preached. And now may God grant, that my converts may attain to a perfect knowledge of the truth of the Gospel...” (vv. 4-5). Paul had not preached in Laodicea to convert anyone. On the other hand, it is possible Paul's converts from other churches had moved to Laodicea.

The tone of the letter sounds authentic. It begins similar to Paul's other letters: “Paul, an Apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, to the brethren which are at Laodicea. Grace be to you, and peace, from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ” (vv. 1-2).

He thanked them for their good works and prayed they would continue in them, not hindered by false teachers (vv. 3-5).

In verses 6-8 he mentioned his bonds and possibility of his death. He rejoiced in his bonds and the thought of death did not bother him.

Laodicea was a major economic city as we shall see later when discussing John's vision of Revelation and the message to the church there. Paul, at this time, told the brethren to focus their attention on Christ's return and “avoid all filthy lucre” (vv. 10-13).

“Be steady in the doctrine of Christ,” Paul wrote in verse 14. He elaborated, using words similar to those he was about to write to the Philippians (4:18): “And whatsoever

things are sound and true, and of good report, and chaste, and just, and lovely, these things do" (v. 15).

Paul added greetings from the saints with him at Rome but did not name any (v. 17). His final instructions were:

"Cause this Epistle to be read to the Colossians, and the Epistle to the Colossians to be read among you" (v. 19).

If this epistle was indeed written by Paul at this time (though God did not intend for it to be included in the Holy Scriptures), it would have been included with the other prison epistles and delivered to Laodicea at the same time Philemon, Colossae and Ephesus received their letters.

Paul sent these three (or four) letters with Tychicus and Onesimus to their respective recipients—Philemon, the churches at Ephesus and Colossae, and possibly Laodicea.

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Epaphras Released from Prison

Epaphras, the Colossian minister imprisoned with Paul, was released from prison after Paul had written these letters.

Epaphras traveled eastward toward his native city. He stopped in Philippi and reported Paul's condition to the brethren. The church in Philippi had a special fondness for their founder. They collected many gifts together and sent Epaphras back to Rome to give them to Paul (Philip. 4:10-20).

While back in Rome helping Paul, Epaphras became seriously ill (Ch. 2:27-30).

"Epaphras" is a contracted form of the name "Epaphroditus." The former name is used in the epistle to Colossae, the latter in the letter to Philippi. Grotius and other critics conjecture that these two were the same man.

Other scholars disagree, claiming Epaphras remained in prison.

We feel there is some validity to the claim they were one and the same. It explains how Philippi learned of Paul's imprisonment. If Epaphras were released from Prison, he would naturally head home, and his travel route would most likely take him

through Philippi.

Paul Writes Philippians

Late A.D. 61, toward the end of Paul's two-year house arrest in Rome, Paul wrote his epistle to the church at Philippi. We know this letter was written late in Paul's imprisonment because of several factors:

"Some time must be allowed for the news of Paul's arrival in Rome to reach Philippi, and for the church there to send Epaphroditus to him with the gift. Paul's reputation among the praetorian guard (1:13) and the penetration of the gospel among the members of Caesar's household (4:22) required an interval of time. The two factions among the preachers, those that envied and disliked Paul, and those that stood with him (1:15, 16) did not develop overnight. Furthermore, his view of his trial shows that he was uncertain of the outcome and that he was resigned to whatever might happen, he appeared confident that he would be released for further service (1:23-26; 2:17, 24)" (Tenney, p. 324).

Apparently there were no problems with false doctrine and heresy in Philippi to stir Paul to write. The references to Judaizers in Ch. 3:2 picture them as a potential danger, not one currently in the church.

The letter is the most personable one Paul wrote to a church. The Philippian church, which he had begun more than a decade earlier after crossing from Asia to Europe, had been intensely loyal to him and Paul felt he could write freely to its members about his tribulations and spiritual ambitions.

Paul's greetings came from himself and Timothy (Ch. 1:1). There is no mention of the others who were mentioned in the first three "prison epistles." By now they had departed to deliver those letters. This epistle is addressed to "all God's people living in Philippi who believe in Christ Jesus together with the church leaders (*New King James* has 'bishops' or 'overseers') and helpers" (*New King James* has "deacons").

We know Paul was still in prison at this

time for he wrote: "You are always in my heart!... For you have all shared with me in this privilege that God has given me, both now that I am in prison and also while I was free to defend and firmly establish the gospel... I want you to know, my brothers, that the things that have happened to me have really helped the progress of the gospel. As a result, the whole palace guard and all the others here know that I am in prison because I am a servant of Christ. And my being in prison has given most of the brothers more confidence in the Lord, so that they grow bolder all the time in preaching the message without fear... And I will continue to be happy, for I know that, because of your prayers and the help which comes from the spirit of Jesus Christ, I shall be set free" (vv. 7-12, 14, 18-19).

The outcome of Paul's trial was pending and he knew he could be set free or be put to death. Either way, he knew he had won: "For my deep desire and hope is that I shall never fail my duty, but at all times, and especially right now, I shall be full of courage, so that with my whole self I shall bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die. For what is life? To me, it is Christ! Death, then, will bring me something even better. But if by living on I can do more worthwhile work, then I am not sure which I should choose. I am caught from both sides: I want very much to leave this life and be with Christ, which is a far better thing; but it is much more important for your sake that I remain alive" (vv. 20-24).

Paul told the church at Philippi, "Do everything without complaining or arguing, that you may be innocent and pure, as God's perfect children who live in a world of crooked and mean people. You must shine among them like stars lighting up the sky..." (Ch. 2:14-15). True Christians shine in a dark world.

Paul let the Philippians know that Epaphroditus (or Epaphras), the minister from Colossae, was anxious to see them again. He had been sick and almost died. But God had healed him and Paul now wanted to send him to Philippi. Paul told the brethren, "Receive him, then, with all joy, as a brother in

the Lord. Show respect to all such men as he, because he risked his life and nearly died, for the sake of the work of Christ, in order to give me help that you yourselves could not give" (vv. 25-30).

The imprisoned apostle also hoped to send Timothy to Philippi as soon as he knew the outcome of his trial. "And I trust in the Lord that I myself will be able to come to you soon" (vv. 19-24).

Paul told the Philippians to imitate true ministers who had set the right example, not false ministers "whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is their shame—who set their mind on earthly things" (vv. 17-19, *NKJ*).

"We, however, are citizens of heaven, and we eagerly wait for our Savior to come from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will change our weak mortal bodies and make them like his own glorious body, using that power which he is able to bring all things under his rule" (vv. 20-21), continued Paul.

True Christians don't get involved in this world's politics—they are of the same status as ambassadors—with their true citizenship in heaven. Christians look forward to Christ's return and the establishment of his government on earth. At that time those who have died in the faith will be resurrected. Paul hoped in this resurrection (v. 11).

He added these encouraging words: "I do not claim that I have already succeeded in this, or have already become perfect. I keep going on to try to possess it. For Christ Jesus has already possessed me... the one thing I do, however, is to forget what is behind me and do my best to reach what is ahead. So I run straight toward the goal in order to win the prize, which is God's call through Christ Jesus... All of us, who are spiritually mature should have this same attitude" (vv. 12-15).

There were many women in the church at Philippi. For you will recall, it began with the conversion of Lydia and her household during a Bible study on the riverbank (Acts 16:13-15). Paul mentioned two more women in Philippians 4: "Euodia and Syntyche, please, I beg you, try to agree as sisters in the Lord" (v. 2).

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These two women were eminent in the church at Philippi and probably were deaconesses. Paul said they “labored with me in the gospel” (v. 3), and in all his writings he said this of only one other person—Timothy. In the Macedonian country where they lived, women’s social position was higher than in most parts of the civilized world (Deen, pp. 262-263, 295-296).

Clement is named with these women in verse 3 as one who labored with Paul. Some have confused this Clement with Clement I (or Clement of Rome), who was the third bishop of Rome in the counterfeit church begun by Simon Magus. Clement I ruled from A.D. 92 to 101 and authored an epistle to the Corinthians which is used by scholars as a source of early Church history (*World Book Encyclopedia*, “Clement,” p. 1474). The scholar Alford “thinks that the Clement here was a Philippian and not necessarily Clement, bishop of Rome” (JFB, p. 1311).

Paul spent a great deal of Chapter 4 thanking the Philippian church for its generous gifts, delivered by Epaphras: “How great is the joy I have in my life in the Lord! After so long a time, you once more had the chance of showing that you care for me. I don’t mean that you had quit caring for me—you did not have a chance to show it. And I am not saying this because I feel neglected; for I have learned to be satisfied with what I have. I know what it is to be in need, and what it is to have more than enough. I have learned this secret, so that anywhere, at anytime, I am content, whether full or hungry, whether I have too much or too little. I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives me.

“But it was very good of you to help me in my troubles. You Philippians yourselves know very well that when I left Macedonia, in the early days of preaching the Good News, you were the only church to help me; you were the only ones to share my profits and losses. More than once, when I needed help in Thessalonica, you sent it to me. It is not that I just want to receive gifts; rather, I want to see profit added to your account. Here, then, is my receipt for everything you

have given me—and it has been more than enough! I have all I need, now that Epaphroditus [Epaphras] has brought me all your gifts. These are like a sweet-smelling offering to God, a sacrifice which is acceptable and pleasing to him. And my God, with all his abundant wealth in Jesus Christ, will supply all your needs” (Ch. 4:10-19).

Paul’s final remarks include greetings from the brethren of the church in Rome: “Greetings to all God’s people who belong to Christ Jesus. The brothers here with me send you their greetings. All God’s people here send greetings, especially those who belong to the Emperor’s palace. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all” (vv. 21-23).

This letter was carried to Philippi by Epaphras.

Paul’s First Trial in Rome

Shortly after Paul sent the letter to Philippi in late 61 or early 62, his case finally came to court.

“From the fact that Paul appealed to Caesar, it would not necessarily follow that Caesar heard the appeal in person. According to Tacitus, Nero announced at the beginning of his principate that he would not judge cases *in propria persona* (in person) as Claudius had done; and during his first eight years he generally delegated them to others (Tacitus, Ann. xiii, 4.2). It was evidently a new departure for Nero when in 62 he himself judged the case of Fabius Veiento (Tacitus, Ann. xiv, 50.2). Thus if Paul came to trial before the early part of 62 (towards the end of his two year’s detention) his case was probably heard by someone other than Nero. This person might be the prefect of the Praetorian Guard, as W. M. Ramsay suggested, ‘representing the Emperor in his capacity as the fountain of justice, together with the assessors and high officers of court’ (W. M. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller*, p. 357).

“If it was the prefect of the Praetorian Guard, it would make a mighty difference whether it was the honest Afranius Burrus

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or the infamous Tigellinus, who succeeded him in 62. Chronological probability would point to Burrus rather than Tigellinus; but we cannot be sure that, if indeed Paul's case was delegated at all, it was delegated to the praetorian prefect" (Bruce, p. 362).

What took so long for Paul's trial to come? Some scholars have thought that Paul's prosecutors failed to arrive in Rome before an 18-month statutory time limit expired. But the 18-month time limit was from a document of the third century and there is no evidence of such a procedure of letting a case lapse by default in the first century. "A prosecutor who did not put in an appearance would be penalized, but this did not involve the automatic discharge of the defendant" (Bruce, p. 363).

Bruce adds, "The prolongation of Paul's stay in Rome over two full years could have been due to congestion of court business as much as anything" (ibid.).

Paul changed during his imprisonment. "A definite change took place after the imprisonment of Paul. The man himself was different, for although he was unready to quit the

ardent pursuit of his calling as Philippians showed (Phil. 3:12), time was against him. In Philemon he described himself as 'Paul the aged' (Philem. 9) and in Philippians he indicated that death might not be far distant (Phil. 1:20, 21). He was relying increasingly upon the aid of his younger associates, who were still free and better able to carry on the work of preaching" (Tenney, p. 331).

The date of Paul's trial arrived and he found himself alone before Nero or the prefect of the Praetorian Guard. Undoubtedly he was strengthened by God to face his accusers. Perhaps he preached the Gospel before the highest leaders in the greatest nation on earth at that time.

Paul finally was acquitted of the charges Jews had trumped up against him in Jerusalem. The court may have heard both sides of the argument and acquitted Paul or perhaps he won by default—his accusers may never have shown up. The Bible doesn't say.

After four years of imprisonment—two in Caesarea and two in Rome—Paul finally was a free man, free to preach the Gospel in person.

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Paul's Final Journey

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Early in Paul's career as an apostle in God's church, he had two goals: to see Rome and to preach in Spain (Rom. 15:22-28). He had now spent two years in Rome and, being acquitted of any crime, was free to go to Spain.

Paul, who at this time was in his 60s or 70s, turned his eyes westward.

Paul Goes to Spain, Britain

"The history of the early New Testament church is presented in the book of Acts. But have you ever noticed that Acts ends in the middle of the story? Luke doesn't even finish the life of Paul after his two year's imprisonment.

"Why?

"You will find the answer in Christ's commission to Paul. Even before he was baptized, Christ had planned the future work he was to accomplish.

"First Paul was to teach the Gentiles—which he did in Cyprus, Asia Minor and Greece. Second, he was to appear before kings—an event brought about by [two years of imprisonment in Caesarea and] a two-year imprisonment at Rome. At the end of

the [latter] two year period... Luke strangely breaks off the story of Paul's life. See Acts 28:31.

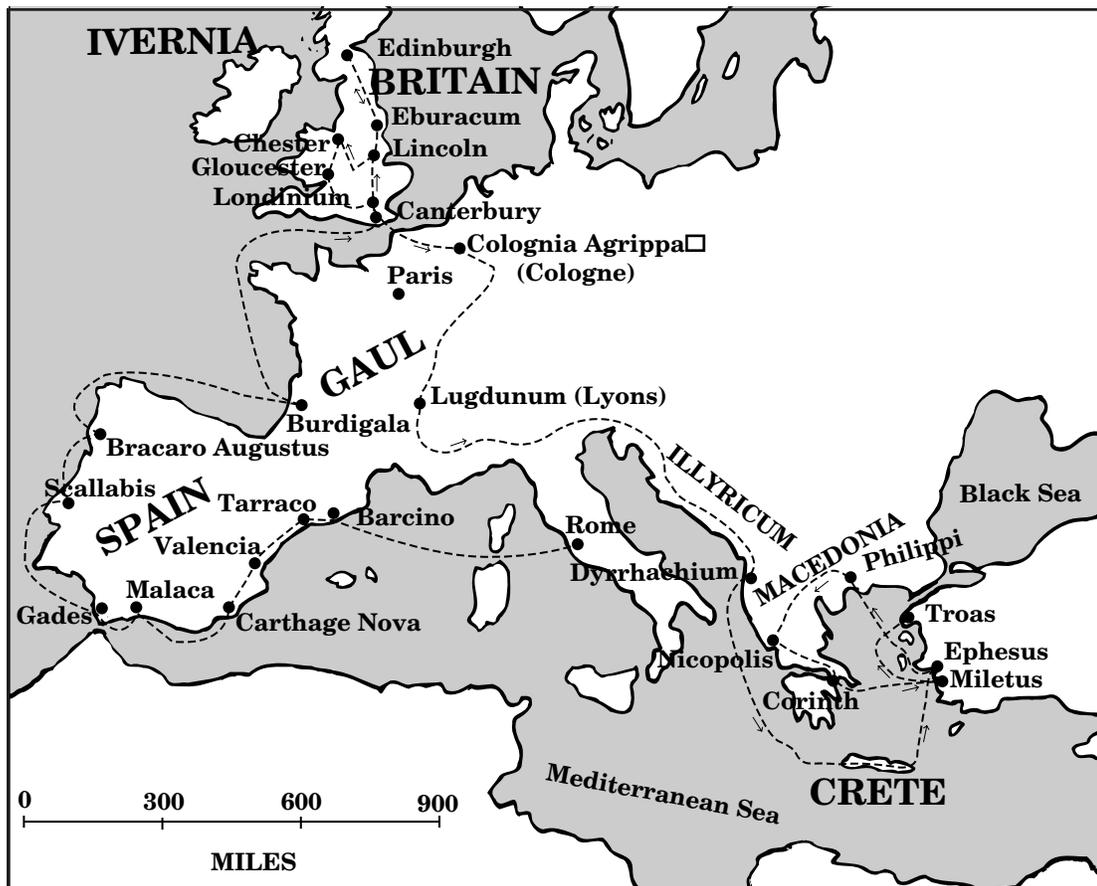
"But Paul's third mission was not yet accomplished. Christ had chosen Paul for a three-fold purpose— 'to bear [his] name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel' (Acts 9:15). There is the answer. He, too, was to end his work among the Lost Ten Tribes!

"Luke was not permitted by Christ to include in Acts the final journeys of Paul's life. It would have revealed the whereabouts of the children of Israel.

"It was not God's time to make that known" (Hoeh, "Where Did the Original Apostles Go?" Part 1, p. 4).

Now was the time for Paul to preach to the lost 10 tribes of Israel in Spain and beyond. His plans were to go to Spain after Rome. Clement of Rome, in his letter to the Corinthians, confirmed Paul's journey to the west.

"The Muratorian list of New Testament books, compiled at Rome towards the end of the Second Century, refers to his setting out from Rome for Spain as something that is not recorded in Acts... A century earlier



Based on extra-Biblical sources and references in Paul's pastoral epistles, the probable route of Paul's final journey may be traced. He traveled from Rome to Spain and Britain. From there he traveled through Gaul, across the northern part of Italy, and returned to the Mediterranean world via the port of Dyrrhachium. From A.D. 62 until his arrest in Troas A.D. 66, Paul visited Crete, Ephesus, Philippi, Nicopolis, Corinth and Miletus, leaving behind an elder in each area.

Clement of Rome reminded the Corinthian church how Paul, 'having preached in the east and the west, attained the noble renown for him by his faith, teaching righteousness to the whole world, and reaching the farthest limit of the west [or, reaching his goal in the west]' [1 Clem. 3:13-14 as recorded in *The Lost Books of the Bible*]. This last expression, it might be argued, coming from a man who was a resident and writing in Rome, would (however translated) most naturally point to a place farther west than Rome. Clement however, does not expressly mention Spain, and his rhetorical and allusive style makes it difficult to draw from his language straight forward historical inferences such as might otherwise have been

made from an author writing only some 30 years after Paul's death.

" 'Reaching the farthest limits of the west,' Clement continues, 'he bore witness before rulers, and thus passed from the world, and went to the holy place, having shown himself a wonderful pattern of patience' [1 Clem. 3:14]" (Bruce, pp. 366-367).

"If Clement was writing from Rome, it would be as strange for him to refer to Rome as 'the bound of the west' as for a man living in Chicago to call that city the western boundary of the United States" (Tenney, p. 338).

Paul traveled west from Rome into Spain. From there he traveled northward through Gaul (France) and on to Britannia (Britain),

preaching to—not the Jews—but Israelite non-Jews who settled in western Europe.

William Camden, in his book, *Remains of Britain*, published in 1674, states, “The true Christian religion was planted here most anciently by Joseph of Arimathea, Simon Zelotes, Aristobulus, by St. Peter, and St. Paul, as may be proved by Dorotheus, Theodoretus and Sophronius” (p. 5).

Jerome, writing in 392, said, “Paul, having been in Spain, went from one ocean to another.... His diligence in preaching extended as far as the earth itself.... After his imprisonment he preached in the western parts.”

Venantius Fortunatus wrote in 560, “Paul passed over the ocean to the island of Britain, and to Thule, the extremity of the earth” (Dugger and Dodd, p. 234).

“Listen to the words of the Greek church historian Theodoret. He reports ‘that St. Paul brought salvation to the isles that lie in the ocean’ (book i, on Psalm cxvi, p. 870). The British Isles!” (Hoeh, “Where Did the Original Apostles Go?” Part 2, p. 18).

William Cave concurs: “Probable it is, that he went to *Spain*, a thing which he himself tells us he had formerly once and again resolved on. Certain it is that the Ancients do generally assert it, without seeming in the least to doubt of it. *Theodoret* and others tell us, that he preached not only in *Spain*, but that he went to other Nations, and brought the Gospel into the *Isles of the Sea*, by which he undoubtedly means *Britain*, and therefore elsewhere reckons the *Gauls* and *Britains* among the Nations, which the Apostles, and particularly the *Tent-maker* persuaded to embrace the Law of *Christ*. Nor is he the only Man that has said it, others having given in their testimony and suffrage in this case” (Cave, p. 110).

A manuscript has been discovered in the archives of Constantinople which purports to be the concluding portion of the book of Acts. The origin of this manuscript is uncertain. It was translated into English in 1801 by C. S. Sonnimi. Much of this “long lost chapter of the Acts of the Apostles” can be verified by other independent sources.

The manuscript reads: “And Paul, full of the blessings of Christ, and abounding in the spirit, departed out of Rome, determining to go into Spain, for he had a long time purposed to journey thitherward, and was minded also to go from thence to Britain.

“For he had heard in Phoenicia that certain of the children of Israel, about the time of the Assyrian captivity, had escaped by sea to ‘the isles afar off,’ as spoken by the prophet, and called by the Romans Britain.

“And the Lord commanded the gospel to be preached far hence to the Gentiles, and to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.

“And no man hindered Paul; for he testified boldly of Jesus before the tribunes and among the people; and he took with him certain of the brethren which abode with him at Rome, and they took shipping at Ostium, and having the winds fair were brought safely into a haven of Spain.

“And much people were gathered together from the towns and villages and the hill country; for they had heard of the conversion of the apostle, and the many miracles which he had wrought.

“And Paul preached mightily in Spain, and great multitudes believed and were converted, for they perceived he was an apostle sent from God” (*The Incredible History of God’s True Church* by Ivor C. Fletcher, pp. 81-82).

Maps of Spain during the first century show several coastal cities. Paul may have stopped at several of these—Barcino, Tarraco, Valencia, Carthage Nova, Malaca, Gades, Scallabis and Bracaro Augusta. He may have sailed between them or possibly traveled some ancient Roman road connecting these cities.

We do not know that he traveled to all of these. But there is some indication he did stop at Gades.

“The ‘haven of Spain’ mentioned in the [manuscript] was almost certainly the port of Gades or Cadiz. A colony of Israelite and Phoenician peoples was established here from very ancient times. This was probably the port of Tarshish (Spain) that Jonah was heading for centuries earlier, when he tried

to escape from God.

“ ‘Cadiz was the commercial centre of Western Europe, and was no doubt the place St. Paul had in mind when, writing to the Romans, he spoke of his “journey into Spain.” ’...

“There was nothing in the least unusual about a sea voyage between Rome and Cadiz during the first century; ‘the commercial and passenger traffic with Gades was intimate and constant’ ” (*The Apostolic Fathers* by J. B. Lightfoot, Vol. 2, p. 31, as quoted by Fletcher, p. 84).

The manuscript claiming to be the lost chapter of Acts continues to describe Paul's journey from Spain to Britain: “And they departed out of Spain, and Paul and his company finding a ship in America [Brittany in northwest Gaul (or France)] sailing into Britain, they went therein, and passing along the South coast they reached a port called Raphinus” (Fletcher, p. 83).

The location of the port of Raphinus is uncertain but some have felt it was Sandwich in Kent. “A port in this vicinity is known to have been used by the Romans during the first century A.D. An old house is said to have existed at Sandwich until Saxon times which was known as ‘The House of the Apostles’ ” (Fletcher, p. 84).

Roman roads linked Sandwich with London.

The manuscript continues: “Now when it was noised abroad that the apostle had landed on their coast, great multitudes of the inhabitants met him, and they treated Paul courteously, and he entered in at the gate of their city, and lodged in the house of an Hebrew and one of his own nation.

“And on the morrow he came and stood upon Mount Lud [modern day Ludgate Hill in London]; and the people thronged at the gate, and assembled in the Broadway, and he preached Christ unto them, and many believed the word and testimony of Jesus.

“And at even the Holy Ghost fell upon Paul, and he prophesied, saying, Behold in the last days the God of Peace shall dwell in the cities, and the inhabitants thereof shall be numbered; and in the seventh numbering

of the people, their eyes shall be opened, and the glory of their inheritance shine forth before them. And nations shall come up to worship on the Mount that testifieth of the patience and long suffering of a servant of the Lord.

“And in the latter days new tidings of the Gospel shall issue forth out of Jerusalem, and the hearts of the people shall rejoice, and behold, fountains shall be opened, and there shall be no more plague.

“In those days there shall be wars and rumours of wars; and a king shall rise up, and his sword shall be for the healing of the nations, and his peacemaking shall abide, and the glory of his kingdom a wonder among princes.

“And it came to pass that certain of the Druids came unto Paul privately, and showed by their rites and ceremonies they were decended from the Jews which escaped bondage in the land of Egypt, and the apostle believed these things, and he gave them the kiss of peace.

“And Paul abode in his lodgings three months, confirming in the faith and preaching Christ continually” (Fletcher, pp. 84-85).

At this time there were numerous Roman roads criss-crossing England. It is possible that Paul may have traveled north up the Ermine Street to visit Lincoln, York (home of the 6th and 9th Roman legions), and Edinburgh. On a return trip, he may have headed southwest from Lincoln on the Fosse Way until it intersected with Watling Street. He could have taken Watling Street northwest into Wales, and visited the town of Chester (home of the 20th Roman Legion) and then traveled south to Gloucester before returning to London. Perhaps a trip into Ireland was included.

There is no record such a journey. But it would seem unlikely that Paul, having come this far, would not travel the good Roman roads just a little bit farther, to reach a few more lost sheep of the House of Israel who inhabited these islands. (For proof that Israelites inhabited these islands, see *The United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy* by Herbert W. Armstrong, pp. 114-122.)

When Paul and preached in Galatia decades earlier, he had preached to the same family of people he was now preaching to in England!

“The apostle to the Gentiles [Paul], after founding Syrian Christianity [his time spent in Antioch], was called to plant the gospel among the Galatians, in the heart of the large Celtic branch of the human family. The Celts of Galatia were of the same family, and spoke the same language as the Irish, Scotch, British, Welsh, and French” (*Truth Triumphant* by Benjamin G. Wilkinson, p. 26).

Notice the origins of the Galatians to whom Paul had preached: “...the Galatians, a numerous branch of the Gauls of France, had pushed their way into Asia Minor. With all the fiery nature of the Celtic race, they had invaded and subdued Italy and sacked Rome in the fourth century before Christ [Ridgeway, *The Early Age of Greece*, Vol. 1, p. 356]. Not satisfied with this success, they broke into Asia Minor, and, settling there, became the founders of the province of Galatia...

“Patrick entered Ireland in the latter half of the fourth century. He found a well-organized and healthy Celtic Christianity there [Fitzpatrick, *Ireland and the Making of Britain*, p. 30]. That the Celts in France were evangelized by the Celts in Asia Minor is shown by a well-known event in the history of the French church. About seventy years after the death of the apostle John, the churches in southern France suffered a terrible persecution at the hand of the pagans. The distressed believers in 177 sent a pathetic account of their afflictions, not to Italy or to Africa, but to their brethren in Asia Minor. (We will read more about this later.)

“In order to understand the situation, political and ecclesiastical, in southern France, we must bear in mind that the Gauls of the West and the Galatae of the east were of the same stock, and that each branch, though several nations intervened, retained unimpaired its racial characteristics’ [Warner, *the Albigenian Heresy*, Vol. 1, p. 19].

“Thus Ireland received the gospel from Asia Minor, by way of the sea and by way of the Celtic believers in southern France; and they, in turn, obtained the light from the Galatians to whom Paul had ministered” (Wilkinson, pp. 26-27).

Perhaps one reason Paul had such a desire to go to Spain, Britain and France was because the Galatians to whom he preached earlier in his life had friends and relatives living in these far reaches of the Roman Empire!

Theodoret in 435 made the statement that Paul preached Christ “and his laws” to the Romans and their tributaries as well as to “the Britons also and the Cimbri [Cymri, i.e. Welsh]” (Fletcher, pp. 77-78).

Paul may have gone to Wales to preach or he may have preached to Welsh people who came to London to hear him.

Paul Visits Gaul, Illyricum, Macedonia

After three months in London, Paul traveled across the English Channel to ancient France, called Gaul.

The manuscript of the last chapter of Acts continues Paul's story: “And after these things Paul and his brethren departed from Raphinus, and sailed unto Antium in Gaul.... And Paul preached in the Roman garrisons and among the people, exhorting all men to repent and confess their sins” (Fletcher, p. 85).

At this time an important Roman road ran from the northwest coast of France along the Rhine river to Colonia Agrippa (now called Cologne). The road continued southeast a ways before turning southwest, meeting up with the Rhone River and arriving in Lugdunum (Lyons). It is in Lyons where Christians will be persecuted in 177.

Another major Roman road headed south out of Lugdunum, turned east and cut across the northern stretches of Italy and then traveled down the eastern edge of the Adriatic Sea through Illyricum (Dalmatia), finally stopping in Dyrrachium in northern Macedonia (*Early European Civilization* by Roscoe

Lewius Ashley, map, p. 299).

Paul could have traveled these major roads as he made his way back to the Mediterranean world. The manuscript of the last chapter of Acts concludes: "And they went forth and came unto Illyricum, intending to go by Macedonia unto Asia, and grace was found in all the churches; and they prospered and had peace. Amen" [The M.S. was reproduced by the kind permission of The Covenant Publishing Co. Ltd., of London] (Fletcher, p. 88).

Luke Writes Acts

It was about this time (63) that Luke wrote the Acts of the Apostles. He wrote the book for Theophilus to continue the story of Jesus Christ and the apostles he had chosen (Acts 1:1-2). If the final chapter of Acts, from which we have quoted, is authentic, it was not included in the manuscript which was used when the Bible was canonized. God did not want the location of the tribes of Israel to be revealed until these last days.

Luke's account in the Bible ended without giving the disposition of Paul's trial in Rome. This has led scholars to assume the book was written before Paul went to trial (*Unger's Bible Handbook*, p. 439).

If the final chapter is authentic, then it too, concludes before the end of the story. It stops at this point in Paul's travels. But it is plain from Paul's pastoral epistles that his final journey was not yet over!

Paul Travels to Crete

After his journey into northwest Europe, Paul headed back through Macedonia and Asia before being arrested, brought back to Rome and martyred A.D. 67.

We no longer have Luke's account in Acts to describe Paul's journeys. But we do have references to places in Paul's final letters, the "Pastoral Epistles."

"The allusions to his movements in the Pastorals bear no relation to the account given in Acts, and in many particulars do not correspond with it at all. The inevitable

deduction is that the three epistles must have been written later, when Paul was traveling again.

"The chronological relations of the Pastorals to the Prison Epistles seem clear from the reference to Paul's companions. Many of these are identical with those of the Prison Epistles, but are located in places which show that they had left Paul's immediate vicinity. Timothy had been left at Ephesus while Paul was en route to Macedonia (1 Tim. 1:3), whereas on the last trip that Timothy took with Paul the order of procedure was from Macedonia to Asia (Acts 20:4-6), and Timothy did not remain in Ephesus. Demas had deserted Paul (2 Tim. 4:10), whereas the Prison Epistles included him among the group at Rome (Phil. 24). Titus was left in Crete (Titus 1:5), and then went to Dalmatia (2 Tim. 4:10), but on none of the journeys in Acts did Paul go to Crete, nor did he have Titus with him when he finally did go there during the voyage to Rome. Mark was in Asia (4:11) where Paul had recommended him in one of the Asian letters (Col. 4:10). Luke was still with him (2 Tim. 4:11). Tychicus had gone on his errand to Ephesus (4:12). Paul himself had visited Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3), Crete (Titus 1:5), Nicopolis (3:12), Corinth (2 Tim. 4:20), Miletus (4:20), and Troas (4:13), and was presently located in Rome (1:17). He was in prison (1:16) and was quite sure that the end of his life was not far away (4:6, 7). Altogether the situation was very different from that described by the Prison Epistles" (Tenney, pp. 332-333).

There is evidence from Paul's later letters that he traveled with Timothy, Titus, Luke, Erastus and Trophimus, and left one of his companions at each of the churches he visited.

Paul had spent some time on the island of Crete on his way to Rome prior to his imprisonment there—his ship had docked at Safe Harbors until after the Day of Atonement A.D. 59 (Acts 27:8-14). It is very likely that Crete was the first stop on Paul's return voyage from Europe A.D. 63 or 64.

The island, which closes in the Greek Archipelago on the south, is 140 miles wide

between Cape Salome on the east and Cape Criumetopon on the west. It has a bold, mountainous terrain and in early times was celebrated for its 100 cities. There were many Jews on the island for they had settled there in considerable numbers between the death of Alexander the Great (323 B.C.) and the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) (Smith, "Crete," pp. 120-121).

God's church was thriving in Crete and Paul saw the need to leave someone on the island to raise up elders in every town (Titus 1:5). He selected Titus to remain there for the task.

64

Returning to Ephesus and Macedonia

Paul and his companions continued north-eastward to Ephesus. People there were teaching false doctrines among the brethren and there was an inordinate interest in genealogies and family histories that was causing division. So Paul left Timothy there and continued on to Macedonia—presumably Philippi—where he and the church had an especially close relationship (1 Tim. 1:3-4).

Rome Burns; Christians Accused

Sometime after midnight on July 19, A.D. 64, while Paul was making this journey, fire broke out in Rome. The finger of suspicion pointed at Nero. He needed a scapegoat, so he blamed the fire on Christians living in Rome.

This persecution was most intense in Rome. To a lesser degree it spread throughout the empire. We will cover the fire and subsequent persecution in detail in the next chapter.

65

Paul Writes 1 Timothy

From Macedonia, Paul wrote to Timothy, whom he had left behind in Ephesus.

Timothy was a young minister who needed Paul's encouragement. He had been born in Lystra. His father was Greek and his

mother Jewish. He was brought up in the Jewish faith and was taught the Scriptures since childhood.

"Likely he had the face of a Chopin, the fingers of a Michelangelo. He was not the robustness of a Silas at the whipping-post, but the strength of a rose folding against the rain.

"Not that persecution dodged him. He met plenty of it, and wore it well. He was Paul's cell companion; more than once he felt death's breath upon his cheek" (Mead, p. 236).

Paul made Timothy his understudy during his second journey (Acts 16:1-3) A.D. 50, and Timothy remained a close friend to Paul ever since.

"He shared in the evangelization of Macedonia and Achaia and aided Paul during the years of preaching at Ephesus, where he became thoroughly acquainted with the city and the needs of the local church" (Tenney, p. 334).

"Paul used him as a courier, running messages hither and yon. He trusted Timothy with precious parchment and bags of coin, and with the rulings of the church at Ephesus" (Mead, p. 236).

"Timothy was a trustworthy but not a forceful character. He gave the impression of immaturity, although he must have been at least 30 years of age when Paul assigned him to the pastorate of Ephesus (1 Tim. 4:2). He was timid (2 Tim. 1:6-7) and was subject to stomach trouble (1 Tim. 5:23). The epistles which bear his name were intended to encourage him and to strengthen him for the tremendous task which Paul had bequeathed to him" (Tenney, p. 334).

1 Timothy was written about A.D. 65 from Macedonia (Halley, p. 525). Tenney titles it "Advice to a Young Preacher."

In the preamble (Ch. 1:3-17), Paul immediately discussed the emergency at Ephesus (vv. 3-11) and his experience (vv. 12-17).

Paul then discussed the official commission from Chapter 1:18 to 4:5. Its purpose is covered in 1:18-20, prayer in 2:1-8, worship by women in 2:9-15, the office of the bishop in 3:1-7, the office of the deacon in 3:8-13,

parenthesis in 3:14-16 and apostasy in 4:1-5.

Personal admonitions were given by Paul from Chapter 4:6 through 6:19. They concern personal conduct (4:6-16) and relations with groups (5:1-6:2). These groups included widows (5:1-16), elders (vv. 17-19), backsliders (vv. 20-25), bondslaves (6:1, 2), false teachers (vv. 3-8), and greedy people (vv. 9-10). Two final admonitions concerned personal confession (Ch. 6:11-16) and use of wealth (vv. 17-19).

Paul concluded his letter with a salutation in 6:20, 21).

Problems in Ephesus

“I want you to stay in Ephesus, just as I urged you when I was on my way to Macedonia,” wrote Paul in Ch. 1:3, immediately following his salutation to Timothy. “Some people there are teaching false doctrines and you must order them to stop. Tell them to give up those legends and long lists of names of ancestors, for these only produce arguments; they do not serve God’s plan, which is known by faith. The purpose of this order is to arouse the love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and a genuine faith. Some men have turned away from these and have lost their way in foolish discussions. They want to be teachers of God’s law but they do not understand their own words or the matters about which they speak with so much confidence” (1 Tim. 1:3-7).

These problems continue to crop up in God’s church in the 20th Century—people inordinately interested in genealogies and people who speak boldly about things they know little about, yet desiring to have a high position in the church.

Paul named two men who caused problems: “Some men have not listened to their conscience, and have made a ruin of their faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to the power of Satan, so that they will be taught to stop speaking evil of God” (vv. 19-20).

Hymenaeus was no doubt the Hymen-

aeus of 2 Tim. 2:17-18 who taught the resurrection was already past. He appeared to be a Gnostic (Smith, “Hymenaeus,” p. 249). (We discussed Gnosticism in Chapter 3.)

Alexander was probably the same “Alexander the coppersmith” who caused Paul much mischief later in Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:14). And, quite likely, he was the same Jewish leader who was pushed forward by the Jews during the riot at Ephesus when Paul was confronted by Demetrius the silversmith in the summer of 55 (Acts 19:33). If this is the case, Alexander had become a member of the Church of God at Ephesus but continued to teach ways contrary to God’s truth—ways based on Jewish customs and superstitions—customs which had died with Jesus Christ.

In any event, Hymenaeus and Alexander were teaching falsehoods to brethren and Paul ordered them disfellowshipped—removed—from the church. They were “handed over to Satan” (the god who rules this whole world outside of God’s church (2 Cor. 4:4). Satan is “the executor of wrath when judiciously allowed by God, on the disobedient (1 Cor. 5:5, 2 Cor. 12:7)” (JFB, p. 1356).

Alexander did not take disfellowship lightly. Instead of repenting he became filled with a bitter hatred for Paul. And when the opportunity would later arise when Paul would come to Ephesus, Alexander was ready to deal God’s apostle a fatal blow.

Concerning Prayer

Next in his epistle, Paul told Timothy to pray for all men, including kings and those in authority so the work of God may go on unhindered and so the brethren may live a quiet and peaceful life (Ch. 2:2).

Concerning Worship by Women

“I also want women to be modest and sensible about their clothes and dress properly; not with fancy hair styles or with gold ornaments or pearls or expensive dresses, but with good deeds, as is proper for women who

claim to be religious” (vv. 9-10).

Paul then set forth a principle to which God’s true church adheres even today: women are not to preach. “Women should learn in silence and all humility. I do not allow women to teach or to have authority over men; they must keep quiet. For Adam was created first, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and broke God’s law” (vv. 11-14).

Office of a Bishop

The office of bishop or elder in God’s church was discussed by Paul in Chapter 3.

“If a man is eager to be a church leader he desires an excellent work. A church leader must be a man without fault; he must have only one wife, be sober, self-controlled, and orderly; he must welcome strangers in his home; he must be able to teach; he must not be a drunkard or a violent man, but gentle and peaceful; he must not love money; he must be able to manage his own family, and make his children obey him with all respect. For if a man does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of the Church of God? He must not be a man who has been recently converted; else he will swell up with pride and be condemned, as the Devil was. He should be a man who is respected by people outside the church, so that he will not be disgraced and fall into the Devil’s trap” (vv. 1-7).

Qualifications for a deacon are similar:

“Church helpers must also be of good character and sincere; they must not drink too much wine or be greedy; they should hold to the revealed truth with a clear conscience. They should be tested first, and then, if they pass the test, they should serve. Their wives also must be of good character, and not gossip; they must be sober and honest in everything. A church helper must have only one wife, and be able to manage his family well. Those who do a good work win for themselves a good standing and are able to speak boldly about the faith that is ours in union with Christ Jesus” (vv. 8-13).

Paul’s Plans

Paul, writing from Macedonia A.D. 65, told Timothy he had plans to return soon to Ephesus. But if he were delayed, this letter would give him instructions on how to run the church:

“As I write this letter to you, I hope to come and see you soon. But if I delay, this letter will let you know how we should conduct ourselves in God’s household, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:14-15).

Warning Against False Teachers

In Chapter 4 Paul told Timothy to beware of false ministers and their teachings. Perhaps the counterfeit church of Simon Magus was making inroads at Ephesus. There were men teaching celibacy and vegetarianism. Paul refuted these beliefs:

“The Spirit says clearly that some men will abandon the faith in later times; they will obey lying spirits and follow the teachings of demons. These teachings come from the deceit of men who are liars, and whose consciences are dead, as if burnt with a hot iron. Such men teach that it is wrong to marry, and to eat certain foods. But God created these foods to be eaten, after a prayer of thanks, by those who are believers and have come to know the truth” (Ch. 4:1-3).

God’s Church neither forbids people to marry nor endorses vegetarianism.

Timothy’s Personal Conduct

Timothy was told by Paul to pass on to brethren the instructions in this letter. But he should stay away from “those godless legends” he had mentioned in Chapter 1.

Timothy was a young man and exercised to keep physically fit. Paul told him this was good—but spiritual exercise was more important:

“Keep yourself in training for a godly life. Physical exercise has some value in it, but spiritual exercise is valuable in every way, for it promises life both for now and for

the future" (vv. 6-8).

Paul encouraged Timothy: "Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young, but be an example for the believers, in your speech, your conduct, your love, faith, and purity. Give your time and effort, until I come, to the public reading of the Scriptures, and to preaching and teaching. Do not neglect the spiritual gift that is in you, which is given to you when the prophets spoke and the elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things and give yourself to them, in order that your progress may be seen by all. Watch yourself, and watch your teaching. Keep on doing these things, for if you do you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

"Do not rebuke an older man, but appeal to him as if he were your father. Treat the younger men as your brothers, the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, with all purity.

"Show respect for widows who really are widows..." (Ch. 4:12-5:3).

Church Widows

Paul told Timothy that families should take care of their widows. But if a widow has no family she was a "widow indeed" and deserved help from the Church. To receive church assistance, widows were required to be older than 60, married only once, have had a reputation for good deeds, have brought up their children well, received strangers in their homes, washed the feet of God's people, helped those in trouble and have given herself to all kinds of good works (1 Tim 5: 9-10).

Younger widows could turn from Christ to desire men. And "they also... waste their time... going around from house to house... they learn to be gossips and busybodies, talking of things they should not." Therefore, Paul preferred that younger widows remarry and have a home and family to care for (vv. 11-14).

Concerning Church Elders

Ministers in God's Church deserve a decent

wage, Paul told Timothy. They should not listen to accusations against other ministers unless the accusations are brought by two or three elders.

Sins committed by brethren should be discussed from the pulpit so all in the congregation can learn from their mistakes, Paul added (1 Tim. 5:17-20).

Timothy's Health

Paul was aware of Timothy's health problems. Perhaps Timothy worried a lot, being a young man with much responsibility. For Paul advised him, "Do not drink water only, but take a little wine to help your digestion, since you are sick so often" (1 Tim. 5:23).

Some false religions teach that wine should not be drunk. But Jesus not only drank wine, He created it from water in his first recorded miracle. And now, nearly 40 years later, one of the chief apostles in the church Jesus began was instructing a younger minister to take a *little* wine. Wine in moderation is not a sin, though drunkenness is (Gal. 5:21)!

Concerning Slaves

Timothy and the rest of the first century church had a problem not seen much in the church today: that of slaves or servants being called into the church with or without their masters. In either case, Paul instructed slaves to be respectful to their masters. If the master were in the church, a converted slave should not seek favors but should serve him even better (1 Tim. 6:1-2). These instructions can be applied today to employers and employees.

False, Greedy Men

Timothy was told to preach to the church what Paul had written in his letter (1 Tim. 6:3). Those men who didn't agree with the truth were proud, knowing nothing, and liked to argue. Timothy was instructed to avoid them (vv. 4-5, *NKJ*).

"They think religion is a way to become

rich,” explained Paul. “Well, religion does make a man very rich, if he is satisfied with what he has. What did we bring into the world? Nothing! What can we take out of the world? Nothing! So then, if we have food and clothes, that should be enough for us. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and are caught in the trap of many foolish and harmful desires, which pull men down to ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some have been so eager to have it that they have wandered away from the faith and have broken their hearts with many sorrows” (vv. 5-10).

After encouraging Timothy to strive for righteousness, Paul again discussed riches:

“Command those who are rich in the things of this life not to be proud, and to place their hope, not on such an uncertain thing as riches, but on God, who generously gives us everything for us to enjoy. Command them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share with others. In this way they will store up for themselves a treasure which will be a solid foundation for the future. And then they will be able to win the life which is true life” (vv. 17-19).

Final Warning

Paul concluded his epistle with a warning about Gnosticism, a belief in “secret knowledge,” which we discussed in Chapter 3 of this book.

“Timothy, keep safe what has been turned over to your care. Avoid the godless talk and foolish arguments of ‘knowledge’ as some people wrongly call it. For some have claimed to possess it, and as a result they have lost the way of faith. God’s grace be with you all” (1 Tim. 6:20-21).

Paul Writes Titus

Having written Timothy, who was at Ephesus, earlier A.D. 65, Paul turned his attention to Titus, another young minister whom Paul had left in charge of the Cretan

churches. It was probably the fall of the year, for Paul asked Titus to visit him in Nicopolis, where he planned to spend the winter (Titus 3:12).

Titus was a Gentile convert of Paul’s early days in Antioch. His conversion was so strong that Paul used it as “exhibit A” for uncircumcised believers at the Jerusalem conference A.D. 49 (Gal. 2:1, 3).

Titus was with Paul on his third journey and acted as emissary when Paul was in Ephesus and sent his stinging corrective letter to the rebellious and corrupt Corinthian church A.D. 55 (2 Cor. 7:6-16).

Titus also traveled widely in Macedonia to collect the funds Paul raised for the brethren in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8:16, 19, 23). He may have been included in the “us” in Acts 20:5 but he is not mentioned by name anywhere in Acts. He seems to have been a stronger character than Timothy and better able to cope with opposition (Tenney, p. 337).

“The situation in Crete was discouraging. The church was unorganized, and its members were quite careless in behavior. If the injunctions in Chapter 2 are any indication of what the churches needed, the men were lax and careless, the older women were gossips and winebibbers, and the young women were idle and flirtatious. Perhaps the preaching of the gospel of grace had given the Cretans the impression that salvation by faith was unrelated to an industrious and ethical life. Six times (1:6; 2:7, 14; 3:1, 8, 14) in the short epistle good works are urged upon Christians. Although Paul says that salvation cannot be earned by good works (Ch. 3:5), he affirms with equal vigor that believers must be careful to maintain good works” (Tenney, p. 336).

As is often the case, churches of God tend to pick up characteristics of the communities around them and the Church of God in Crete was no different.

Crete, as we already have mentioned, was 140 miles long and 7 to 30 wide. The island rests southeast of Greece between the Aegean and Mediterranean seas. It was mountainous but its valleys were fertile and populous, known as the “island of a hundred

cities.”

Crete was steeped in mythology. Its highest mountain, Mt. Ida, was the legendary birthplace of the Greek god, Zeus. In mythology, Minos and the Minotaur lived on Crete.

The people were akin to the Philistines and are thought to be the Cherethites of 1 Sam. 30:14. Cretans were daring sailors and famous bowmen with a very bad moral reputation.

The nucleus of the Church of God on Crete probably began with Cretans who were in Jerusalem on Pentecost when the church began (Acts 2:11), for there is no record of any apostolic visit there, other than Paul's stay on his trip to Rome in Acts 27 (Halley, pp. 532-533).

Tenney labels Paul's letter to Titus as "Titus: The Sound Doctrine" (Tenney, p. 337).

Paul began his letter, as usual, with a salutation. He then gave Titus the source of sound doctrine (Titus 1:1-4).

The administration of sound doctrine is discussed in the remainder of Chapter 1. The appointment of elders is discussed in verses 5-9 and the exposure of false teachers in verses 10-16.

Chapter 2 discusses the preachings of sound doctrine to aged men, aged women, himself and to slaves. The definition of sound doctrine is discussed in verses 11-15.

Counseling by sound doctrine is discussed in Ch. 3:1-11.

Paul concludes his letter in Ch. 3:12-15.

Titus is very similar to 1 Timothy, which has led scholars to believe they were written at the same time.

Paul described Titus in Ch. 1:4 as "my true son in the faith that we share."

Titus' job was described next: "I left you in Crete for you to put in order the things that are still needed doing, and to appoint church elders in every town. Remember my instructions: an elder must be without fault, he must have only one wife..." and he described the character of an elder in much the same way he did to Timothy in 1 Tim. 3:1-7. "In this way," continued Paul, "he will be able to encourage others with the true teaching, and also show the error of those who are

opposed to it" (vv. 5-9).

Paul continued discussing Titus' mission: "For there are many who rebel and deceive others with their nonsense, especially the converts from Judaism. It is necessary to stop their talking, for they are upsetting whole families by teaching what they should not, for the shameful purpose of making money. It was a Cretan himself, one of their own prophets, who said, 'Cretans are always liars, and wicked beasts, and lazy gluttons.' And what he said is true. For this reason you must rebuke them sharply, that they may have a healthy faith, and no longer hold on to Jewish legends and to human commandments which come from men who have rejected the truth" (vv. 10-14).

The Cretan prophet Paul mentioned was Epimenides of Phaestus, or Gnosus, in Crete, who lived about 600 B.C. The words probably were taken from his treatise, "Concerning Oracles" (JFB, p. 1386).

Preaching Sound Doctrine

Paul told Titus how to handle specific problems among the brethren of the Church of God in Crete:

"But you must teach what is required by sound doctrine. Tell the older men to be sober, sensible, and self-controlled; to be sound in their faith, love, and endurance. In the same way tell older women to behave as women who live a holy life should. They must not be slanderers, or slaves to wine. They must teach what is good in order to train younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, and to be good housewives, who obey their husbands, so that no one will speak evil of the message from God.

"In the same way urge the young men to be self-controlled. You yourself, in all things, must be an example in good works. Be sincere and serious in your teaching...

"Slaves are to obey their masters and please them in all things. They must not talk back to them or steal from them...

"That grace [the grace of God] instructs us to give up ungodly living and worldly

passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this world, as we wait for the blessed Day we hope for, when the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ will appear...

“Teach these things, and use your full authority as you encourage and rebuke your hearers. Let none of them look down on you” (Titus 2:1-7, 9-13, 15).

Paul continued giving specific areas of instruction in Chapter 3:

“Remind your people to submit to rulers and authorities, to obey them, to be ready to do every good thing. Tell them not to speak evil to anyone, but to be peaceful and friendly, and always show a gentle attitude toward all men...” (Ch. 3:1-2).

Paul described how Jesus Christ saved the brethren in the church from their evil ways and made it possible to inherit eternal life (vv. 3-8).

“I want you to give special emphasis to these matters, so that those who believe in God may be concerned with giving their time to doing good works. These are good and useful men. But avoid stupid arguments, long lists of names of ancestors, quarrels, and fights about the Law. They are useless and worthless.

“Give at least two warnings to the man who causes divisions, and then have nothing more to do with him. For you know that such a person is corrupt, and his sins prove that he is wrong” (vv. 8-11).

Paul had a strong desire to meet with Titus. He told him, as he concluded the letter:

“When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me in Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend winter there.”

Artemas is said to have been subsequently bishop of Lystra. Tychicus had been sent by Paul to Asia Minor twice during his first Roman imprisonment. Tradition says he later became bishop of Chalcedon in Bithynia (JFB, p. 1390).

Once either of these capable men arrived in Crete, Titus would be free to leave and visit Paul.

Two other men were mentioned in the

final words of Paul’s letter to Titus: Zenas the lawyer and Apollos. “Do your best to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos to get started in their travels, and see to it they have everything they need” (v. 13).

Zenas is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. “Zenas” was short for “Zenodorus.” He was a Jewish scribe who, after his conversion, retained the title from his former occupation. He was a civil lawyer. Hippolytus mentions him as one of the Seventy and afterwards bishop of Diospolis (JFB, p. 1390).

Apollos, of course, was discussed earlier in Acts 18 and in Paul’s epistle of 1 Corinthians. Apparently these two brought this epistle from Paul to Titus, and from there were to embark on a journey similar to those of Paul and Barnabas or Paul and Silas when Paul was a much younger man (Halley, p. 534, JFB, p. 1390).

Titus’ Last Days

We have no way of knowing for sure that Titus did meet with Paul in Nicopolis but we can be fairly certain that he would fulfill the wishes of the apostle over him.

“Whether Titus did join the Apostle at Nicopolis we cannot tell. But we naturally connect the mention of this place with what St. Paul wrote, at no great interval of time afterwards, in the last of the Pastoral Epistles (2 Tim. 4:10); for Dalmatia lay north of Nicopolis, at no great distance from it. From the form of the whole sentence, it seems probable that this disciple had been with St. Paul in Rome during his final imprisonment, but this cannot be ascertained confidently. The traditional connection of Titus with Crete is much more specific and constant, though here again we cannot be certain of the facts. He is said to have been permanent bishop in the island, and to have died there at an advanced age. The modern capital, Candia, appears to claim the honor of being his burial place,” (Smith, “Titus,” p. 702).

Halley feels Titus rejoined Paul in Nicopolis, remained with him through his second arrest and imprisonment. “Whether he

forsook Paul in that dark and lonely hour because of threatening dangers, or Paul sent him to finish the evangelization of the coast N W of Greece, we do not know. Let us hope the latter, for he was a good and great man. Tradition says that Titus became bishop of Crete, and he died peaceably at an advanced age" (Halley, p. 532).

Titus Rejoins Paul

We can be fairly sure that Titus left Crete in the able hands of Artemas or Tychicus (probably the latter) and visited Paul in Nicopolis, 350-400 miles away.

It seems logical that Titus would have sailed before winter made travel dangerous. He probably sailed the 250-300 miles to Corinth, and from there traveled by land 100 miles up the western coast of Greece to Nicopolis.

Nicopolis was called "The City of Victory" because of the battle of Actium in Epirus. Emperor Augustus built the city in memory of that battle victory (Smith, "Nicopolis," p. 450).

"Paul purposed a journey through Oetolia and Acarnania into Epirus (Nicopolis) and there 'to winter' " (JFB, p. 1390).

We can be fairly sure that Paul and Titus met at Nicopolis, a seaport on the west coast of Greece and spent the winter of 65-66 there.

Paul's Arrest

In spring 66, Paul, Erastus, Trophimus and undoubtedly others journeyed across Greece to Corinth (2 Tim. 4:20).

Erastus was one of the attendants or deacons of Paul at Ephesus. He had been sent into Macedonia with Timothy while Paul had remained in Asia (Acts 19:22) (Smith, "Erastus," p. 179). He also may have been the same Erastus mentioned in Rom. 16:23. This Erastus was the converted city treasurer of Corinth (JFB, p. 1383). This makes sense, because Paul left Erastus in Corinth. Paul may have spent some time in Corinth before he continued to Miletus, 250

miles east across the Aegean Sea.

At the seaport of Miletus, about 40 miles south of Ephesus, Trophimus became sick and Paul left him there (2 Tim. 4:20). Trophimus was a native of Ephesus, a converted Gentile. He and Tychicus had gone with Paul from Macedonia to Asia (where Tychicus had remained) during Paul's third journey. Trophimus had gone with Paul the rest of the way to Jerusalem and was "the innocent cause of the tumult in which... Paul was apprehended (Acts 21:27-29)" (Smith, "Trophimus," p. 712).

Trophimus was not up to travel. Paul left him at Miletus and sailed 175 miles up the Asian coast to Troas where he stayed with Carpus (2 Tim. 4:13). According to Hippolytus, Carpus later became bishop of Berytus in Thrace (Thrace was a region of Europe between the Black sea and Macedonia) (Smith, "Carpus," p. 98).

Bishop Handley C. G. Moule conjectures that it was at Carpus' house that Paul was arrested and carried off, with no opportunity to gather his books, papyri or coat (2 Tim. 4:13 *The Second Epistle to Timothy* by Handley C. G. Moule, p. 157f).

Paul faced a fierce opposition to himself and his message from a coppersmith named Alexander (2 Tim. 4:14). This man could very well have been the same Alexander who had been a Christian in Ephesus and was put out of the church on Paul's order (1 Tim. 1:20) (Smith, "Alexander," p. 26).

"Excommunicated then he was subsequently restored, and now vented his personal malice because of his excommunication in accusing Paul before the Roman judges, whether of incendiarism or of introducing a new religion" (JFB, p. 1383).

"A.T. Hanson points out that, literally translated, Alexander 'informed many evil things against me' and that 'the regular word for an informer is connected with this verb.' Some commentators suggest that Alexander was the informer responsible for Paul's second arrest. If this happened at Troas, it might explain why Timothy, who will pass through Troas on his journey to Rome, ([verse] 13), is warned: 'beware of him

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yourself.' But Alexander did more than inform: 'he strongly opposed our message'...

"We are not told of what charges had been laid against him [Paul]. But we know from Tacitus, Pliny and other contemporary writers the kinds of allegations which were being made against Christians at that time. They were supposed to be guilty of horrid crimes against the state and civilized society. They were accused of 'atheism' (because they eschewed idolatry and emperor-worship), of cannibalism (because they spoke of eating Christ's body), and of a general 'hatred of the human race' (because of their supposed disloyalty to Caesar and perhaps because they had renounced the popular

pleasures of sin). It may be that some of these charges were being levelled against Paul" (*Guard the Gospel* by John R. W. Stott, pp. 122-123)

When Rome burned A.D. 64, Emperor Nero had blamed the fire on Christians, setting off a wave of persecution against God's church (JFB, pp. 1372-1373). And, it was into the very heart of this Roman government that Paul was brought to stand trial once again!

Nero's persecution of Christians was in full swing when Paul arrived in Rome. His treatment this time was very different from that of his first arrest and imprisonment! (Stott, pp. 17-18).

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Rome Burns and Christians Persecuted

We pause momentarily from the narrative of Paul's life and digress slightly to discuss the burning of Rome and subsequent persecution of Christians by the Roman government. It was against this backdrop that Peter wrote his first epistle to called out members of the lost 10 tribes of the House of Israel, now living on the southern coasts of the Black Sea.

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Rome Burns

"Some time after midnight on 19 July, A.D. 64, the night after the full moon, a fire broke out at the north-east end of the Circus Maximus in Rome, adjoining the Palatine and Caelian hills. The shops which stood in the colonnade round the outer face of the Circus were full of combustible wares which provided fodder for the flames, and the conflagration, securing a hold there and fanned by the wind, raged through the city for five days. When at last it was stamped out, a fresh outbreak started on the estate of Tigellinus. Of the fourteen districts into which the city was divided, only four were spared; three were completely destroyed and the remaining seven received severe dam-

age. The imperial palace itself, on the Palatine hill, was burned out.

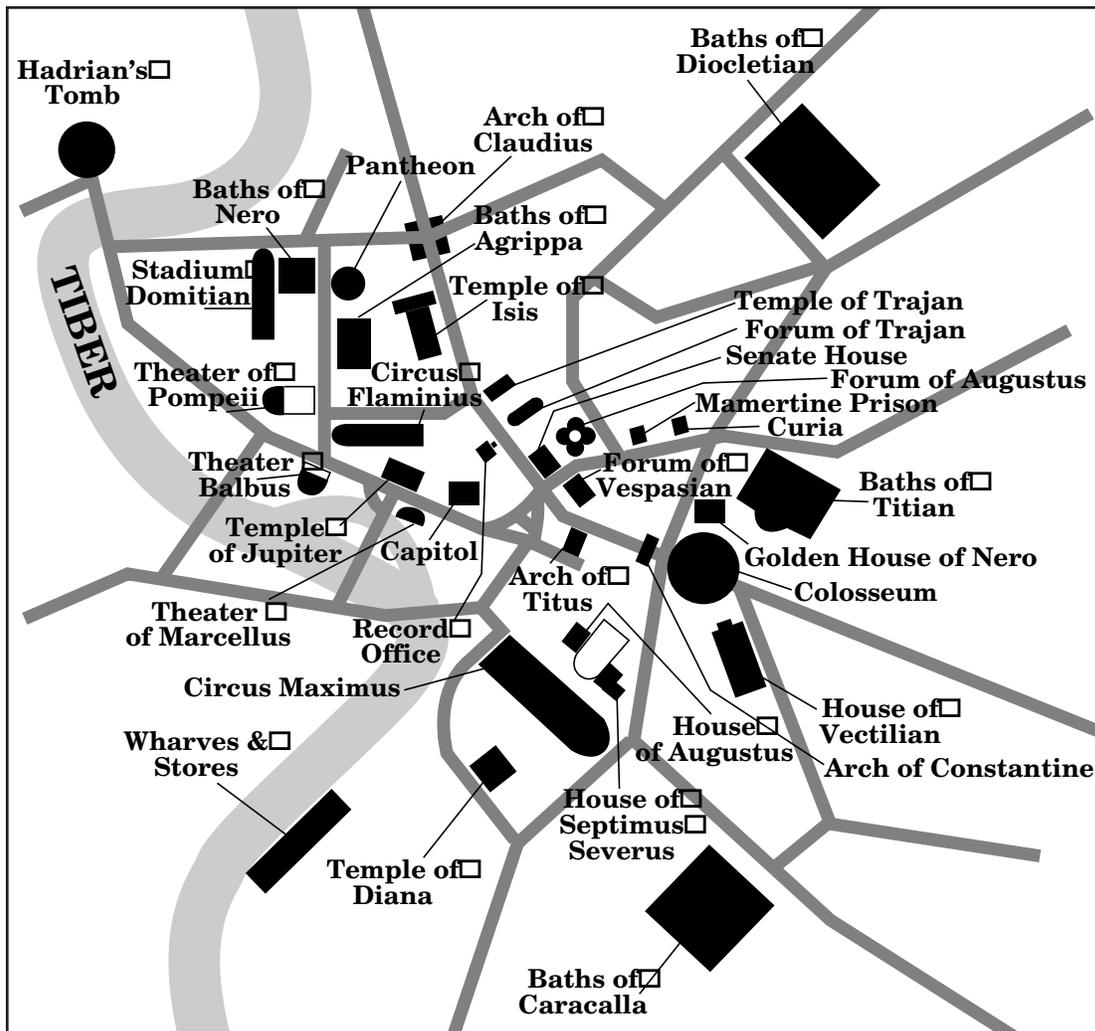
"Nero was at Antium (Anzio), on the Tyrrhenian coast, when the fire started. He hastened back to Rome and threw himself vigorously into the organization of relief. The Campus Martius, on the east bank of the Tiber, and the imperial gardens west of the river were thrown open to the homeless multitudes; temporary shelter was constructed for them, and they were provided with grain at a greatly reduced rate.

"But Nero received little thanks for these measures. People were unwilling to believe that the fire was accidental, and many thought that Nero had arranged it in order that he might rebuild the city nearer to his heart's desire" (Bruce, pp. 399-400). There were rumors that Nero sang of the burning of Troy while Rome was aflame. There were other rumors of gangs going about threatening firefighters and other men going about helping the fire to spread.

Christians Accused

The city was rebuilt. The narrow, winding streets and irregular blocks of high apart-

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This map of Rome in the early Christian era comes from a later date than that of Nero, because a number of landmarks are named for later emperors (including Constantine, who ruled from A.D. 306 to 337). The Colosseum, completed by Emperor Titus in A.D. 80, was the site of many Christian martyrdoms. Mamertine Prison, site of Paul's final imprisonment, is northwest of the Colosseum. The fire which razed much of Rome in A.D. 64 began in the Circus Maximus on the south side of the city. The nearby storehouse and wharf was filled with combustible material which added fuel to the fire.

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ments were replaced with broad streets and spacious buildings that were regularly planned.

“But the finger of popular suspicion continued to point at Nero. His new palace, ‘the Golden House,’ which replaced the one lost in the fire, was so luxurious and extensive—it stretched from the Palatine hill to the Esquiline... Nero accordingly found it expedient to provide scapegoats. The Christians

of Rome were charged with instigating the fire. Why Christians? First, no doubt, because they were unpopular ‘haters of the human race,’ disliked by all for their anti-social attitude. So much of the Roman way of life was bound up with what the Christians regarded as immorality and idolatry that they would not take part in it” (Bruce, p. 400).

“There were several reasons why Rome, ordinarily tolerant of foreign religions, was

harsh with the Christians. The Christians kept apart, obeying the injunction to be separate from the world. When they did not take part in great public religious festivals, they offended the populace. As they refused to worship dead emperors, or consider living emperors as demi-gods, the Romans thought them guilty of little less than treason. They held secret meetings, and the government feared and discouraged all secret meetings, particularly of so large a secret society as the Christian Church. Finally, the Roman people believed that the Christians were guilty of eating children and other revolting practices. Under some emperors the Christians were left alone, but under the best emperors, who cared for the public welfare, they were harshly punished" (*Early European Civilization* by Roscoe Lewis Ashley, p. 316).

Finally, Christians expected a "fiery dissolution of the current world order" at any time. They thought Christ would return in their lifetime. As Rome, the capital of the world, burned from end to end, perhaps some simpler minds imagined this was the Day of the Lord and welcomed it as such.

Christians did not have the same attachments to their belongings as their neighbors did. What did Christians care if they lost everything? The Kingdom of God was soon to be established on the ruins! If Christians said such things to their neighbors, they could easily have been accused of starting the fire.

Christians began to be arrested and some divulged the names of other Christians. Soon "a huge crowd was convicted not so much of arson as of hatred of the human race. Their execution was an occasion for popular entertainment; Nero's gardens were thrown open for the occasion. According to Tacitus [Annals, xv. 44], some were crucified, some were sewn up in the skins of animals and hunted down by dogs, some were covered with pitch and set alight to serve as living torches when darkness fell" (Bruce, p. 401).

The Roman citizens as a whole knew little of the Christians as yet. They considered them a sect of the Jews and despised them because they belonged to the lowest

class of society (*A History of Rome* by George Willis Botsford, p. 231).

The persecution of Christians spread throughout the Roman Empire, though it was not as intense in outlying areas as it was in Rome itself.

"Nero's persecution of Christians [A.D. 64-67] was very intense in and around Rome, but not general over the Empire. However, the example of the Emperor encouraged the enemies of Christians everywhere to take advantage of the slightest pretext to persecute. It was a trying time. The church was about 35 years old. It had suffered persecutions in various localities at the hands of local authorities. But now Imperial Rome, which had hitherto been indifferent, even in some cases friendly, had accused the Church of a terrible crime, and was undertaking to punish it...

"The church was undergoing a world trial [1 Peter 5:9]. It seemed as if the end had come. It was literally a 'fiery trial,' 4:12. Christians were being burned nightly in Nero's gardens. It looked as if the devil, as a 'roaring lion' 5:8, was about to devour the church" (Halley, p. 551).

1 Peter Written

The date of Peter's first epistle is in dispute. Halley places it after Paul's martyrdom, though he places his martyrdom early (66). But tradition says Peter and Paul were martyred about the same time (*Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, Marie Gentert King, editor, p. 12; Bruce, p. 402).

If tradition holds true, Peter's epistle must have been written after the fire in Rome (A.D. 64) but early enough for him to write a second letter before his crucifixion A.D. 67 or 68. Therefore, we place his first epistle about 66, at the time of Paul's second arrest.

As the great Roman persecution of Christians spread across the empire, Peter and John Mark were in Babylon, on the eastern reaches of the empire. There were people of the lost 10 tribes of Israel in this area and it was Peter's commission to preach to them.

As he learned of the persecution, Peter wrote to the members of the Church of God who were not Jews but Israelites, and who now were living in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, all areas near the Black Sea. These were areas he had evangelized and were areas north of the churches Paul had started in Asia Minor.

Some have speculated that Peter was in Rome at the time of this writing, using the symbolic "Babylon" to describe his location (Tenney, pp. 348-349). "If this conclusion is correct, it does not imply that Peter had founded the church at Rome or that he had ministered there for any great length of time. Neither Acts nor Romans gives any hint that Peter had been in Rome prior to A.D. 60. If he did write from Rome, he was probably paying the city a casual visit in much the same way he had called at Corinth at an earlier date" (Tenney, p. 349). He also may have been visiting Paul during the latter's second imprisonment.

Peter, in the first chapter, stressed obedience to God in spite of persecutions (vv. 2, 6-7, 14). He offered encouragement by reminding the brethren of the hope of the resurrection (vv. 3, 4, 9). Notice his words:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away... In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Ch. 1:3-4, 6-7, *NKJ*).

Peter tells the Christians of their calling. "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now

have obtained mercy" (Ch. 2:9-10, *NKJ*).

Be Shining Examples

Next, Peter admonished the scattered elect to be shining examples in their personal conduct, in spite of persecutions and false accusations:

"I appeal to you, my friends, do not give in to bodily passions, which are always at war against the soul. Your conduct among the heathen should be so good that when they accuse you of being evildoers they will have to recognize your good deeds, and therefore praise God on the Day of his coming.

"Submit yourselves, for the Lord's sake, to every human authority: to the Emperor, who is the supreme authority, and to the governors, who have been sent by him to punish the evildoers and praise those who do good. For this is God's will: he wants you to silence the ignorant talk of foolish men by the good things you do. Live as free men; do not use your freedom, however, to cover up any evil, but live as God's slaves. Respect all men, love your fellow believers, fear God, and respect the Emperor" (1 Peter 2:11-17).

Peter reminded the church that Christ, the living Head of the church, was unjustly accused, persecuted and killed, yet did not sin, curse or threaten his persecutors. He left the church his example (vv. 18-25).

Husbands and wives also should set the right example with their relationships, Peter continued. The next section of Peter's letter is similar to the sections Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus (Eph. 5:22) and Colossae (Col. 3:18-21):

"In the same way you wives must submit yourselves to your husbands, so that if some of them do not believe God's word, they will be won over to believe by your conduct. It will not be necessary for you to say a word, for they will see how pure and reverent your conduct is. You should not use outward aids to make yourselves beautiful, as in the way you fix your hair, or in the jewelry you put on, or the dresses you wear. Instead, your beauty should consist of your true inner self, the ageless beauty of a gentle and quiet

spirit, which is of great value in God's sight. For in this way the devout women of the past, who hoped in God, used to make themselves beautiful; they submitted themselves to their husbands. Sarah was like that; she obeyed Abraham and called him 'My master.' You are now her daughters if you do good and are not afraid of anything.

"You husbands, also, in living with your wives, you must recognize that they are the weaker sex and so you must treat them with respect; for they also will receive, together with you, God's gift of life. Do this so that nothing will interfere with your prayers" (1 Peter 3:1-7).

Again, Peter told God's church members not to pay back evil for evil (vv. 8-13). "Who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?" he asked (v. 13). He answered, "But even if you should suffer for doing what is right, how happy you are! Do not be afraid of men, and do not worry... Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you. But do it with gentleness and respect. Keep your conscience clear, so that when you are insulted, those who speak evil of your good conduct as followers of Christ may be ashamed of what they say. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if this should be God's will, than for doing wrong" (vv. 14-17).

Peter explained how those called into God's church lived changed lives and no longer did some of the things their unconverted friends did:

"From now on, then, you must live the rest of your earthly lives controlled by God's will, not by human passions. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what the heathen do. Your lives were spent in indecency, lust, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and the disgusting worship of idols. And now the heathen are surprised when you do not join them in the same wild and reckless living, and so they insult you" (Ch. 4:2-4).

The apostle next made reference to the "fiery trial which is to try you" (1 Peter 4:12, *NKJ*). The word "fiery" is very interesting if Peter were indeed discussing the fact that

some brethren were being burned at the stake. The Greek word for "fiery" is πυροσις (purosos) which specifically means "smelting" and used figuratively here as a conflagration or calamity as a test—a burning, trial ("Greek Dictionary of the New Testament" included in *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* by James Strong, p. 34). The word is used only once in the Bible. "Smelt" is an interesting word choice, for it means "to fuse or melt (ore) in order to separate the metal contained [or] to obtain or refine (metal) in this way" (*The Random House College Dictionary*, Laurence Urdang, ed., p. 1241). Burning at the stake was used to separate true Christians from those who would recant their beliefs. The trial was used to refine the character of true Christians.

Notice what Peter wrote: "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what shall be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now 'If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?' (Prov. 11:31). Therefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator" (1 Peter 4:12-19, *NKJ*).

Peter Writes to the Ministers

As Peter neared the end of his epistle, he directed a few comments to the ministry:

"I appeal to the church elders among

you, I who am an elder myself. I am a witness of Christ's sufferings, and I have a share of the glory which will be revealed. I appeal to you: be shepherds of the flock God gave you, and look after it willingly, as God wants you to, and not unwillingly. Do your work, not for mere pay, but from a real desire to serve. Do not try to rule over those who have been given to your care, but be examples to the flock. When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the glorious crown which will never lose its brightness.

"In the same way, you younger men must submit yourselves to the older men. And all of you must put on the apron of humility, to serve one another; for the scripture says, 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble' (Prov. 3:34). Humble yourselves, then, under God's mighty hand, so that he will lift you up in his own good time" (1 Peter 5:1-4).

Final Comments on Persecution

Peter discussed persecution one last time in Chapter 5:

"Throw all your worries on him (God) for he cares for you.

"Be alert, be on watch! For your enemy, the Devil, roams around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Be firm in your faith and resist him, for you know that your fellow believers in all the world are

going through the same kind of sufferings. But after you have suffered for a while, the God of all grace, who calls you to share his eternal glory in union with Christ, will himself perfect you, and give you firmness, strength, and a sure foundation. To him be the power for ever! Amen" (vv. 7-11).

Final Greetings

Peter concluded his letter with greetings:

"I write this brief letter with the help of Silvanus [Silas], whom I regard as a faithful brother. I want to encourage you and give my testimony that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it.

"Your sister church in Babylon, also chosen by God, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark. Greet each other with the kiss of Christian love.

"May peace be with all of you who belong to Christ" (1 Peter 5:12-14).

Peter, writing most likely from Babylon on the Euphrates, sent his epistle by the hands of Silvanus to brethren called from the lost 10 tribes who were living near the Black Sea in northern Asia Minor (JFB, p. 1463).

The persecution of Christians increased, as we will discuss in the next chapter. Paul will find prison life much different this time, and even Timothy will find himself behind bars!

18

The Last Days of Paul

66

Some time about A.D. 66 Apostle Paul was arrested again on trumped up charges. While the Biblical details are sketchy, some scholars have felt the arrest occurred in Nicopolis where Paul spent the winter of 65-66 and other scholars have felt that he was arrested in Troas.

The argument for Troas is stronger, because Paul told Timothy in 2 Tim. 4 that several of his belongings were left there. Paul also wrote of the evil which Alexander did to him, leading scholars to deduce it was this man who caused Paul's arrest.

"The cause of his arrest is also uncertain. If Alexander the coppersmith mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:14 be identical with the Alexander of Acts 19:33, one might venture a guess that he was a Jewish metallurgist who was disgruntled with Paul on two counts: Paul's preaching of free grace for Gentiles, and the decline of the trade in shrines at Ephesus because of Paul's vigorous inroads into heathenism... Perhaps Alexander, still rankling over Paul's escape from Ephesus and over the loss of trade which his fellow workmen had suffered, denounced him to the Roman authorities and finally brought about his condemnation"

(Tenney, p. 339).

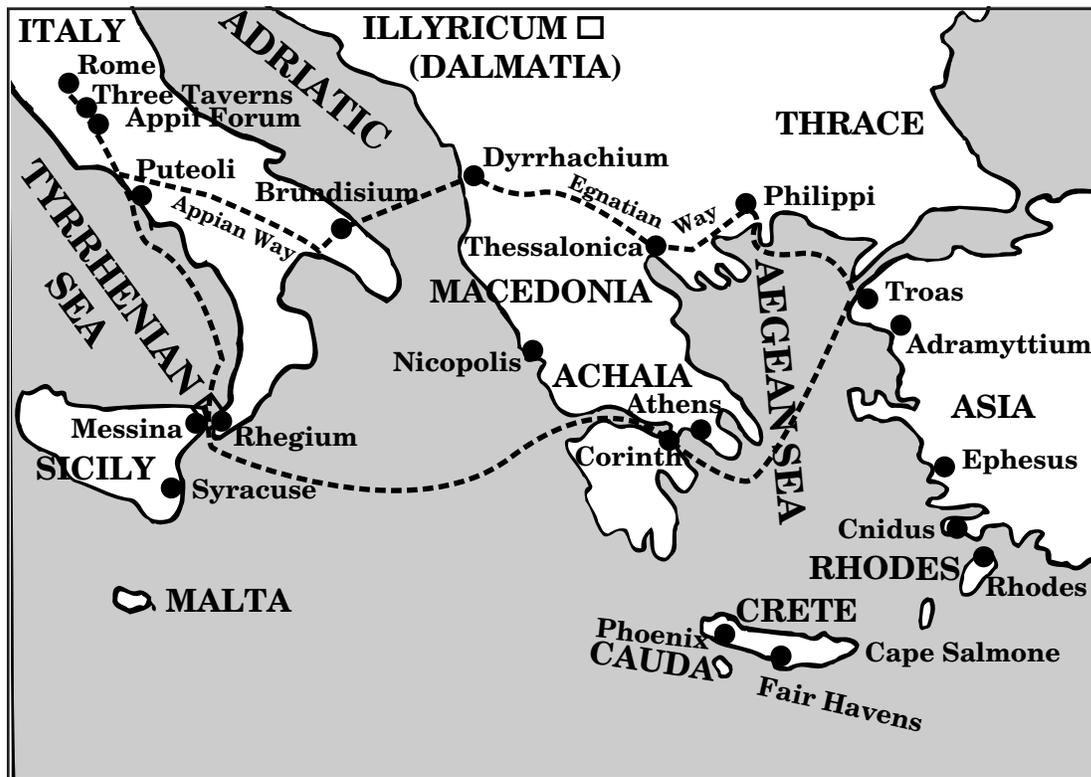
We have no indication how Paul was brought back to Rome. He may have sailed to Corinth and thence across the Adrian Sea, around the "boot" of Italy and up the Tyrrhenian Sea coast to Rome, a distance of 1,000 miles. Or soldiers may have marched him on the Egnatian Way across Macedonia, ferried him 100 miles across the Adriatic Sea from Dyrrhachium in Macedonia to Brundisium in Italy, and then walked the Appian Way across Italy to Rome, a total distance of about 810 miles.

Had Paul indeed gone overland, it would be easy to see why Titus left him for Dalmatia. As they waited at Dyrrhachium to ferry across the Adrian Sea to Italy, the region of Dalmatia was less than 20 miles to the north. Or perhaps Titus went there after accompanying Paul to Rome.

Timothy Imprisoned

About this time (A.D. 66), Timothy was arrested and imprisoned at Ephesus. But whatever charges were made against him, they did not stick, for he was released (Heb. 13:22).

66



Paul most likely was arrested in Troas in the spring A.D. 66. He was taken back to Rome, either by sea (southern route) or overland. If his route were overland, it would explain why Titus left him for Dalmatia (Illyricum). While waiting to ferry across the Adriatic Sea at Dyrrhachium, Dalmatia was just a few miles to the north.

Paul Writes Hebrews

66

Once again Paul found himself “behind bars” in Rome. While awaiting trial he probably wrote the epistle to the Hebrews in Jerusalem.

The epistle to the Hebrews has confused scholars because the author is not mentioned in the letter itself.

“Several hypotheses have been advanced concerning his identity, though none has behind it the same unanimity of the tradition that supports the Lukan authorship of the Third Gospel and Acts. The Eastern Church from the early days considered the epistle to be the product of Paul, but probably indirectly. Eusebius stated that Clement of Alexandria claimed Paul wrote it in Hebrew and that Luke translated it into Greek. Origen frequently quoted it as Paul’s and admitted that it was generally received

as his...

“Many other names have been suggested for the author, chief among them are Barnabas, to whom Tertullian attributed it, and Apollos, a guess of Martin Luther...

“In no hypotheses do the conclusions amount to final proof. One thing is certain: As Hayes says, ‘If the authorship of this epistle is uncertain, its inspiration is indisputable’ (Tenney, p. 358).

In spite of modern ideas, much evidence points to Paul being the author. The similarity in style between Hebrews and Luke’s writings may be attributed to Luke having been a companion of Paul for so long a time. Internal evidence favors Paul being the author. The personal notices also favor Pauline authorship (JFB, pp. 1393-1394).

The date of Hebrews has confused scholars too. But the epistle logically falls into the time period of A.D. 64-68, during the perse-

cution of Christians under Nero (*Studies in Hebrews* by Herschel H. Hobbs, p. 7).

Why was the letter written? “The historical position to which the majority of Bible scholars both past and present adhere is that the epistle was written to Hebrew Christians who had a genuine experience of grace [repentance and forgiveness], but who were faced with the temptation of forsaking Christianity to return to Judaism. . . . there is a wide difference of opinion as to the cause of this tendency. It is quite clear from the text itself that they were enduring heavy persecution, perhaps from the Roman government” (Hobbs, p. 8).

The letter was written to converted Jews, probably in Jerusalem, although a specific destination is not given in the letter.

The theme of the letter may be summed up in one word, mentioned first in Chapter 1:4: “Better.” The author compares Christ to the prophets (Christ being superior), Christ to Moses (Christ being superior), the millennial and Sabbath rest to the “rest” Israel had when entering the promised land (the former being superior), Christ’s priesthood on the order of Melchizedek to the priesthood of Aaron (the former being better), the new covenant to the old (the new being better), and Christ’s sacrifice to animal sacrifice (Christ’s being better).

After describing how Jesus was better than the angels and how mankind is to become children of God while the angels were created to serve those who will inherit eternal life (Chapter 1), Paul told the Hebrew Christians to heed the sermons they were receiving in God’s church: “Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. . . . how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation. . . .” (Ch. 2:1, 3, *NKJ*).

Paul later described this great salvation: Man, in his mortal state, is a little lower than the angels. But ultimately all things will be put in subjection to him (vv. 5-9).

Now near the end of his life, Paul was still keeping the seventh-day Sabbath and admonishing the brethren to do so: “There

remains therefore a rest for the people of God” (Heb. 4:9, *NKJ*). The original Greek says a “sabbath rest.” Paul continued, “For he who has entered his rest has himself ceased from his works as God did from his (v. 10) *NKJ*).

Paul described Jesus Christ as the high priest of Christians: “Our high priest is not one who cannot feel sympathy with our weaknesses. On the contrary, we have a high priest who was tempted in every way that we are, but did not sin. Let us be brave, then, and come forward to God’s throne, where there is grace. Then we will receive mercy and find grace to help us when we need it” (Ch. 4:15-16).

The Hebrews to whom the letter was sent were spiritually immature. Notice this chastisement: “There is much we have to say about this matter (Christ as high priest), but it is hard to explain to you because you are so slow to understand. There has been enough time for you to be teachers—yet you still need someone to teach you the first lessons of God’s message. Instead of eating solid food, you still have to drink milk. Anyone who has to drink milk is still a child, without any experience in the matter of right and wrong. Solid food, on the other hand, is for adults, who have trained and used their tastes to know the difference between good and evil” (Ch. 5:11-14).

Paul next described the six fundamental doctrines of the Church of God: Repentance from dead works, faith toward God, baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead and eternal judgments (Ch. 6:1-2).

Christians must grow spiritually. They cannot leave the church, go back to their worldly ways, and then expect to come back to church. To willingly and willfully sin is to commit sin that is unpardonable (Ch. 6:4-6).

Next, the author explained how Jesus Christ is high priest, not according to the Levitical priesthood the Jews used, but according to the order of Melchizedek, who, in fact, was the Being who later became Christ. Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek and Christians are to pay tithes to Jesus Christ through his ministry (Ch. 6: 19-8:6, esp.

v. 12, which discusses the transferring of tithing from Aaron's priesthood to that of Melchizedek).

A new covenant was discussed in Chapter 8. The old covenant failed because the people of Israel lacked God's Spirit to enable them to keep God's law. Under the new covenant, God's Spirit is made available to those God calls and they are better able to keep God's laws.

"If there had been nothing wrong with the first covenant, there would have been no need for a second one. But God finds fault with his people when he says:

"The days are coming, says the Lord,

When I will draw up a new covenant with the people Israel,

And with the tribe of Judah.

It will not be the covenant that I made with their ancestors

On the day I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt.

They were not faithful to the covenant I made with them,

And so I paid no attention to them, says the Lord.

Now, this is the covenant that I will draw up with the people of Israel

After those days, says the Lord:

I will put my laws in their minds,

And I will write them on their hearts.

I will be their God,

And they shall be my people.

None of them will have to teach his fellow citizen,

Nor will any have to tell his fellow countryman,

"Know the Lord."

For they will all know me,

From the least to the greatest of them.

I will have mercy on their transgressions,

And I will no longer remember their sins.'

By speaking of a new covenant, God made the first one old; and anything that is getting old and worn out will soon disappear" (vv. 7-13).

Shedding of blood is required for forgiveness of sin. Under the old covenant, blood of

animals was required. Under the new covenant Christians have a new sacrifice: the blood of Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:2-28).

Paul admonished the Hebrew Christians to keep attending church. They weren't to become "solitary Christians" though some had felt they did not need the church organization and tried to go it alone. Paul told them, "Let us be concerned with one another, and help one another to show love and to do good. Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another, all the more since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming near" (Heb. 10:24-25).

Again, the Hebrew Christians were reminded that leaving the Truth—committing sin on purpose—leads to destruction in the lake of fire—the second death. "For there is no longer any sacrifice that will take away sins if we purposely go on sinning after the truth has been made known to us. Instead, all that is left is to be afraid of what will happen: the judgment and the fierce fire which will destroy those who oppose God!" (vv. 26-27).

Hebrews 11 is the "Faith Chapter." Faith is defined in verses 1 and 3: "To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see. It is by faith that we understand that the universe was created by God's word, so that what can be seen was made out of what cannot be seen."

Paul further stated, "No man can please God without faith. For he who comes to God must have faith that God exists and rewards those who seek him" (v. 6).

Chapter 11 discusses several Bible people of faith: Abel (v. 4), Enoch (v. 5), Noah (v. 7), Abraham (vv. 8-11, 17-19), Isaac (v. 20), Jacob (v. 21), Joseph (v. 22), Moses (vv. 23-29), Rahab (vv. 30-31), Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets (v. 32).

"It was in faith that all these persons died. They did not receive the things God had promised, but from a long way off they saw and welcomed them, and admitted openly that they were foreigners and refu-

gees on earth... Others, refusing to accept freedom, died under torture in order to be raised to a better life. Some were mocked and whipped, and others were tied up and put in prison. They were stoned, they were sawn into two, they were killed with the sword. They went around clothed in skins of sheep or goats, poor, persecuted, and mistreated. The world was not good enough for them! They wandered like refugees in the deserts and hills, living in caves and holes in the ground.

“What a record these men have won by their faith! Yet they did not receive what God had promised, for God had decided on an even better plan for us. His purpose was that they would be made perfect only with us” (vv. 13, 35-40).

In Chapter 12 Paul told his readers, “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race which is set before us” (v. 1*NKJ*).

He told them it is important to be corrected by God. “My son, pay attention when the Lord punishes you, and do not be discouraged when he rebukes you. For the Lord punishes everyone he loves and whips everyone he accepts as a son.

“Endure what you suffer as being a father’s punishment; because your suffering shows that God is treating you as his sons. Was there ever a son who was not punished by his father? If you are not punished as all his sons are, it means you are not true sons, but bastards. In the case of our human fathers, they punished us and we respected them. How much more, then, should we submit to our spiritual Father and live! Our human fathers punished us a short time as it seemed right to them. But God does it for our own good, so that we may share his holiness.

“When we are punished, it seems to us at the time something to make us sad, not glad. Later, however, those who have been disciplined by such punishment reap the peaceful reward of a righteous life” (vv. 5-11).

The Hebrew Christians were urged to pursue peace with all men and holiness to

God. They were told not to allow roots of bitterness to spring up. (vv. 14-15). “Keep loving one another as brothers in Christ,” Paul wrote in Chapter 13:1. “Remember to welcome strangers in your homes, There were some who did it and welcomed angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them (written by someone who had been there, and was indeed in prison at this writing!). Remember those who are suffering, as though you were suffering as they are” (v. 13).

Paul supported marriage and condemned immorality and adultery (v. 4).

“Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, ‘I will never leave you; I will never abandon you,’ Let us be bold, then, and say,

“The Lord is my helper,
I will not be afraid!

What can man do to me?” (vv. 5-6).

Three times in this final chapter of Hebrews, Paul told Christians to remember or obey the ministers over them (at the Jerusalem church): verses 7, 17, 24.

Paul made an important statement in verse 8: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” God’s church bases its beliefs on what Jesus taught—not on traditions of men that contradict Scriptures. Since it was Jesus Christ in the form of the Word who gave the Ten Commandments to Moses on Sinai, He would not change his mind in human form and do away with those important guidelines for life.

“Do not let different and strange doctrines lead you from the right way,” warned Paul (v. 9). Practically from the day the church began, Satan has infiltrated the congregation with “wolves in sheep’s clothing” who have tried to lead God’s people away with false doctrines. Over and over Paul had written to the congregations to obey what was first taught to them—the truths that we now have in the form of the Holy Scriptures. Some were teaching strange doctrines about food. If they practised what they preached, it made them neither healthier nor more spiri-

tual (v. 9b).

Paul asked for the prayers of the Hebrew members of the Church of God. His trial in Rome had not yet looked hopeless and he thought he may be released just as Timothy had been: "Keep on praying for us. We are sure to have a clear conscience, for we want to do the right thing at all times. And I beg you all the more to pray that God will send me back to you sooner... I beg you, my brothers, to listen patiently to this message of encouragement: for this letter I have written you is not very long. I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been let out of prison. If he comes soon enough, I will have him with me when I see you. Give our greetings to all your leaders and to all God's people. The brothers from Italy send you their greetings. May God's peace be with you all" (vv. 18-19, 22-25).

Paul Writes 2 Timothy

Not long after Paul sent his letter to the Hebrew Christians at Jerusalem in the summer or early fall A.D. 66, Paul again went to court in Rome. This time he was not received as well as in previous hearings. He was bound in chains and thrown into a dungeon.

"He was incarcerated in some 'dismal underground dungeon with a hole in the ceiling for light and air' (*The Epistles to Timothy and Titus* by William Hendriksen, p. 234). Perhaps it was the Mamertine prison, as tradition says. But wherever he was, Onesiphorus succeeded in finding him only after a painstaking search ([2 Tim.] 1:17). He was certainly in chains (1:16), 'wearing fetters like a criminal' (2:9). He was suffering acutely from the loneliness, the boredom and the cold of prison life (4:9-13). The preliminary hearing of his case had already taken place (4:16, 17). Now he was awaiting the full trial, but was not expecting to be acquitted. Death appeared to him inevitable (4:6-8)" (Stott, pp. 16-17).

Timothy had been released from prison but had not yet arrived. Paul wrote again to Timothy, asking him to come before winter (2:21) and to bring his cloak, books and

parchments (4:13). Everyone but Luke had deserted Paul. He wanted Timothy to bring Mark to him (4:11), showing there were no lasting hard feelings between Paul and the young man who had deserted him and Barnabas on his first journey.

2 Timothy is Paul's last epistle. It is his farewell message. It contains heartfelt sentiment and personal admonition. Notice some quotes. After an introduction in which Paul addressed "Timothy, my dear son" (2 Tim. 1:2), Paul wrote:

"I give thanks to God... I thank him as I remember you always in my prayers, night and day. I remember your tears, and I want to see you very much, that I may be filled with joy. I remember the sincere faith you have, the kind of faith that your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice also had. I am sure that you have it also" (vv. 3-5).

Trouble with Timothy

Timothy was a timid man. Paul tried to help him with this problem. He continued his epistle: "For this reason (the faith in him) I remind you to keep alive the gift that God gave to you when I laid my hands on you. For the Spirit that God has given us does not make us timid; instead, his Spirit fills us with power and love and self control" (vv. 6-7). "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God" (v. 8 *NKJ*).

"Hold to the true words that I taught you, as the example for you to follow, and stay in the faith and love that are ours in union with Christ Jesus. Keep the good things that have been entrusted to you, through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in us" (vv. 13-14).

Onesiphorus Searches for Paul

Paul continued, "You know that everyone in the province of Asia deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes. May the Lord

show mercy to the family of Onesiphorus, because he cheered me up many times. He was not ashamed that I am in prison, but as soon as he arrived in Rome he started looking for me until he found me. May the Lord grant him to receive mercy from the Lord on that day! And you know very well how much he did for me in Ephesus” (2 Tim. 1:15-18).

“The aorist tense of the verb ‘turned away from me’ seems to refer to some particular event. The most likely allusion is to the moment of the apostle’s re-arrest. The churches of Asia, where he labored for several years, had depended heavily upon him. Perhaps his arrest seemed to indicate that the Christian cause was now lost. Perhaps they reacted by repudiating and disowning him. We know nothing of Phygelus and Hermogenes, but their mention suggests they were ringleaders. In any case Paul saw the turning away of the Asian churches as more than a personal desertion; it was a disavowal of his apostolic authority. It must have seemed particularly tragic, because a few years previously, during Paul’s two and a half years’ residence in Ephesus, Luke says that ‘all the residents of Asia’ heard the word of the Lord and many believed (Acts 19:10). Now ‘all in Asia’ had turned away from him. The great awakening had been followed by a great defection...

“The one bright exception appears to have been a man called Onesiphorus, who had often entertained Paul in his home (literally ‘refreshed’ him, verse 16) and had rendered him other, unspecified service in Ephesus (18). He had thus been true to the meaning of his name, ‘a bringer of profit.’ In addition, he had not been ashamed of Paul’s chains (16), which seems to mean both that he did not repudiate him at the time of his arrest and that he then followed him, even accompanied him to Rome, and then searched diligently for him until he found him in his dungeon” (Stott, pp. 44-45).

Paul, in his final letter to Timothy, encouraged his understudy in Ephesus to follow the example of Onesiphorus rather than that of all who had deserted him in Asia.

Jesus foretold that his disciples would

face imprisonments: “Before all these things take place, however, you will be arrested and persecuted; you will be handed over to trial in synagogues and be put in prison; you will be brought before kings and rulers for my name’s sake. This will be your chance to tell the Good News. Make up your minds ahead of time not to worry about how you will defend yourselves; for I will give you such words and wisdom that none of your enemies will be able to resist or deny what you say. You will be handed over by your parents, your brothers, your relatives, and your friends, they will put some of you to death. Everyone will hate you because of me. But not a single hair from your heads will be lost. Hold firm, for this is how you will save yourselves” (Luke 21:12-19).

Even though the church was to face persecution, it was not fashionable in the first century, nor is it fashionable today, for a church to have its leaders branded as criminals—accused of criminal acts and thrown into prison. Many brethren in Asia in the late 60s found Paul’s imprisonment an embarrassment. They could not understand how a true Christian leader could commit such wrong-doings as to warrant a prison sentence. We, in God’s church today, also must guard against this attitude. We need to have the attitude of Onesiphorus instead.

In Chapter 2, Paul told Timothy to be strong, endure persecution and avoid entanglement with worldly affairs: “Take your part in suffering, as a loyal soldier of Christ Jesus. A soldier in active service wants to please his commanding officer, and so does not get mixed up with the affairs of civilian life” (vv. 3-4).

Paul described his condition: “Because I preach the Good News I suffer, and I am even chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not in chains, and for this reason I endure everything for the sake of God’s chosen people, in order that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, together with eternal glory. This is a true saying:

“If we have died with him, we shall also

live with him;

If we continue to endure, we shall also rule with him;

If we deny him, he also will deny us;

If we are not faithful, he remains faithful,

For he cannot be false to himself" (vv. 9-13).

Paul gave the following advice to the young minister:

"Keep away from godless and foolish discussions, which only drive people farther away from God. What they teach will be like an open sore that eats away the flesh. Two of these teachers are Hymenaeus and Philetus. They have left the way of truth and are upsetting the faith of some believers by saying that the resurrection has already taken place" (vv. 16-19).

The teaching of these two men was probably a type of Gnosticism (Stott, p. 69).

Hymenaeus was an early Gnostic. He was mentioned in Paul's first letter to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:20) in unfavorable terms as well (Smith, "Hymenaeus," p. 249).

Philetus possibly was a disciple of Hymenaeus, because the latter is mentioned without him in 1 Tim. 1:20.

Both of them "appear to have been persons who believed the Scriptures of the O.T., but misinterpreted them, allegorizing away the doctrine of the Resurrection, and resolving it all into figure and metaphor" (Smith, "Philetus," p. 523).

Warnings for the Last Days

Paul next warned Timothy of evil attitudes that would be extant in these last days before the return of Christ:

"Remember this! There will be difficult times in the last days. For men will be selfish, greedy, boastful, and conceited; they will be insulting, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, and irreligious; they will be unkind, merciless, slanderers, violent, and fierce; they will hate the good; they will be treacherous, reckless, and swollen with pride; they will love pleasure rather than God; they will hold to the outward form of

religion, but reject its real power. Keep away from these men. Some of them go into homes to get control over weak women who are weighed down by the guilt of their sins and are driven by all kinds of desires, women who are always trying to learn but who never can come to know the truth" (2 Tim. 3:1-7).

Last Instructions

Timothy, the young minister who was at this time probably in his 30s, received final instructions from Paul, who was nearing 70 and awaiting execution on trumped-up charges:

"But you have followed my teaching, my conduct, and my purpose in life; you have observed my faith, my patience, my love, my endurance, my persecutions, and my sufferings. You know all the things that happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the terrible persecutions I endured! But the Lord rescued me from them all. All who want to live a godly life in union with Christ Jesus will be persecuted; but evil men and imposters will keep on going from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived themselves. But as for you, continue in the truths that you were taught and firmly believe. For you know who your teachers were, and you know that ever since you were a child you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. For all Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instructions for right living, so the man who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good work.

"I solemnly call upon you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge all men, living and dead: because of his coming and of his kingdom, I command you to preach the message, to insist upon telling it, whether the time is right or not; to convince, reproach, and encourage, teaching with all patience. For the time will come when men will not listen to true teaching, but will

follow their own desires, and will collect for themselves more and more teachers who will tell them what they are itching to hear. They will turn away from listening to the truth and give their attention to legends. But you must keep control of yourself in all circumstances; endure suffering, do the work of a preacher of the Good News, and perform your whole duty as a servant of God.

“As for me, the hour has come for me to be sacrificed; the time is here for me to leave this life. I have done my best in the race, I have run the full distance, I have kept the faith. And now the prize of victory is waiting for me, the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day—and not only to me, but to all those who wait with love for him to appear” (2 Tim. 3:10-4:8).

Paul’s Last Recorded Words

The last recorded words of Apostle Paul are found in the final verses of 2 Timothy:

“Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas fell in love with this present world and has deserted me; he has gone off to Thessalonica. Crescens went to Galatia and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he can help

me in the work. I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When you come, bring my coat that I left in Troas with Carpus; bring the books too, and especially the ones made of parchment.

“Alexander the metalworker did me great harm; the Lord will reward him according to what he has done. Be on guard against him yourself, for he was violently opposed to our message.

“No one stood by me the first time I defended myself; all deserted me. May God not count it against them! But the Lord stayed with me and gave me strength, so that I was able to proclaim the full message for all the Gentiles to hear; and I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. And the Lord will rescue me from all evil, and take me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory for ever and ever! Amen.

“I send greetings to Prisca and Aquila, and to the family of Onesiphorus. Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus in Miletus, because he was sick. Do your best to come before winter.

“Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, and Claudia send their greeting, and so do all the other brothers.

“The Lord be with your spirit.

“God’s grace be with you all” (2 Tim. 4:9-22).

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Death of Peter and Paul

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We now come to the conclusion of the lives of two of the church's greatest apostles: Peter and Paul.

If tradition is correct, Peter and Paul both were killed in Rome about the same time during Nero's reign. Supposing this to be true, Peter must have gone to Rome to visit the imprisoned Paul. It would not be out of the ordinary for a church leader such as Peter to visit this outlying church when a great apostle such as Paul was facing death.

If Peter indeed was in Babylon on the Euphrates, he must have journeyed from there to Rome after writing his epistle A.D. 66.

In Rome, prayers of Peter and Paul may have caused the death of an enemy of the church.

Death of Simon Magus

Tradition from the fourth century says Simon Magus (see Acts 8) met his demise in Rome.

"St. Cyril of Jerusalem (A.D. 346) in the sixth of his *Catechetical Lectures* prefaces his history of the Manichees by a brief account of earlier heresies. Simon Magus, he

says, was the father of all heresy. After being cast out by the Apostles, he came to Rome where, having joined himself to a profligate woman of the name of Helen, he gave out that it was he who appeared as the Father on Mt. Sinai, and afterwards, not in the flesh, but in appearance... as Jesus Christ, and finally, as the Holy Ghost, according to the promise of Christ. His success at Rome was so great that the emperor Claudius erected a statue to him with the inscription *Simoni Deo Sabcto*. The triumph of Simon Magus was terminated on the arrival of Peter and Paul at Rome. Simon Magus had given out that he was going to be translated to heaven, and was actually careening through the air in a chariot drawn by demons when Peter and Paul knelt down and prayed, and their prayers brought him to earth a mangled corpse" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., "Simon Magus," p. 128).

Other traditions say Simon Magus was buried alive, planning to rise on the third day (but never did) and that he attempted to fly but came crashing to the earth after Peter and Paul prayed. Simon fractured his thigh and ankle bones in this version of his fall. But overcome with vexation, he committed

suicide (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, pp. 127-128; Smith, “Simon Magus,” p. 649).

“Peter, after various miracles, retired to Rome, where he defeated the artifices and confounded the magic of Simon Magus, a great favourite of the Emperor Nero: He likewise converted to Christianity one of the minions of that monarch, which so exasperated the tyrant, that he ordered both St. Peter and St. Paul to be apprehended. During the time of their confinement (9 mos.), they converted two of the captains of the guard and forty-seven other persons to Christianity” (King, p. 12).

Mark Writes His Gospel

The last of the synoptic gospels, the Gospel of Mark, was written by John Mark (nephew of Barnabas) about this time. *Unger’s Bible Handbook* dates the book from 64 to 68; Tenney says it was written in 67 or 68.

John Mark, like Luke, was not an apostle, as were Matthew and John. Where did he get his information? Tradition says he wrote the book while in Rome as a disciple of Peter (*Unger’s Bible Handbook*, p. 383). While Peter was imprisoned, Mark may have written his Gospel.

“Eusebius quoted also Clement of Alexandria (c. A.D. 180) to the effect that Peter’s hearers urged Mark to leave a record of the doctrine which Peter had communicated orally, and that Peter authorized the Gospel to be read in churches. Origen, Clement’s successor (c. A.D. 225), is alleged to have said that Mark wrote his Gospel as Peter explained it to him. Irenaeus confirmed this tradition by saying that ‘after the death of Peter and Paul, Mark delivered to us in writing things preached by Peter’” (Tenney, p. 155).

All three traditions agree that Mark was the author of the Gospel and connect it to Peter’s preaching.

Peter Writes Second Epistle

While in prison, Peter wrote his last letter—the epistle of 2 Peter. It was written shortly

before his martyrdom A.D. 67.

“As the central theme of I Peter was *suffering*, so that of II Peter is *knowledge*. If the errorists were magnifying their knowledge as the basis of their superiority, Peter wanted to show that the answer to false knowledge is true knowledge” (Tenney, p. 368).

Let’s examine some of the final words we have from Simon Peter, who was a chief apostle of the Church of God from its beginning A.D. 31 until his death about A.D. 67.

Peter’s greeting in verse 1 is not as specific as his greeting in his first epistle. But this letter is intended for the same audience—the brethren living among the scattered 10 tribes of Israel (2 Peter 3:1).

Peter wrote a recipe for Christian success:

“For this very reason, do your best to add goodness to your faith; and to your goodness, add knowledge; to your knowledge add self-control; to your self-control add endurance; to your endurance add godliness; to your godliness add brotherly love; and to your brotherly love add love. These are the qualities you need... So then, my brothers, try even harder to make God’s call and his choice of you a permanent experience, for if you do so you will never fall away” (vv. 5-8, 10).

Peter’s Approaching Death

Peter wrote of his approaching death later in Chapter 1:

“I think it is only right for me to stir up your memory of these matters, as long as I am still alive. For I know that I shall soon put off this mortal body, as our Lord Jesus Christ plainly told me. I will do my best, then, to provide a way for you to remember these matters at all times after my death” (2 Peter 1:13-15).

Warning of False Prophets

The brethren were told by Peter not to interpret Scriptures for themselves—for many false prophets were doing just that!

“Above all else, however, remember this: no one can explain, by himself, a prophecy in the Scriptures. For no prophetic message ever came just from the will of man, but men were carried along by the Holy Spirit as they spoke the message that came from God.

“False prophets appeared in the past among the people, and in the same way false teachers will continue to appear among you. They will bring in destructive, untrue doctrines, and deny the Master who saved them, and so bring upon themselves sudden destruction. Even so many will follow their immoral ways; and because of what they do, people will speak evil of the Way of truth. In their greed these false teachers will make a profit out of telling you made-up stories” (Ch. 1:20-2:3).

Peter then told how God is able to save one righteous person out of his or her trials—even when he or she is living in the midst of a godless and sinning society. He used the examples of Noah (v. 5) and Lot (vv. 6-7).

The false ministers are further described by Peter: “...who follow their filthy bodily lusts and despise God’s authority.

“These false teachers are bold and arrogant, and show no respect for the glorious things above, instead, they insult them... Pleasure for them is to do anything in broad daylight that will satisfy their bodily appetites; they are a shame and a disgrace as they join you in your meals, all the while enjoying their deceitful ways! They want to look at nothing else but immoral women; their appetite for sin is never satisfied. They lead weak people into a trap. Their hearts are trained to be greedy. They are under God’s curse! They have left the straight path and lost their way; they have followed the path taken by Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the money he would get for doing wrong, and was rebuked for his transgression. For a dumb ass spoke with a human voice and stopped the prophet’s insane action.

“These men are like dried up springs, like clouds blown by a storm... They make proud and stupid statements, and use immoral and bodily lusts to trap those who are just barely

escaping from among the people who live in error. They promise freedom, while they themselves are slaves of destructive habits—for a man is a slave of anything that has defeated him. For if men have escaped the deadly forces of the world through their knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and then are caught by them and defeated, such men are in worse condition at the end than they were at the beginning.

“It would have been so much better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than to have known it and then to turn away from the sacred command that was given them! What happened to them shows that the proverb is true, ‘A dog goes back to what he has vomited,’ and ‘A pig that has been washed goes back to roll in the mud’ ” (2 Peter 2:10-11, 13-22).

The Last Days

Just as Paul had done in several of his epistles, Peter took the opportunity in his last letter before his death to write about the days in which we may be living now—the last days before Jesus Christ returns to this earth.

“First of all, you must understand that in the last days some men will appear whose lives are controlled by their own passions. They will make fun of you and say, ‘He promised to come, didn’t he? Our fathers have already died, but everything is still the same as it was since the creation of the world!’...

“But do not forget this one thing, my dear friends! There is no difference in the Lord’s sight between one day and a thousand years, to him the two are the same. The Lord is not slow to do what he has promised, as some think. Instead, he is patient with you, because he does not want anyone to be destroyed, but he wants all to turn away from their sins.

“But the Day of the Lord will come as a thief. On that Day the heavens will disappear with a shrill noise, the heavenly bodies will burn up and be destroyed, and the earth with everything in it will vanish. Since all

these things will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people should you be? Your lives should be holy and dedicated to God, as you wait for the Day of God, and do your best to make it come soon—the Day when the heavens will burn up and be destroyed, and the heavenly bodies will be melted by the heat. But God has promised new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness will be at home, and we wait for these” (2 Peter 3:3-4, 8-13).

Paul’s Letters Misunderstood

“And so, my friends,” continued Peter, “as you wait for that Day, do your best to be pure and faultless in God’s sight and to be at peace with him. Look on our Lord’s patience as the opportunity he gives you to be saved, just as our dear brother Paul wrote to you, using the wisdom God gave him. This is what he writes in all his letters when he deals with this subject. There are some difficult things in his letters which ignorant and unstable people explain falsely as they do with other passages of the Scriptures. This they bring on their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:14-16).

Even today, more than 1,900 years after Paul wrote his epistles, false teachers still distort his teachings by saying he taught the Law of God is done away.

Peter Concludes Second Epistle

Peter continued, “But you my friends, already know this. Be on guard, then, so that you will not be led away by the errors of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But continue to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory, now and for ever! Amen” (2 Peter 3:17-18).

These are the last words we have recorded from a chief apostle of the earliest days of the New Testament Church of God.

Peter and Paul Martyred

Peter was getting old and weak. He had been

in a Roman prison for nine months and found guilty of trumped-up charges similar to those leveled against Paul.

One legend tells of an interesting vision of Jesus that Peter may have had about this time. The story says Peter fled Rome in fear but met Jesus on the Appian Way. Peter asked Jesus where He was going and the Lord replied, “I go again to be crucified.” The apostle returned to Rome penitent and ashamed, and was martyred (JFB, p. 1373).

One day soldiers came to Peter’s cell and unlocked the gate. They told the white-haired apostle to hold out his hands. When he obeyed, they slapped chains on him and took their unwilling prisoner to be crucified (John 21:18-19).

“Having been nine months in prison, Peter was brought from thence for execution, when, after being severely scourged, he was crucified with his head downwards, which position, however, was at his own request” (King, p. 12).

“Lactantius, one of the early Fathers wrote: ‘Execrable and noxious tyrant as he was, Nero determined to destroy the heavenly Church and to abolish righteousness; and becoming the persecutor of God’s servants he crucified Peter and slew Paul’—a statement consistent with the prediction of our Lord. At the time of the martyrdom of Peter, he is reputed to have asked his executioners, ‘crucify me with my head down; my Master was crucified for me with his head upward. I am not worthy to die as he did’” (*Bible Men of Faith* by J. Oswald Sanders, pp. 196-197).

Paul also was martyred about this time—late summer A.D. 67.

Because Paul was a Roman citizen, he could not legally be tortured or crucified. Instead, he was taken outside of Rome on the road from Rome to Ostia and was beheaded by sword (Bruce, p. 367).

“It was common to send prisoners, whose death might attract too much notice at Rome, to some distance from that city, under military escort, for execution; hence the soldier’s sword, not the executioner’s axe, was the instrument of his decapitation” (JFB,

p. 1373).

The hymn “Apostolorum Passio,” written in the middle of the fourth century, probably by Ambrose, indicates that Peter and Paul’s martyrdom was celebrated June 29 at three locations—Vatican Hill (site of Peter’s crucifixion), the Ostian Way (site of Paul’s decapitation) and the Appian Way (site of Peter’s legendary vision prior to his crucifixion) (Bruce, p. 409).

Following the death of these two apostles, Timothy left Rome and returned to Ephesus. John Mark left Rome and, fol-

lowing Peter’s instructions, began a church in Alexandria, Egypt, a city that was a hotbed of paganism.

The persecution under Nero did not stop with Peter and Paul.

“Erastus, the chamberlain of Corinth; Aristarchus, the Macedonian; Trophimus, an Ephesian by birth, and a Gentile by religion, converted by St. Paul; Joseph, commonly called Barsabas, and usually deemed one of the seventy; and Ananias, Bishop of Damascus, are among those who perished during this persecution” (King, p. 14).

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Church Attacked from Within and Without

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Satan dealt blow after blow against God's church A.D. 67. He had delivered a severe punch to its physical head—the martyrdom of Peter and Paul June 29. Also murdered were Erastus, Aristarchus, Trophimus, Joseph (Barsabas), and Ananias.

But Satan also delivered blows to the bowels of the church. He brought wolves into the flock to devour the church with false teachings.

Jude Writes Epistle

The apostle Jude, brother of Jesus, was used by God to battle Satan. God inspired him to write the Epistle of Jude late A.D. 67 or early 68 (Halley, p. 564; Smith, "Jude," p. 318; Tenney, p. 372).

Jude had planned to write a general letter to the churches when news of Satan's devastating heresy caused him to write the stern warning in the epistle Jude.

Jude most likely wrote his epistle from Palestine, probably from the headquarters church in Jerusalem (JFB, p. 1517).

His introduction mentions God the Father and Jesus Christ, but the Holy Spirit is conspicuously absent, again showing the

Trinity to be a myth unaccepted by the true church (v. 1).

Jude told his readers to beware of "new teachings" from false ministers and to cling to the "old truths" they had been taught by the apostles: "...it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (v. 3, *KJV*).

Jude sustained the validity of the Old Testament by mentioning Israel's history, as well as that of Sodom and Gomorrah and the fallen angels. He also wrote of the archangel Michael, Satan, Cain, Enoch, Balaam, Moses and Korah. He emphasized the need to believe God and obey Him or else suffer eternal death in a lake of fire (vv. 5-7, 9, 11, 14).

The main message of this epistle is similar to that of 2 Peter—a warning against immoral false teachers. Notice how Jude described them:

"...I felt the need of writing you now to encourage you to fight on for the faith which once and for all God has given to his people. For godless men, who have slipped in unnoticed among us, distort the message about the grace of God to excuse their immoral

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ways, and reject Jesus Christ, our only Master and Lord...

“These men insult things they do not understand; and those things that they know by instinct, like wild animals, are the very things that destroy them. How terrible for them! They have followed the way that Cain took; they have given themselves over to error for the sake of money, as Balaam did; they have been destroyed by rebelling like Korah rebelled. They are like dirty spots in your fellowship meals, with their shameless carousing. They take care of themselves only. They are like clouds carried along by the wind and bringing no rain. They are like trees that bear no fruit, even in autumn, trees that have been pulled up by the roots and are completely dead. They are like wild waves of the sea, with their shameful deeds showing up like foam...

“These men are always grumbling and blaming others; they follow their own evil desires; they brag about themselves, and flatter others in order to get their own way” (vv. 3-4, 10-13, 16).

Jude reminded the brethren that they had been warned about such evil men coming among them (vv. 17-19). He told them to stay close to God and not be deceived into following these evil, lustful false teachers:

“But you, my friends, keep on building yourselves up in your most sacred faith. Pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, and keep yourselves in the love of God, as you wait for our Lord Jesus Christ in his mercy to give you eternal life. Show mercy toward those who have doubts: save them by snatching them out of the fire. Show mercy also, mixed with fear, to others as well; but hate their very clothes, stained by their sinful lusts” (vv. 20-23).

Notice that God’s church did not recommend persecuting or burning at the stake those who “fall away” or leave the church. Paul had taught to “mark” those who cause division—have nothing to do with them—but not to consider them enemies (1 Thes. 3:14). Jude told the brethren to be merciful and attempt to rescue those bewildered and deluded. It is false religions, fueled by Satan’s

hatred, that have sought to destroy “heretics” including, at times, members of God’s true church. But Jesus had promised the “gates of hell” would not prevail against the Church of God (Matt. 16:18, *NKJ*).

Jude Martyred

Not long after writing his epistle, Jude (and others) were murdered under the persecution of Christians begun by Nero.

“About the same time Saints James, Philip, Matthew, Mark, Matthias, Jude, Bartholomew, Thomas, and Luke the Evangelist also suffered martyrdom for the cause of Christ” (King, p. 13).

End of Jerusalem Church

Meanwhile, things were not going well for the headquarters church in Jerusalem.

The city’s Jews had been in revolt against the Roman government since September 66. The Roman procurator at that time was Florus. He had a terrible lust for wealth. Bribes and extortion were frequent. The breaking point came when he raided the Temple treasury and took 17 talents, claiming they were required for imperial service.

This action was sacrilegious in Jewish eyes and caused them to demonstrate riotously. Florus treated this as rebellion and retaliated by arresting a number of the leading citizens and crucifying them.

“The insurrectionary spirit spread with rapidly increasing momentum and the point of no return was passed when, early in September, the insurgents seized Antonia Fortress and wiped out its Roman garrison” (Bruce, p. 379).

In November, Cestius Gallus marched south on Jerusalem with a Roman legion from Syria, in an effort to regain Roman control of the situation. He occupied a northern suburb of Jerusalem but then retreated.

The Roman commander-in-chief Vespasian was sent by Nero to Judea to put down the revolt in the spring of 68.

“When Vespasian arrived the following spring to take charge of operations, he

steadily reduced Galilee, Paraea, western Judea and Idumaea, but when he was ready to besiege Jerusalem itself, news came of the death of Nero (June 9, 68) and the civil war that followed, Vespasian suspended operations for a year to see how events would turn out..." (Bruce, p. 381).

One of Nero's failings was a lack of interest in military affairs and it cost him his life. "In the year 68 several of the legions stationed at the frontiers rebelled, each acclaiming its own general as emperor. When the first of the legions marched on Rome, Nero discovered that he had no support in the city and committed suicide, lamenting that the world was losing a great artist. During the chaotic 'year of the four emperors,' the general who had succeeded Nero was himself overthrown and murdered by another general; this process was repeated twice over" (*The Mainstream of Civilization Part 1 to 1715* by Joseph R. Strayer, Hans W. Gatzke, E. Harris Harbison and Edwin L. Dunbaugh, p. 83).

"But God's headquarters Church was still in danger—in the doomed and besieged city! ...General Vespasian now commanded the Roman army and moved energetically to crush the rebellion.

"Was the living, active Jesus Christ on the job? Yes! A stronger hand than all the might of Rome would make the next move!

"The emperor died suddenly. Leaving the army in Palestine to his son, Vespasian raced for Rome to be emperor. Again, the Roman armies temporarily withdrew!

"And in Jerusalem, as God's people were gathered at the Feast of Pentecost, there was an earthquake, accompanied with a great noise, and a supernatural voice was heard to say in the Temple: '*Let us remove hence!*'

"God's people did 'remove hence!' The church fled to the mountains, and on to Pella, a small town just beyond the River Jordan. Behind them the Roman armies closed in rapidly on Jerusalem" (*The Ambassador College Bible Correspondence Course Lesson 49*, p. 11).

The apostle John (and perhaps others)

fled north to Ephesus (Halley, p. 558).

Vespasian's son, Titus, was given the job of quelling the Jewish revolt. But God made sure the true Church of God in Jerusalem had fled to safety in 69 before it was too late.

"Titus began the siege of Jerusalem in April, 70. The defenders held out desperately for five months, but by the end of August the Temple area was occupied and the holy house burned down, and by the end of September all resistance in the city had come to an end" (Bruce, p. 382).

"...Titus himself, expressed the opinion that the temple should most certainly be demolished, in order that the Jewish and Christian religions might be more completely wiped out; for although these religions were mutually hostile, they nevertheless shared the same origin; the Christians were an offshoot of the Jews, and if the root were destroyed the stock would quickly perish" (Bruce, p. 383).

It is said that 1,100,000 Jews perished in the siege of Jerusalem but the church escaped the horrors of the siege by following Christ's instructions in Matthew 24 and fleeing to Pella, a town in the mountains beyond the Jordan (Dugger and Dodd, p. 41).

"And the Church of God everywhere in Roman lands was silenced. No meetings were allowed after A.D. 69 out of fear of revolt after the death of two Caesars already that year.

"Thus ended, after just two 19-year time cycles, the work of the Apostolic church in Jerusalem!" (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 49, pp. 11-12).

There is little recorded about the Church of God during the 10 years Vespasian was emperor in Rome and during the succeeding reign of his eldest son, Titus (A.D. 79-81). "As members of an unauthorized religious association they were liable to summary penalties, but there was no express ban on Christianity as such" (Bruce, p. 412; Strayer et al., p. 84).

Barnabas and Simon Martyred

We do have record of two martyrdoms dur-

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ing the reign of Vespasian. Barnabas' death is supposed to have taken place A.D. 73, Simon Zelotes, who had preached the Gospel in Mauritania, Africa and Britain, was crucified in Britain A.D. 74 (Dugger and Dodd, p. 56).

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Persecution under Domitian

Domitian, Titus' younger brother, became emperor A.D. 81. He was not the able leader that his older brother or father (Vespasian) had been. "Like so many who lack a talent for leadership, Domitian hid behind a cloak of oppressive autocracy. He demanded that he be addressed as 'lord and god.' Any criticism of himself was considered treason and punished by death" (Strayer et al., pp. 84-85).

Domitian "opened season" on Christians once again (Bruce, p. 412).

"The Emperor Domitian was naturally of a cruel disposition; he first slew his brother, and then raised a second persecution against the Christians..."

"During this reign there were various tales published in order to injure the Christians. Among other falsehoods, they were accused of indecent nightly meetings, of a rebellious spirit, of murdering their children, and even of being cannibals; and at this time, such was the infatuation of the pagans, that if famine, pestilence, or earthquakes afflicted any of the Roman provinces, it was charged on the informers; and many, for the sake of gain, swore away the lives of the innocent... The various kinds of punishment and inflicted cruelties were, during this persecution, imprisonment, racking, searing, broiling, burning, scourging, stoning and hanging. Many were lacerated with red-hot pincers, and others were thrown upon the horns of wild bulls. After having suffered these cruelties, the friends of the deceased Christians were refused the privilege of burying their remains" (King, pp. 14-15).

Simeon, bishop of Jerusalem, was crucified, and Flavia, daughter of a Roman senator, was banished to Pontus.

Death of Timothy

Timothy, Paul's disciple and bishop of Ephesus, met his doom near the end of the first century.

After Paul was martyred in 67, Timothy returned to Ephesus and governed the church there. As the century drew to a close, the pagans were about to celebrate a feast where the people wore masks and carried images of their gods around on sticks.

"When Timothy met the procession, he severely reproved them for their idolatry, which so exasperated them, that they fell upon him with their clubs, and beat him in so dreadful a manner, that he expired two days after" (King, pp. 15-16).

Other Martyrs

Other Church of God leaders were killed in the latter half of the first century as Satan attempted to stamp out the true church.

Matthias, who was selected to be the apostle replacing Judas Iscariot, suffered martyrdom. One account says he was killed in Ethiopia (Smith, "Matthias," p. 385), another says he was stoned at Jerusalem and beheaded (Dugger and Dodd, p. 53).

Andrew, Peter's brother, preached in Scythia, Achaia, Nicephorus in Asia Minor and Thrace. It is said he was crucified on a cross with its two ends fixed transversely in the ground. This was either in the ancient city of Edessa in Mesopotamia (Dugger and Dodd, p. 53) or at Patrae in Achaia (Smith, "Andrew," p. 36).

Mark, who had been in Rome with Peter and Paul at the time of their executions, went thereafter to Alexandria, Egypt, a hotbed of religious confusion. There, he established a church and used it as a base from which to preach to other areas. When he returned to Alexandria, he was dragged to pieces by the people of that city during a feast in honor of their idol, Serapis (Smith, "Mark," p. 374; Dugger and Dodd, pp. 53-54).

Bartholomew was beaten and crucified by idolaters in "India" (probably Arabia).

Thomas also died in “India.” While preaching the Gospel there, he excited the rage of pagan priests and was thrust through with a spear (Dugger and Dodd, p. 55; Smith, “Thomas,” p. 694).

Luke was hanged on an olive tree in Greece by idolatrous priests between A.D. 75 and A.D. 100 (Dugger and Dodd, p. 55; Smith, “Luke,” p. 356).

This was indeed a sad and trying time for God’s church!

Jude’s Grandsons

Two Greek writers, Hegesippus and Eusebius, tell us about the faithful grandsons of Jude, author of the Bible book by that name. The grandsons were Zokker and James. Jesus Christ was still ruling his church! As He often does, He used family members to continue his work.

“In the reign of Domitian [(81-96)], Zokker and James were called before the Roman governor, interrogated and contemptuously dismissed—being deemed unworthy of further notice. Yes, the world now viewed the faithful few with contempt” (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 49, p. 15).

Eusebius gives us more details on the interrogation of Zokker and James under Domitian:

“The same emperor ordered the execution of all who were of David’s line, and there is an old and firm tradition that a group of heretics accused the descendents of Jude—the brother, humanly speaking, of the Savior—on the ground that they were of David’s line and related to Christ Himself. This is stated by Hegesippus in so many words:

“ ‘And there still survived of the Lord’s family the grandsons of Jude, who was said to

be His brother, humanly speaking. These were informed against as being of David’s line, and brought by the *evocatus* before Domitian Caesar, who was as afraid of the advent of Christ as Herod had been. Domitian asked them whether they had descended from David, and they admitted it. Then he asked them what property they owned and what funds they had at their disposal. They replied that they had only £1,500 (9,000 denarii) between them, half belonging to each; this, they said, was not available in cash, but was the estimated value of only twenty-five acres of land, from which they raised the money to pay their taxes and the wherewithal to support themselves by their own toil.’

“Then, the writer continues, they showed him their hands, putting forward as proof of their toil the hardness of their hands by incessant labour. When asked about Christ and His Kingdom—what it was like, and where and when it would appear—they explained that it was not of this world or anywhere on earth but angelic and in heaven, and would be established at the end of the world, when He would come in glory to judge the quick and the dead and give every man payment according to his conduct. On hearing this, Domitian found no fault with them, but despising them as beneath his notice let them go free and issued orders terminating the persecution of the church. (Hegesippus was referring to the Jerusalem Church only [now in Pella].) On release they became leaders of the churches, both because they had borne testimony and because they were of the Lord’s family; and thanks to the establishment of peace they lived on into Trajan’s time” (*The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine* by Eusebius, translated by G.A. Williamson, pp. 126-127).

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Preachings and Visions of John

Much of the history of God's church in the last three decades of the first century is filled with the gloom of martyrdom after martyrdom and death after death. One shining exception is the life of the apostle John, who was headquartered in Jerusalem until 68.

At the time of Nero's death in June 68, God's church at Jerusalem was given its chance to flee to safety. The Roman legions released their death grip on the city and withdrew until April of the following year.

John Flees to Ephesus

When the church fled east across the Jordan River, the apostle John fled north and established himself in Ephesus where Timothy was pastoring. This had become the geographic and numerical center of the Christian population (Halley, p. 558).

In the years that followed, John preached throughout Asia Minor and established churches in Smyrna, Pergamos, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea and Thyatira (King, p. 13).

Three of John's pupils became pillars of the Church of God in the second century.

Polycarp would later become bishop of Smyrna, Papias bishop of Hierapolis; and Ignatius bishop of Antioch in Syria (Halley, p. 558).

John Writes his Gospel

Scholars are not sure when John penned the fourth Gospel. Erwin R. Goodenough says it was written as early as A.D. 40, though few scholars accept a date this early. Some place it as late as 140, which also is unlikely.

"The best solution seems to be that John was produced in Asia Minor, possibly in Ephesus, toward the close of the first century, when the church had achieved a measure of maturity, and when there was need for an advance in the teaching concerning the nature of faith. It was apparently written in Gentile surroundings, for the feasts and usages of the Jews are explained for the benefit of those who are unfamiliar with them (John 2:13, 4:9, 19:31)" (Tenney, p. 189).

"The date of John's gospel is after the synoptic gospels but not later than A.D. 85 or 90, shown by the following reasons. (1) It supplements the synoptics. It omits much that they record and records much that they

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omit; it is full where they are concise and vice versa. (2) It shows a maturity of Christian consciousness, unlikely in the earlier period of the church. (3) It shows no reference to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, either in prospect or retrospect, so was certainly written a number of years after that event. (4) Archeology supports this sound dating” (*The New Unger’s Bible Handbook*, p. 421).

John’s Gospel is different from the other three. About 92% of what is found in John is not in the others. By contrast, Matthew is 42% unique, Luke 59% and Mark only 7%.

Only eight of the 35 miracles Christ performed are recorded in John’s Gospel. Six of the eight are found only in John.

90

John Writes First Epistle

John was no young man when he penned his first epistle about A.D. 90. He probably was close to 90 years old. He wrote the letter from Ephesus but there is no evidence from his writing to indicate who his specific audience was. It may have been a general epistle to be passed from congregation to congregation or, as suggested by Augustine and Bede, it may have been addressed to the churches of God in Parthia (JFB, p. 1495). Smith says it was primarily meant for the churches in Asia over which John had responsibility and to whom he may have preached (Ch. 1:3, 2:7) (Smith, “John, The First Epistle General Of” p. 307).

John wrote to combat a form of Gnosticism called Docetism, that was creeping into the church. Docetism was the belief that Jesus had not been flesh. He had merely been a ghost or spirit made visible. This was based on the Gnostic belief that spirit is good, flesh is evil and ne’er the twain should mix! (Tenney, p. 376)

Another purpose of John’s letter was to unify the brethren who were now small, scattered, persecuted churches (Smith, p. 307).

Let’s look at what John wrote:

“We write to you about the Word of Life, which has existed from the very beginning;

we have heard it, and we have seen it with our eyes; yes, we have seen it and our hands have touched it... What we have seen and heard we tell to you also, so that you will join with us in the fellowship that we have with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (Ch. 1:1, 3).

John told the brethren God is light and Christians must not live in darkness.

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and there is no truth in us,” John wrote in verse 8. He added, “If we say that we have not sinned we make a liar out of God, and his word is not in us” (v. 10). All have sinned; all are sinners, John wrote. But there is a way out: If we confess our sins to God, we will be forgiven (v. 9). Jesus Christ pleads for us, for He is the means by which our sins are forgiven (Ch. 2:1-2).

Here, A.D. 90, God’s Law was still intact. It had not been “nailed to the cross.” John wrote, “If we obey God’s commands, then we are sure that we know him. If someone says, ‘I do know him’ but does not obey his commands, such a person is a liar and there is no truth in him... he who says that he lives in God should live just as Jesus Christ did” (vv. 3-4, 6).

A Christian must be filled with Godly love. If anyone hates his brother, he is still in darkness (Ch. 2:8-11).

Satan has always made the world outside of God’s church appear glamorous and wonderful, when in reality the physical world is decaying. True glamor and beauty is in spiritual character being developed in Christians. That is what will grow and last forever. John told the brethren, “Do not love the world or anything that belongs to the world. If you love the world, you do not have the love for the Father in you. Everything that belongs to the world—what the sinful self desires, what people see and want, and everything in this world that people are so proud of—none of this comes from the Father; it all comes from the world. The world and everything in it that men desire is passing away; but he who does what God wants lives forever” (vv. 15-17).

Many people had left the church at the

time John wrote his first epistle. John comforted those who had remained steadfast and called those who quit “anti-Christ” or the enemies of Christ.

“My children, the end is near! You were told that the enemy of Christ would come, and now many enemies of Christ have already appeared, and so we know that the end is near. These people really did not belong to our group, and that is why they left us; if they had belonged to our group, they would have stayed with us. But they left so that it might be clear that none of them really belonged to our group” (vv. 18-19).

John told the brethren to stick to what had been preached to them from the beginning and let God’s Spirit interpret the Scriptures for them. They were not to listen to these false ministers and to lying brethren who were trying to pollute the truth by combining it with their Gnostic beliefs (vv. 24-27).

Once again, now in the 90s, God’s people are admonished to keep his laws as John defines sin: “Whoever sins is guilty of breaking God’s law; for sin is a breaking of the law” (1 John 3:4).

Persecution under Emperor Domitian was stepping up. John addressed this in Chapter 3:

“So do not be surprised, my brothers, if the people of the world hate you. We know that we have left death and come over to life; we know it because we love our brothers. Whoever does not love is still in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that a murderer does not have eternal life in him. This is how we know what love is: Christ gave his life for us. We too, then, ought to give our lives for our brothers! If a man is rich and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against his brother, how can he claim that he has love for God in his heart? My children! Our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action” (vv. 13-18).

John gave more details about the false ministers in Chapter 4. He told Church of God members not to believe everyone who

claims to have God’s Spirit. They should test these false prophets who had gone everywhere.

“This is how you will be able to know whether it is God’s Spirit: everyone who declares that Jesus Christ became mortal man has the Spirit [that] comes from God. But anyone who denies this about Jesus does not have the Spirit of God” (vv. 1-3).

John wrote more about love in the following verses. He explained that God is love. He built up to this climax: “For this is the love of God that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3, *NKJ*).

One comment about 1 John 5:7-8. John did not write the words referring to the Trinity that appear in many translations of the Bible, including the *King James Version*: “...the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth...”

Today’s English Version omits these false, unauthentic words altogether. The *New King James Version* notes in its margin that these words are found “in Greek in only four or five very late manuscripts” (*NKJ*, p. 1369). The first translation to have these added spurious words was a Vulgate from the eighth century (*JFB*, p. 1509).

Wrapping up his letter, John reminded the brethren to believe in the name of the Son of God and to pray in his name, asking according to God’s will. He told them the whole world is under the sway of Satan (vv. 13-15, 19).

“We know that the Son of God has come and given us understanding, so that we know the true God. Our lives are in the true God—in his son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and this is eternal life.

“My children, keep yourselves away from false gods!” concluded John (vv. 20-21).

John Cast into Boiling Oil

Some time after writing 1 John, the last remaining apostle was arrested during the persecution of Domitian.

“Being at Ephesus, he was ordered by

Emperor Domitian to be sent bound to Rome, where he was condemned to be cast into a caldron of boiling oil” (King, p. 13).

“John was sentenced to death, and it seemed his fate was to have been much the same as most of the other apostles had been, a martyr’s death... His would-be executioners carried out the orders to the letter; but, to their amazement and surprise, he arose from the boiling oil, praising God, and without bodily injury. Such fear was thus caused among many who witnessed the miracle, that hundreds of conversions were made to the faith they were vainly endeavoring to stamp out. Fearing further to try to take the apostle’s life, he was banished to the island of Patmos, about 75 miles off the northeast shore of the Mediterranean Sea. It was on this island where the angel of God visited the apostle, and gave him the last book of the New Testament, the Revelation” (Dugger and Dodd, pp. 38-39).

On Patmos

On the island of Patmos John was assigned to work in the mines (Smith, “John the Apostle,” p. 305).

The island is rugged and bare. It is one of the Sporades islands and is in the Icarian Sea, a part of the Aegean, about 45 miles southwest of the seaport Miletus.

“Anyone with a sense of theater will applaud God’s choice of Patmos, one of the northernmost islands in the Dodecanese, as the place to plot the end of the world. Rearring volcanic ramparts and plunging, dark-shadowed chasms jar against terraced green hills and flowered meadows that burn under the stinging Aegean sun with a Van-Gogh-like luminosity. ...it’s scarcely seven miles long and, at one point, narrower than the average Frisbee toss” (“Patmos” by Alan Linn, *Travel & Leisure*, August 1992, pp. 96, 99).

Patmos is divided into two almost-equal parts, a northern and a southern section. A very narrow isthmus connects them. On the east side of the isthmus are the harbor and town. South of town is a hill which crowns a

“commanding height” and has built on it a monastery named “John the Divine.” Half way up the ascent is a cave or grotto where tradition says John received the Revelation (Smith, “Patmos,” p. 495).

John Writes Revelation

While imprisoned on Patmos for proclaiming “God’s word and the truth that Jesus revealed,” John had a vision from God (Rev. 1:9-10). Following the vision, which concerned future events—“what must happen very soon,” John wrote what he saw in a book and sent it to the seven churches in Asia where he ministered (Rev. 1:1, 4).

Purpose of Revelation

John described the purpose of his book in Chapter 1: “In this book are written the things that Jesus Christ revealed. These things were given him by God, for him to show God’s servants what must happen very soon. Christ made these things known to his servant John by sending his angel to him. John has told you all that he has seen. This is his report concerning the message from God and the truth revealed by Jesus Christ. Happy is the one who reads this book, and happy are those who listen to the words of this prophetic message and obey what is written in this book! For the time is near when all this will happen.

“From John to the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace be yours from God, who is, who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits in front of his throne, and from Jesus Christ...

“I am John, your brother, and in union with Jesus I share with you in suffering, and in his kingdom, and in enduring. I was put on the island named Patmos because I had proclaimed God’s word and the truth that Jesus revealed” (Rev. 1: 1-5, 9).

“I was in the spirit (a vision or prophetic trance) on the Lord’s Day (the future time of trouble referred to as ‘the Day of the Lord’— 1 Thes. 5:2) and I heard behind me a loud voice, as a trumpet, saying, ‘I am the Alpha

and the Omega, the First and the Last,' and 'What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea' " (vv. 10-11, *NKJ*).

"So the very *purpose* of this book is to show us of this generation now living, the coming world-shaking events of the Day of the Lord—the time of God's judgments at this age-end *leading up to*, and *climaxing in* the second coming of Christ, and the happy, peaceful World Tomorrow!" (*The Book of Revelation Unveiled At Last!* by Herbert W. Armstrong, p. 10).

John described a heavenly scene in the final verses of Revelation 1, including a description of the risen Jesus Christ in his glorified state (vv. 12-20).

In Chapters 2 and 3 John wrote a message to each of the seven churches along a mail route in Asia Minor. The conditions in these churches may also describe the spiritual condition of God's true church through seven successive eras from A.D. 31 to the return of Christ.

"These messages come directly from Christ—they contain the direct testimony of Jesus Christ.... Here Jesus takes the actual spiritual condition and functioning of these seven churches, then existing in Asia Minor, as a prophecy of the spiritual condition and the works and accomplishments, in carrying out Christ's great commission, of the true Church of God during seven successive periods of time up until the end of this age and the second coming of Christ" (Armstrong, *Revelation*, pp. 10-11).

The Church at Ephesus

Notice what Christ told John about the church at Ephesus and about the first era of God's church:

"I know what you have done; I know how hard you have worked and how patient you have been. I know that you cannot tolerate evil men, and that you have tested those who say they are apostles but are not, and have found out they are liars. You are patient, you

have suffered troubles for my sake, and you have not given up. But here is what I have against you: You do not love me now as you did at first. Remember how far you have fallen! Turn from your sins and do what you did at first. If you don't turn from your sins, I will come to you and take your lampstand from its place. But here is what you have in your favor: You hate what the Nicolaitans do, as much as I" (Rev. 2:1-6).

Christians at Ephesus had lost their first love. The church as a whole also lost its first love. Christ physically removed the lampstand A.D. 69 when the Jerusalem Church fled to Pella. He would later remove the lampstand spiritually, A.D. 135, when the church's authority and respect would be stripped from it following a second Jewish war with Rome.

"At the time John penned these words, Jesus Christ already knew the performance record of the church at Ephesus. The church congregation was a type of the entire church in apostolic times. The Ephesus church had let down. It had not continued in its work after A.D. 69 to all nations (Mat. 28:19)" (*Correspondence Course*, Lesson 49, p. 12).

On the positive side, the church at Ephesus—and the first era of God's church—was not overly swayed by false ministers, though this was a big problem. We have seen many epistles carrying warnings about these evil men. And the Ephesian church had withstood persecution. And it had hated the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. Who were they?

In an April 5, 1975 sermon to the Pasadena p.m. congregation of the Worldwide Church of God, Mr. David Antion explained the Nicolaitans. He said they held to false gods, idolatry, and committed pornea (sexual immorality).

This sect "held that it was lawful 'to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication,' in opposition to the decree of the church rendered in Acts 15:20, 29" (Smith, "Nicolaitans," p. 450).

It appears this sect used human reasoning to refute commands and instructions from the headquarters church. It was a rebellious group and God hates rebellion as



A primary mail circuit covered the seven cities John mentions in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. Also visible on this map is the island of Patmos where John was banished and had the vision of Revelation.

much as He hates witchcraft (1 Sam. 15:23).

The Message to Smyrna

John's next message went to the church at Smyrna (and to the church era which followed the Ephesian era and had characteristics of Smyrna).

Smyrna was a port city, like Ephesus, just 40 or 50 miles to its south (*Story of the Bible World in Map, Word and Picture*, by Nelson Beecher Keyes, p. 140).

Pagan mysteries prevailed in this city (Smith, "Smyrna," p. 653). But it was "a

splendid city, of rare beauty, on a fine bay, rival of Ephesus, with the proud tradition that it had been the birthplace of Homer.

"Its bishop, at the time, was the beloved Polycarp. Irenaeus, who had talked with Polycarp, said that Polycarp was appointed bishop of Smyrna by John.

"The church was composed of poor people, with nothing like the number or prestige that the church at Ephesus had. They were 'poor, but rich,' 2:9" (Halley, p. 580).

John, in the vision of Revelation, told the church at Smyrna it was about to suffer persecution for "ten days" (Rev. 2:10). But he encouraged them: "I know your troubles; I know that you are poor—but really you are rich! I know the evil things said against you by those who claim to be Jews, but are not; they are a group that belongs to Satan!

"Do not be afraid of anything you are about to suffer. Listen! The Devil will put you to the test by having some of you thrown into

prison; your troubles will last ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life... Those who win the victory will not be hurt by the second death" (vv. 9-11).

The "ten days" may have signified a short trial. It could have referred to the upcoming persecution under Trajan. But one thing is certain. The time is defined. The persecuted church was told that an end to persecution was coming. It would not go on forever. While this statement promised persecution, it also promised relief after 10 days.

The Message to Pergamum

The third church John addressed was in the city of Pergamum. It lay 50 miles north of Smyrna and was the political capital of “Asia”—i.e. Turkey today. Pergamum was a great, ancient city and literary center. It was a chief seat of Hellenic culture. It had the second largest library in the world (Alexandria’s was largest), containing 200,000 volumes. Parchment was invented there when a king of Egypt, jealous of Pergamum’s literary fame, prohibited shipping papyrus to that city. Parchment proved to be a better writing material than papyrus and its name was a form of the name “Pergamena.”

Emperor worship was strong in Pergamum. Incense was offered before a statue of the emperor as if to God. Christians who refused to offer incense at this spot were killed. The city also was home to an altar to Jupiter and Esculapius, the latter being a healing god in the form of a serpent. In addition to these pagan practices, Pergamum was a stronghold for Balaamite and Nicolaitan teachers. Thus this city, a “notorious center of heathenism and wickedness,” was called “Satan’s throne” (Halley, p. 581).

Pergamum “became a city of temples devoted to sensuous worship” (Smith, “Pergamos,” p. 512). In the midst of this paganism God placed his church. Note what Jesus told this church (and the church era later to be called by its name) through the vision John recorded in Revelation:

“I know where you live, there where Satan has his throne. You are true to me, and you did not abandon your faith in me even during the time when Antipas, a faithful witness for me, was killed there where Satan lives” (Rev. 2:13).

Who was the martyr Antipas? Tradition says he was the bishop of Pergamum (Smith, “Antipas,” p. 41).

Christ found some things wrong in the Pergamum church: “There with you are some who follow the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak how to cause the people of Israel to sin by eating food that had been

offered to idols, and by committing immorality. In the same way, you also have people among you who follow the teachings of the Nicolaitans. Turn from your sins, then! If not, I will come to you soon and fight against those people with the sword that comes out of my mouth” (Rev. 2:14-16).

The church at Ephesus hated the works of the Nicolaitans. And at fewer than 100 miles away, the church at Pergamum had people following in the way of the Nicolaitans—these people held to false gods and committed idolatry and sexual immorality.

The doctrine of Balaam is to get as close to the world as one can and yet be considered “Christian”—like getting as close to the edge of a cliff as one can—without falling off.

The Message to Thyatira

The mail route that connected these seven churches reached its northernmost point at Pergamum. From there it headed southeast for about 50 miles until it reached the city of Thyatira.

This city sat on the Lycus River, to the left of the road from Pergamum to Sardis, on the confines of Mysia and Ionia, so that sometimes Thyatira was reckoned with one and sometimes with the other. Dyeing apparently was an important part of this city’s industry as it also was in Colossae and Laodicea (Acts 16:14).

There is evidence that Thyatira was home to a great amalgamation of races. The principal deity of Thyatira was Apollo (Smith, “Thyatira,” p. 695).

Thyatira was famous for its magnificent temple of Artemis (Diana).

“Jezebel, it is thought, may have been a prominent woman devotee of Diana, with a gift for leadership, who had a following of influential people in the city, and who, attracted to the growing cause of Christianity, attached herself to the church, militantly insisting, however, on the right to teach and practice licentious indulgence, claiming inspiration for her teaching.

“She was called ‘Jezebel’ because, like Jezebel the devilish wife of Ahab who intro-

duced the abomination of Astarte worship into Israel, 1 Kings 16, she was introducing the same practices into the Christian Church.

“Not all of the Thyatira pastors accepted her teaching. But, trying to be liberal, and thinking that she might be a help in winning the whole city to the Name of Christ, they accepted her as a fellow pastor” (Halley, p. 582).

Jesus Christ, the ever-living Head of the Church of God, was very displeased with this situation, as He revealed in vision to John:

“This is the message from the Son of God, whose eyes blaze like fire, whose feet shine like polished brass. I know your love and your faithfulness, your service and your patience. I know you are doing more now than you did at first. But here is what I have against you: you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a messenger of God. She teaches and misleads my servants into committing immorality and eating food that has been offered to idols. I have given her time to turn from her sins, but she does not wish to turn from her immorality. Therefore I will throw her on a bed where she and those who committed adultery with her will suffer terribly. I will do this now, unless they repent from the wicked things they did with her. I will also kill her children, and then all the churches will know that I am he who knows men’s thoughts and wishes. I will repay each one of you according to what you have done.

“But the rest of you in Thyatira have not followed this evil teaching; you have not learned what others call ‘the deep secrets of Satan.’ I say to you that I will not put any other burden on you. But you must hold firmly to what you have until I come” (Rev. 2:18-25).

Yes, Christ was angry at the spiritual whore who was seducing some in Thyatira. She pretended to utter inspired messages but they were nothing more than disguised calls to libertinism, fornication and eating of idol meats professed by the Balaamites and Nicolaitans.

“By a false spiritualism these seducers led their victims into the grossest carnality,

as though things done in the flesh were outside the true man, and were, therefore, indifferent” (JFB, p. 1535).

The reference to her children meant not her physical progeny but those born spiritually by her. This Jezebel and her followers were Gnostics, proclaiming to have deep, hidden knowledge.

“Thyatira was just the reverse of Ephesus. There, much zeal for orthodoxy, but little love; here, activity of faith and love, but insufficient zeal for godly discipline and doctrine, a patience of error even when there was not a participation in it” (JFB, p. 1535).

The situation is somewhat reminiscent of that in Corinth 40 years earlier (1 Cor. 5). At that time the church was filled with love and felt the best thing to do was ignore a man living in sin with his stepmother. Now Thyatira, filled with love, was allowing this spiritual whore the freedom to seduce all the members she wished. But Jesus Christ said He was about to step in and strike her and her followers with either plague or death.

The Message to Sardis

About 35 miles southeast of Thyatira lay the city of Sardis, home of the fifth congregation to receive a message from Christ through John’s vision of Revelation.

Sardis was two miles south of the Hermus River and lay below the Tmolus mountain range. In its early days the city was a great commercial center. It is said the art of dyeing wool began here. From the time of its invasion by Alexander the Great, Sardis began to lose its commercial importance but was still a famous city in Roman times (Smith, “Sardis,” p. 606; Halley, p. 583).

The church at Sardis has a history similar to that of its city. At one time the congregation was vibrant. But by the time of John’s writing the members were falling asleep spiritually. Jesus, through John’s vision, warned the church:

“I know what you are doing; I know that you have the reputation of being alive, even though you are dead! So wake up, and strengthen what you still have, before it dies

completely. For I find that what you have done is not yet perfect in the sight of my God. Remember, then, what you were taught and how you heard it; obey it, and turn from your sins. If you do not wake up, I will come upon you like a thief. But a few of you in Sardis have kept your clothes clean" (Rev. 3:1-4).

The name "Sardis" means "Those escaping." Like the church at Ephesus, the congregation at Sardis had a good start and a bad ending. When the city of Sardis was dying, it held to its past glory. So did the congregation of God's church there. Perhaps only three out of a hundred in this congregation made it into God's kingdom. This message could be considered an obituary (Donald Prunkard, sermon to Worldwide Church of God, Minneapolis West, June 21, 1975).

The Message to Philadelphia

Another 35 miles to the southeast of Sardis lay the town of Philadelphia, home of the sixth church to receive a message from Christ in John's vision.

This town lay on the lower slopes of the Tmolus mountains, 952 feet above sea level. There is still a town on this site but it is called Allah-Shehr (City of God). "The original population of Philadelphia seems to have been Macedonian: but there was, as appears from Rev. iii.9, a synagogue of Hellenizing Jews there, as well as a Christian church. The locality was subject to constant earthquakes, which in the time of Strabo rendered even the town-walls of Philadelphia unsafe. The expense of reparation was constant, and hence perhaps the poverty of the members of the Christian church (Rev. iii.8)" (Smith, "Philadelphia," p. 523).

"Philadelphia was distinguished from the other cities by several characteristics: first, it was the missionary city: secondly, its people lived always in the dread of disaster, 'the day of trial': thirdly, many of its people went out of the city to dwell: fourthly, it took a new name from the Imperial god [during the reign of Vespasian (A.D. 70-79), Philadelphia called itself Flavia]" (*The Letters to the Seven Churches* by William M. Ramsay,

p. 398).

The Church of God at Philadelphia was a humble but faithful church that was "content to exemplify the Life of Jesus in the midst of a pagan and corrupt society." This congregation loved God's Word and was intent on keeping it. This church was greatly loved by Jesus and receives no reproof from him in John's vision (Halley, p. 584).

Notice Christ's words recorded in that vision: "I know what you do; I know that you have a little power; you have followed my teaching and have been faithful to me. I have opened a door before, which no one can close" (Rev. 3:8). "False Jews" or false Christians (spiritual Jews) will fall down and worship true Christians, Christ promised in verse 9. "They will all know that I love you," He added.

"Because you have kept my order to be patient, I will also keep you safe from the time of trouble which is coming upon the whole world, to test all the people on earth. I am coming soon. Keep safe what you have, so that no one will rob you of your victory prize" (vv. 10-11).

These people, some of whom left the city for fear of earthquakes, will be given a new city to dwell in (in the world tomorrow): the new Jerusalem. And they will never have to leave that city! (vv. 12-13).

The Message to Laodicea

The seventh and final message went to the Church of God at Laodicea, a city 50 miles southeast of Philadelphia (Keyes, p. 140). Laodicea lay in the valley of Maeander, on the small river Lycus. The cities of Colossae and Hierapolis were only a few miles to the east.

Under the Roman government, Laodicea grew to be a city of importance. A great road ran through it and it was the seat of a "conventus." It was a city of great wealth (Smith, "Laodicea," p. 333).

"The great road from the west (from Ephesus and Miletus) ascends the Maeander Valley, due eastwards, until it enters 'the Gate of Phrygia.' In the Gate are a remark-

able series of hot springs, and warm mud baths, some in the bed of the Maeander, others on its banks...

"Immediately above this point lies a much broader valley, in which Lydia, Phrygia, and Caria meet. The Maeander [River] comes into this valley from the north, breaking through a ridge of mountains by a gorge, which... is useless as a roadway. The road goes on up to the east up the glen of the Lycus [River], which here joins the Maeander, and offers an easy roadway." The Lycus Glen has an upper and lower glen. Colossae was in the upper, Laodicea in the lower (Ramsay, p. 413).

"Laodicea was a very strong fortress, planted right on the line of the great road; but it had one serious weakness. It was entirely dependent for water supply (except in so far as wells may have existed within the walls, of which there is now no trace) on an aqueduct connected from the springs about six miles to the south. The aqueduct was under the surface of the ground, but could hardly remain unknown to a besieging army or be guarded long against his attack. If the aqueduct was cut, the city was helpless, and this weakness ruined the character of the city as a string fortress, and must have prevented the people from ever feeling secure when threatened with attack" (Ramsay, p. 415).

Laodicea was a great banking and manufacturing center, its chief product was a glossy black wool, similar to the dark violet wool produced at Colossae. In the valley where the Lycus and Maeander met, was a market where the people of the valley traded with strangers from a distance.

The city also had its own school of medicine which followed the teachings Herophilus (330-250 B.C.), who believed compound diseases required compound cures. Apparently Laodiceans developed an ointment from the spice nard that strengthened the ears. This region of Phrygia also developed a medicine for the eyes, which was made from stones ground to a fine powder. The first recorded use of this powder was in Laodicea (Ramsay, pp. 416-419).

"There is no city whose spirit and nature are more difficult to describe than Laodicea. There are no extremes, and hardly any strong marked features. But in this even balance lies its peculiar character. Those were the qualities that contributed to make it essentially the successful trading city, the city of bankers and finance, which could adapt itself to the needs and wishes of others, ever pliable and accommodating, full of the spirit of compromise" (Ramsay, pp. 422-423).

The Church of God in Laodicea had problems. "The Laodicean church is neither one thing nor another. It is given to compromise, it cannot thoroughly reject the temptations and allurements of the world" (Ramsay, p. 424). The church was entirely self satisfied (p. 428).

To this church John wrote a warning message he had received in vision from Christ:

"I know what you have done; I know that you are neither cold nor hot. How I wish you were either one or the other! But because you are barely warm, neither hot nor cold, I am about to spit you out of my mouth! 'I am rich and well off,' you say, 'I have all I need.' But you do not know how miserable and pitiful you are! You are poor, naked and blind. I advise you, then, to buy gold from me, pure gold, in order to be rich. Buy also white clothing to dress yourself and cover up your shameful nakedness. Buy also some medicine to put on your eyes, so that you may see. I reprove and punish all whom I love. Be earnest then, and turn from your sins. Listen! I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into his house and eat with him, and he will eat with me. To those who win the victory I will give the right to sit by me on my throne, just as I have been victorious, and now sit by my Father on his throne" (Rev. 3:14-21).

Prelude-Setting

Having completed Christ's messages to the seven churches in Asia, John continued the vision in Chapters 4 and 5, giving a prelude

to the remainder of Revelation. He described God's throne and a scroll with seven seals. Only the Lamb of God was worthy to open the seals and reveal what will happen in the last days of man's society on the earth.

The End Time

The first six seals included the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse." These four were the white horse (false prophets), red horse (war), black horse (famine) and pale horse (pestilence) (Rev. 6:1-8; Mat. 24:3-8; Armstrong, *Revelation*, p. 16). The fifth seal described a time of tribulation coming upon God's church:

"Then the Lamb broke the fifth seal. I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been killed because they had proclaimed God's word and had been faithful in their witnessing. They shouted in a loud voice: 'Almighty Lord, holy and true! How long will it be until you will judge the people of earth and punish them for killing us?' Each of them was given a white robe; and they were told to rest a little while longer, until the total number was reached of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been" (Rev. 6:9-11).

The sixth seal revealed earthquakes and heavenly signs (vv. 12-17).

Chapter 7 broke from the story flow and described two great groups. The first group had God's seal of protection placed on their foreheads and were numbered at 144,000. They are to live through the rough times prior to Christ's return and will be made immortal at that time. The other group is called the "innumerable multitude." They know God's truth but reject it and must suffer through the Great Tribulation. While in captivity, these people repent and return to God. They may lose their physical lives in concentration camps but they gain their eternal lives.

The seventh seal, which John began describing in Chapter 8, consisted of seven trumpets, signaling the last seven events before Christ returns to this earth. The first four trumpets detailed destruction of the earth, the sea, trees, rivers and atmosphere

(vv. 1-13).

The fifth, sixth and seventh trumpets are also known as the three woes.

Revelation 9 describes the fifth trumpet (first woe). It is the gathering of the great armies in Europe and their conquering of modern-day Israel (United States, Britain and the English-speaking peoples) (vv. 1-12; Armstrong, *Revelation*, p. 38).

The sixth trumpet (second woe) is a gathering of an army of 200 million soldiers from Russia and Asia, ready to battle a revived Roman Empire found in Europe. These two remaining empires will seek to destroy each other—and as a result would destroy all life from the earth—if Christ did not plan to return in the nick of time (Rev. 9:13-21; Mat. 24:21-22; Armstrong, *Revelation*, pp. 38-39).

While this is happening on the world's political scene, God has two witnesses preaching a worldwide message of warning, repentance and hope of a world tomorrow ruled by the returning King of kings. John's vision next described these two who preach from Jerusalem during the final three-and-a-half years of man's civilization. At the end of three-and-a-half years, the government of the revived Roman Empire will have the two witnesses martyred. For three-and-a-half days their bodies will lie in the street. But then they will be resurrected by God. They will rise into the clouds to the accompanying noise and shaking of great earthquakes. This will happen immediately before the final trumpet blows and Christ returns (Rev. 11:1-19).

In Chapter 12 Christ revealed through John the history of his church—the Church of God—from A.D. 31 to his return. The chapter begins with a description of Satan attempting to destroy Christ. When this fails, Satan goes after God's church pictured by "the woman." But the church is protected in the wilderness 1,260 days (years). Later, as the time of Christ's return draws near, Satan, filled with wrath, attempts to crush God's church in the Philadelphian era—the era which today lives on the earth. The church is given the wings of an eagle to fly to

a place of safety in the desert where she will be nurtured for three-and-a-half years, safe from Satan's attack. While the two witnesses are preaching in Jerusalem, the rest of God's true church is in a place of safety preparing to meet Christ. Satan then turns his wrath on the Laodicean era of God's church.

Revelation 13 describes two beasts which picture revivals of the Roman Empire. The first "was allowed to fight against God's people and to defeat them, and it was given authority over every tribe and people, every language and nation" (v. 7). God's people will be captured and killed (vv. 8-9). The second beast is a great false religious leader who will perform miracles and will cause the world to worship the revived Holy Roman Empire.

In Revelation 14, three angels bring their messages. The first announces to the world that a time of judgment has come. The second announces the fall of Babylon (possibly the Roman Catholic Church, possibly this whole world's evil system), the third announces punishment for those who worship the revived Roman Empire or the Catholic Church which supports it.

In Chapters 15 and 16, seven last plagues are poured out on the earth to punish those who worship the beast. The first produces painful sores. The second turns seas to blood. The third turns fresh water into blood. The fourth causes the sun to scorch the earth's inhabitants. The fifth brings darkness. The sixth dries up the Euphrates so Asian armies may attack European armies at Jerusalem. The seventh produces a great cry, "It is done!" and is accompanied by earthquakes, thunder, lightning and gigantic hailstones.

John's vision next described the false church in Revelation 17 and 18, including its fall.

In Chapter 19, Christ returns to earth, makes war with the armies of this world and defeats them. He marries the church and establishes his government.

In Chapter 20, John described the resurrection to eternal life of baptized believers. Satan will be bound and unable to harm

humanity for 1,000 years while those humans will ready this planet for a greater day. Near the end of 1,000 years, Satan will be loosed for a short time and again will deceive many people before he is cast forever into outer darkness.

Once Satan is out of the picture forever, all humanity who had not yet received eternal life will be brought back to physical life and given a chance to live God's way for up to 100 years. People who never knew Christ's way will get their chance at this time. (They are not lost in some hell fire.)

The final two chapters describe the new heaven and new earth as physical creation is turned from physical to spiritual and God the Father establishes his throne on the earth.

Conclusion of Revelation

The vision John received ended with upbeat messages and dire warnings:

"Then the angel said to me, 'These words are true and can be trusted, And the Lord God, who gives his Spirit to the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants what must happen very soon.'

"'Listen,' says Jesus, 'I am coming soon! Happy are those who obey the prophetic words in this book!'

"I, John, have heard and seen all these things. And when I finished hearing and seeing them, I fell down at the feet of the angel who had shown me these things to worship him. But he said to me, 'Don't do it! I am a fellow servant of yours, and of your brothers the prophets, and of all those who obey the words in this book. Worship God!' And he said to me, 'Do not keep these prophetic words of this book a secret, for the time is near when all this will happen...'

"I, John, solemnly warn everyone who hears the prophetic words of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to his punishment the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes away anything from the prophetic words of this book, God will take away from him his share of the fruit of the tree of life, and his share of the

Holy City, which are described in this book.

“He who gives his testimony to all this, says ‘Certainly so! I am coming soon!’

“So be it. Come Lord Jesus!

“May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all” (Rev. 22:6-10, 18-21).

96

Nerva becomes Emperor

John had been banished to the isle of Patmos by Emperor Domitian. The emperor was now having problems back in Rome.

Domitian was an oppressive ruler who demanded to be called “lord and god.” Any criticism of himself was considered treason and the penalty was death. This caused problems for government officials as well as for the Church of God. So many men of high rank were executed that a conspiracy was formed and Domitian was murdered in 96.

The plot was so carefully concealed the army was caught unprepared and had no candidate to put forward as a replacement for Domitian. The senate seized this opportunity and chose one of its own members, Nerva, as emperor. He was already an old man when he became emperor in 96 and reigned only until 98 (Strayer et al., p. 85).

Under Nerva, John was freed from Patmos and allowed to return to Ephesus (King, p. 13; Dugger and Dodd, p. 56).

John went on tours into the heathen regions around Ephesus preaching the Gospel. He also visited the churches, ordaining bishops and clergy (JFB, p. 1513).

Also during this time he trained Polycarp, Papias and Ignatius for their roles as church bishops in the upcoming second century (Halley, p. 558).

Polycarp by this time was about 28 years old (*The World Book Encyclopedia*, “Polycarp,” p. 6479).

97

2 John Written

Though John was free, persecution against the Church of God increased. It became dangerous to merely mention the church in correspondence. When John penned his final two letters about the year 97, he resorted

to code.

When he addressed the church, he did not use the name “Church of God.” Instead, he wrote to the “dear Lady and to her children.” Those who were in the church and knew the truth understood that the “dear lady” and her children referred to them (2 John 1-2).

In his travels, John was happy to find Christians still obeying God. Not all had been deceived, martyred or had left the faith. John wrote words of encouragement and warned against false teachers:

“How happy I was to find that some of your children live in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. And so I ask you, dear Lady: let us all love one another.... This love I speak of means we must live in obedience to God’s commands...

“Many deceivers have gone out over the world, men who do not declare that Jesus Christ became mortal man. Such a person is a deceiver, he is the enemy of Christ [Anti-Christ—*NKJ*]. Watch yourselves, then, so that you do not lose what you have worked for, but will receive your reward in full.

“Anyone who does not stay with the teachings of Christ, but goes beyond it, does not have God... If anyone comes to you, then, who does not bring this teaching, do not allow him in your home; do not even say, ‘Peace be with you.’ For anyone who wishes him peace becomes his partner in the evil things he does.

“I have so much to tell you, but I would rather not do it with paper and ink; instead I hope to visit you and talk with you personally, so that we shall be completely happy.

“The children of your dear Sister send you their greetings” (vv. 4-13).

John concluded his short epistle with cautious words—stating he had more to say but would tell them in person rather than risk putting words on paper and possibly bring persecution on the church and on himself.

John Writes 3 John

Some time after John sent out his short

epistle to the church, brethren from another church brought him bad news. One of the leaders of this particular congregation had ignored John's epistle. He sought to glorify himself and taught lies. He also was inhospitable to traveling ministers and taught other brethren to be that way. This evil man was Diotrephes.

Which church Diotrephes attended is unclear. But John responded to this problem by writing to Gaius (or Caius). There are several men with these names mentioned in the Bible. He may have been the Gaius or Caius of Macedonia (Acts 19:29), or of Derbe (Acts 20:4), or of Corinth (Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14). It is likely he was a convert of John's, a layman of great wealth, and could have been Caius, bishop of Thessalonica or Caius, bishop of Pergamum. He probably was not Caius, bishop of Ephesus, if John were writing from there (Smith, "John, the Second and Third Epistles of," p. 307).

The Scriptures indicate Gaius was a convert of John's (vv. 2, 4) and a minister (v. 5).

John did not use his name in his introduction. Instead, he used the code, "From the Elder." John was the last remaining of the original apostles and indeed was elderly. He probably was in his 90s.

John told Gaius how messengers had arrived from his church: "I was so happy when some brothers arrived and told how faithful you are to the truth—just as you always live in the truth. Nothing makes me happier than to hear my children live in the truth" (vv. 3-4).

John praised Gaius for helping traveling ministers (vv. 5-8).

Then he told Gaius of the trouble Dio-

trephes was causing in his congregation:

"I wrote a short letter to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be their leader, will not pay any attention to what I say. When I come I will bring up everything he has done: the terrible things he says about us and the lies he tells! But that is not enough for him; he will not receive the brothers when they come, and even stops those who want to receive them and tries to drive them out of the church!

"My dear friend, do not imitate what is bad, but imitate what is good. Whoever does good belongs to God; whoever does what is bad has not seen God" (vv. 9-11).

On the other hand, the congregation had a good man named Demetrius. Of him, John wrote:

"Everyone speaks well of Demetrius, truth itself speaks well of him. And we add our witness, and you know what we say is true" (v. 12).

Again, as in 2 John, there was much more John wished to write, but prudence forced him to wait and tell Gaius in person. "I have so much to tell you, but I do not want to do it with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and then we can talk personally.

"Peace be with you.

"All your friends send greetings. Greet all our friends personally" (vv. 13-15).

There is no reason to doubt John fulfilled his intention and continued his travels as long as he was physically able. He died near the end of the first century of old age. He was the only one of the original apostles who did not die a martyr's death (Dugger and Dodd, p. 56). Why did he, alone, escape violent death? Perhaps it was because he was the disciple whom Jesus loved the most.