

The Great Stories of the Early Church
82-Paul in Roman Custody06
Paul at Rome
Acts 28:11-31

- 11 And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux.
- 12 And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days.
- 13 And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli:
- 14 Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome.
- 15 And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appiiforum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.
- 16 And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.
- 17 And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.
- 18 Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me.
- 19 But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of.
- 20 For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.
- 21 And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee.
- 22 But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.
- 23 And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.
- 24 And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.
- 25 And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers,
- 26 Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive:
- 27 For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.
- 28 Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.

- 29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.
- 30 And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him,
- 31 Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him. KJV

Introduction:

The last events of which we are certain from scripture in the life of Paul were those which surrounded the final leg of his journey to Rome in the custody of Roman soldiers, his interaction with the Jews at Rome, and his two years in a very mild form of imprisonment awaiting his audience with Caesar, which he had requested. Here Luke's account of Paul's life suddenly ceases for reasons we will take up in a future message.

For those who do not have a solid grasp on the reality of the Sovereignty of God, the idea that Paul spent four years as a prisoner, first at Caesarea and now in Rome may seem a real mystery. Why would God allow a man who had such a great ministry in the provinces of Asia, Macedonia, and Greece be silenced (as it seems) in this way? But God never makes mistakes and everything He does is with a purpose. He is not surprised by events nor does He need to change course because of the decisions and/or failures of men.

These four years were used by God to accomplish exactly what He intended, to present the Gospel exactly where He wanted it presented, and to save those souls that God had determined from eternity past to be saved. No time was wasted and no one went without a hearing of the gospel who might have been saved.

The trip from Miletta (or 'Malta') was very quick and uneventful.

Interestingly, the trade between Italy and Malta was well established and regular. Certainly there was no real need to wait for three months we would think. Although, we do note that this was the time of the year when sailing was not recommended because it was the stormy season on the Mediterranean. So, again, maybe the wait was necessary.

From Malta they sailed to Rhegium (ree -jee-i-um) which sat right on the Italian coast near Sicily. One story is that the name means 'division' and that it marked the location where there had been once a land bridge between Italy and the island which had disappeared at some point in the recent past from this time.

Then, they went up the coast to Puteoli where there was a port near the highway which ran north to Rome. Here they apparently disembarked for the trip to the Capitol since Rome was not a port itself. Here they found brethren, though we do not know if they were Jewish brethren or Gentile believers, Luke does not tell us. The Centurion which had custody of Paul seems to have been very well disposed toward Paul since he allowed them to stay seven days with these brethren.

About halfway between Puteoli and Rome, along this highway called the Appian Way and a couple of famous locations, the Appiiforum and the Three Taverns. These places are well known to history. Here, it seems, 'brethren' from Rome (again, identity unknown) had heard that Paul was coming and came to meet them.

When they arrived at Rome the centurion which had accompanied Paul from Caesarea, Julius, turned Paul over to the Captain of the Guard who, in turn, allowed him to take a house and stay by himself without being subjected to the actual prison. Though it seems that he did not have liberty there were liberal allowances for visitors. It is believed that from here he wrote and sent several of the letters which we find in our New Testament. It is also believed that he did much to strengthen the Roman church to which he had already written the great letter of Romans, the most complete dissertation of Christian doctrine in the New Testament.

Paul did not wait long before calling the 'Jews' together, probably the leaders and elders of the Jewish synagogue. He wanted to explain to them why he was at Jerusalem and take advantage of the opportunity to present to them the gospel.

Here is the result, again, and Paul's words to them which have caused confusion in the minds of many.

Acts 28:24-28

- 24 And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.
- 25 And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers,
- 26 Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive:
- 27 For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.
- 28 Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. KJV

This is a quote from Isaiah which was current for him as well as applicable for Paul's audience as well.

Interestingly, it is from that great passage where Isaiah had a vision of God.

Isa 6:1-13

- 1 In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.
- 2 Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.
- 3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.
- 4 And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was

- filled with smoke.
- 5 Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.
- 6 Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar:
- 7 And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.
- 8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.
- 9 And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.
- 10 Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.
- 11 Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate,
- 12 And the LORD have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land.
- 13 But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof. KJV

It seems to me that the words to Isaiah were against the backdrop of the coming Babylonian invasion and captivity which immediately followed Isaiah's ministry.

We know that historically Paul's words were spoken against the backdrop of the coming devastation of Israel from which it would never recover as a believing nation.

But what of this turning to the Gentiles? How are we to understand that?

There is a system of theology which was developed in the 19th century which still impacts conservative Christians today called Dispensationalism. Though it has various branches as most systems do, the original version was based on a principle which said that God's original intent in sending Christ was to convert the nation and set up a kingdom from Jerusalem to rule the world. It further teaches that since the Jews rejected Christ and would not hear Him, in fact crucified Him, God installed a Plan B which was to offer the gospel to the Gentiles instead of the Jews, enforce a time of devastation upon them, but ultimately to recover them through the gospel and set up the earthly kingdom for 1000 years on the earth through the return of Christ in power.

Now, I know, that is a very brief sketch of a massive body of theology but I think I have the essence of it correct. By the way, this is the reason that many conservative Christians have been excited about the rise of Israel since the 2nd World War and why many believe that we should support them now, not merely as a free and democratic nation that works with us but because there is some special bond that Christians have with them through the understanding of prophecy according to the Dispensational scheme.

Now please bear with me. I disagree with Dispensationalism on a number of points but my purpose here today is not to ridicule anyone or call them stupid. Many very smart people have and still do believe it, so I am not calling you out today or trying to call you names. I simply have a different opinion based on my own study of scriptures, not the reading of someone's book or Bible notes.

There are some things that are observably true.

The Jews did reject and crucify Christ.

After His Resurrection He did commission the church to carry the gospel to the whole world.

After the Day of Pentecost countless thousands of Gentiles were evangelized and added to the Christian Church.

Those are incontrovertible facts upon which everyone agrees. But how did history actually play out?

Do you recall that in the days immediately after the Ascension of Christ to heaven that the Holy Spirit was poured out in a Great Awakening.... Upon The Jews?

Acts 2:36-42

36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. KJV

After the healing of the lame man.

Acts 4:1-4

1 And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them,

2 Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

3 And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide.

4 Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the

men was about five thousand. KJV

When Paul returned to Jerusalem for the last time.

Acts 21:18-20

- 18 And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present.
- 19 And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.
- 20 And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: KJV

Now, please pardon me for noticing but it seems obvious that there was a great work of the Spirit of God among the Jews.... After They Had Rejected Jesus.

In fact... the Jews who believed on Jesus and preached Him among their own people were totally surprised to learn that the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the Gentiles. Remember Cornelius in Acts 10:

Acts 10:45

- 45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

It does not seem that they were anticipating a rejection of their nation by God.

So, what do Paul's words mean?

Well, if we look back in the ministry of Paul, we will find a certain pattern to his ministry where there were Jews in a city. Remember that he had been specifically called to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles.

While he was in Damascus, after the encounter with the Lord in getting there.

Acts 9:10-16

- 10 And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.
- 11 And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,
- 12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.
- 13 Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:
- 14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.
- 15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. KJV

But, as he ministered....

Acts 13:4-5

4 So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

5 And when they were at Salamis, **they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews:** and they had also John to their minister. KJV

And, so, it became a pattern. Very few of the Jewish synagogues saw the majority of their people accepting the message of Paul. Some did, as we see here at Rome in our text, but the most did not... and when they did not...

At Antioch in Pisidia...

Acts 13:42-43

42 And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath.

43 Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. KJV

But it was a pattern that Paul followed all the way to the end of his journey. But the words He spoke to the Jews at Rome had been spoken before some time earlier at Corinth.

Acts 18:5-6

5 And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.

6 And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. KJV

The words seem to actually be intended to be heard locally and to introduce a shift in Paul's ministry in each location where Jewish synagogues, having first heard the gospel, rejected Paul's words. He would take those in the synagogue; Jews, proselytes and Gentile attenders with him and establish a church.

Now, that being said, let us observe what we know of scripture and history.

There was a great work of God among the Jews after the Resurrection up to 70 A.D. when the Temple as well as the rest of Judea was crushed under the boots of Rome.

From that time on the work of God in the world was more and more among the Gentiles.

Both of these things had been prophesied as the Coming Work of the Messiah.

Paul struggled with this reality and wrote about it.

Rom 11

- 1 I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.
- 2 God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew.

The Sovereignty and electing Grace of God was in play in this whole situation. God needed not institute Plan B at all for His Plan was exactly what occurred.

- 3 Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying,
Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life.

No Revival in Israel was ever complete and no Apostasy ever was either as Elijah learned.

- 4 But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.

So, even after the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus by Israel?....

- 5 Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

God always had a remnant in Israel right up to the ministry of Paul to the Gentiles.

- 6 And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.

Grace, all of Grace, never anything but Grace.

- 7 What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded

Notice that Paul divides Israel into two camps, 'the election,' and 'the rest.' One was converted by Grace and one was rejected.

In the book of Galatians Paul will describe this very same division as "Jerusalem which now is," and "Jerusalem which is above." Gal. 4:25,26.

It sounds very much like Reprobation of "the rest," the decree of God to shun them and refuse them Grace.

- 8 (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that

they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day.

Jesus also commented on this peculiar lack of faith among the Jews of His day.

Matt 13:15-16

15 For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. KJV

The eyes that see do so because they have been 'blessed' by God.

John 12:39-40

39 Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again,

40 He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.

This is for sure rough to the ears, but is it not what the scripture says?

9 And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling block, and a recompence unto them:

10 Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back alway.

Paul is quoting David as a prophecy of exactly what happened. It is not a shift of plan.

11 I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.

God's Plan, rough as it is, has blessing enfolded in it. Through the blindness of Israel light has come to the Gentiles and the elect among Israel have been awakened to truth through being disturbed at the Work of God outside of their nation.

12 Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?

There is blessing to the world through both circumstances, the rejection of the Jews and the salvation of those among them who would believe.

13 For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:

14 If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.

Paul never lost the desire to see his people saved and he never believed that the door of the Gospel had been closed to those who would hear. He was not passive in his desire but sought to

convince and ‘provoke’ them to emulate the faith of the heathen ‘dogs,’ the ‘goya,’ in repentance and true belief.

- 15 For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?

A repeat of a previous idea. Then he turns to an elaborate analogy. Israel is an olive tree planted and tended by God. Some of it has been broken off and branches from a wild olive tree have been grafted in.

- 16 For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches.
17 And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;
18 Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.

This is a warning to Gentiles to not be arrogant in the Grace that has been given to them through the apostasy of Israel.

- 19 Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in.
20 Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear:
21 For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.

Unbelieving, hypocritically believing, falsely believing people are rejected by God be they Jew or Gentile.

- 22 Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.

Be warned. God is Good but God is also Severe. No person is truly converted but those who “continue in His goodness.” Saving faith is enduring faith, period.

- 23 And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again.

No door is closed to any Jew who will repent and believe.

- 24 For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

Bottom line, there is no hurdle to jump for a Jew which is different from that of a Gentile. It is literally, in the mind of Paul, a more natural thing (even at this late date) for a Jew to be saved than for a Gentile.

- 25 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

Paul seemed to indicate that there was a coming work upon the Jews, a New Awakening. Some believe that this means the Jews of our time and some think that it already happened in the time leading up to the Roman invasion.

Paul was definitely urging the Roman Gentile believers to have a merciful attitude toward the Jews of their city. Some had believed and their Jewish upbringing was causing tension in the church and some were yet to believe through the ministry of the Gentiles.

- 26 And so all Israel (all of the 'seed of Abraham' Jew and Gentile alike) shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:

Rom 9:6-7

6 ...For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:

7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. KJV

- 27 For this is my covenant unto them (all of them, the real Israel), when I shall take away their sins.

The elect of Israel still has Jews which have not believed and they are not the enemies of the believing Gentiles.

- 28 As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes.
29 For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.

God has not and does not change plans especially on this great matter of salvation.

- 30 For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief:
31 Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy.

The salvation of the Jews who have not as yet been converted will come through the merciful preaching of the gospel to them by Gentiles.

- 32 For God hath concluded them all (Gentile and Jew) in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.

God is Amazingly Wise and Gracious!

- 33 O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!
- 34 For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?
- 35 Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?
- 36 For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen. KJV

God saves the repentant believer by Grace through Faith, a gift from heaven not generated within one's self. Regardless of who one claims to be, the entrance to the kingdom and the invitation to repent and believe are open. None is excluded. There is no room for prejudice of any kind on this matter or the refusal to preach the gospel to any.

Eph 2:11-18

- 11 Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands;
- 12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:
- 13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.
- 14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;
- 15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;
- 16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:
- 17 And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.
- 18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. KJV

To Recap:

There was an obvious turning away from some things, particularly the Jewish form of Worship which had been given at Sinai.

The veil was torn in two at Jesus' death, a symbolic putting away of the old system,

The Holy Spirit, Who had abandoned the temple before the Babylonian invasion and the destruction of Solomon's Temple, had fallen upon the Church at Pentecost, an obvious replacement of the one with the other.

The Temple was ultimately destroyed.

New Covenant/Old Covenant Theology was finally resolved into its ultimate form.

Galatians 4/5

If you make the comparison there was almost a repeat of the 40 years in the wilderness, one generation of Jews replacing another in the time between the cross and the destruction of the Temple.

But, in the middle of all of that transition, Paul was still going first to the Jews in every city, including Rome. And, here at the end of the book of Acts we are barely 10 years from 70 A.D.

But did God cast away His people which He foreknew? Absolutely not!