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## THE TWO WAYS OF THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH

### CHAPTER 10

## PAUL RETURNS TO JERUSALEM

*"After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.....For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.....and now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the holy spirit witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.....and finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem.....And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, thus saith the Holy Spirit, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. And when we heard these things, both we and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.... and when he would not be persuaded, we ceased saying the will of the Lord be done."*  
Acts 19:21; 20:16,22,23; 21:4,10,11,12,14

**P**aul wanted to go to Jerusalem. And so he did. We cannot question his motive for it was undoubtedly honest and with the interest of the Christian church at heart. His prudence in going is another matter. Some may feel, after reading Paul's epistles and the book of Acts, that Paul always did God's will and was doing so when he went to Jerusalem for the final time. Although it is a hard thing to consider, nevertheless it is a fact that no one always does the will of God, including Paul.

A servant is not above his master, nor equal to him. Jesus Christ was the only perfect man. All others are inferior to Him, including Paul. All others, including Paul, made mistakes and will continue to make them. Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and man for the simple reason that man needs a mediator. Every man needs a mediator, including Paul. And, examination of Paul's epistles shows that Paul would be the first to admit this reality. Nowhere does Paul say or imply that he became a perfect man when he was saved. He received a perfect gift from God but realized his continuing dependence on God to overcome his old nature. He says, "for when I would do good, evil is present with me" (Rom. 7:21).

Paul also tells us that nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:31-39). Therefore, we can rest in the peace of God even when our mind tells us to do one thing and our heart tells us to do another. It is clear from Acts 19:21 that Paul wanted to go to Jerusalem. But, "purposed in the spirit" in that verse is translated "pondered in spirit" by Knoch and the greek word used, *titemi*, means to put or to place. In other words, Paul sought in spirit to determine whether or not he should go to Jerusalem.

### Should Paul Have Gone to Jerusalem? Part I

The question that needs to be asked is, "Did God want Paul to go to Jerusalem?". It is certainly not my intention to belittle Paul in any way by posing this question. Rather, my purpose is to try to show that Paul's attempts to maintain fellowship with the Jerusalem church had reached a clearly impossible stage. If

it is true that God was telling Paul not to go to Jerusalem, as well as telling other Christians by the spirit to confirm to Paul that he should not go to Jerusalem, then the state of events within the Christian church by the year 56 A.D. become much clearer.

If we assume that God must have wanted Paul to go to Jerusalem because Paul went there, then we must allow that God could tell people, "by the spirit" (Acts 21:4), to tell Paul not to go to Jerusalem and also tell Paul, "by the spirit", that he should go to Jerusalem. Such a possibility is not comprehensible and leads to the erroneous conclusion that the bible is not understandable. Great damage has been done to the Christian community by such conclusions.

Such conclusions cause many people to cease from reading their bibles altogether, and thereby deny them the opportunity to feast on the bread of life. As one author pointed out regarding the second and third century church, "God came to be viewed as fundamentally mysterious and outside the realm of reason". Such a view is essentially pagan and not Christian. The Christian view is that God revealed Himself clearly in His Word and in His Son, Jesus Christ. We can know God's will clearly by the study of His Word, the guidance of His spirit, and the intercession of His Son. Acts 20 and 21 provide clear evidence that God's will for Paul was to refrain from going to Jerusalem.

We can understand Paul's desire in wanting to go to Jerusalem. Many of us today have experienced the frustration of trying our best to achieve reconciliation with a person or group, only to conclude ultimately that reconciliation is not possible without a willingness on the part of both parties to "repair the breach". Paul's desire to go to Jerusalem was surely this kind of "one sided" attempt at reconciliation.

Today we hear much about "forgiving" others. Seldom is it brought to our attention that "forgiveness" is a meaningless term unless it is associated with "repentance". Jesus said, "and if he repent, forgive him" (Luke 17:3). He amplifies his instruction in the following verse by saying "if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; though shalt forgive him." (Luke 17:4). Surely, forgiveness is clearly required of the Christian. But, just as surely, repentance is the act that makes forgiveness possible. We can understand Paul hoping to achieve a reconciliation with the Jerusalem church. We can also understand (as Paul later did) that "the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed" (Acts 28:27). We do not question Paul's desire, only his failure to admit that the situation in Jerusalem was such that he could not possibly achieve a reconciliation by his presence there.

Jesus said, "the children of this world are in their generation 'wiser' (meaning more thoughtful or prudent) than the children of light" (Luke 16:8). Certainly Jesus is not suggesting here that the children of light should become children of this world. But, in the parable in which He makes the above statement He concludes with the statement that "you cannot serve God and mammon (money)". We are left to draw the proper parallels.

One parallel seems to be that Christians sometimes get "mixed up" when they try to evaluate a situation from both God's point of view and man's point of view. The natural man has no such problem because he cannot even try to evaluate a situation from God's point of view. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (I Cor. 2:14). Perhaps this is why Jesus says that the children of this world are "wiser" or "more thoughtful" or "more prudent" than the children of light. The children of this world do not have the "task" of balancing their own views with those of the spirit of God- a sometimes troubling task for the Christian who realizes that he has imperfect knowledge of God's will and yet desires to do God's will.

Perhaps Jesus words can be applied to Paul's situation in wanting to go to Jerusalem. Paul did bring with him representatives from the churches of Asia with collections taken up from those churches to bring to Jerusalem. It seems possible that Paul felt the offerings would mitigate against his unpopularity there. If so, Paul may have been confusing "serving God" with "serving mammon". It is not an uncommon mistake of the Christian. Often times the Christian feels that "giving things" will "open a door" that would

otherwise stay closed. Many times he finds that the door stays closed even after he has "given things". Certainly the door stayed closed to Paul in Jerusalem as we will see.

## Should Paul Have Gone to Jerusalem? Part II

Whether the money that Paul brought was to be given to the Jerusalem church, or to the nation of Israel as a whole, is a question of no small importance in our perception of the Jerusalem church. The natural assumption, due no doubt to the common perception of the Jerusalem church as the "mother church", is that Paul brought this money for the Jerusalem church. However, in Paul's defense before the governor Felix, he says, "Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings" (Acts 24:17). If this is true, then we see the Jerusalem church as an integral part of Israel and not an unpopular and insignificant "sect" that had no status with the nation.

In any event, the verses cited at the start of this chapter seem to make it clear that God did not want Paul to go to Jerusalem. In Acts 20:22 Paul says, "I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem". If he would have said, "I go rejoicing in the spirit unto Jerusalem" we would have no difficulty in understanding that he was "free in the spirit" to go. But, "bound in the spirit" seems to imply a resistance by the spirit to his going. The following verses show that resistance. Acts 20:23 says that "the holy spirit witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me" (if I go to Jerusalem). In Acts 21:4 we find disciples in Tyre "who said to Paul through the spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem". It does not seem possible that God could tell the people in Tyre "through the spirit" that Paul should not go up to Jerusalem and at the same time be telling Paul by the same spirit that he should go up to Jerusalem.

I know it is difficult to picture Paul doing something that God did not want him to do, but Luke goes to great lengths in Acts to fully describe the circumstances under which Paul went to Jerusalem, his reception when he arrived, and the consequences of his action in going to Jerusalem. Almost a third of the book of Acts is devoted to Paul's final trip to Jerusalem (about 57 A.D.) and his imprisonment following. It is, by far, the event that Luke deals with most fully. We must conclude because he did so that of all the events he covers it is the most important.

Fully half of the book of Acts is devoted to the events surrounding Paul's final trip to Jerusalem, the events surrounding Stephen's death and the events surrounding the conversion of the household of Cornelius. All three events deal with conflict within the Christian church and, because of the extensiveness with which Luke deals with these events, we are drawn to the conclusion that showing the conflict over law and grace, within the church, is a major purpose of the book of Acts rather than Acts merely furnishing "an orderly and reliable record of the rise and progress of the Christian faith". There is evidence that the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts were originally two parts of one work. If so, the purpose, given by Luke in Luke 1:1, applies also to the book of Acts. Namely, "to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us." Luke could hardly give an account of "all things believed among us" since that would be an impossible task. He tells of the most important, the "most surely believed". The amount of time Luke spends with Stephen, with Cornelius, and with Paul's final trip to Jerusalem seems to show that the message of "the grace of God" was central to "those things which are most surely believed among us". If so, it is not only the thrilling reality that "so great a salvation" has been given to us, but also a rejection of that reality by a substantial number of people in the church that Luke wants us to know. It is a critical issue and may well have been the cause of the death of Stephen, the loss of esteem of Peter, and the four or more year imprisonment of Paul.

With all these things in mind, certainly is it important to decide the primary question "Did God want Paul to go to Jerusalem or did He not want him to go?" In Acts 21:8 we are told that, as Paul continued on his way to Jerusalem, he stayed with Philip the evangelist, "which was one of the seven" of Acts 6:3. We are then told that Philip's four daughters prophesied (Acts 21:9). We are not told of what they prophesied, but, in the context, we are led to the conclusion that the prophesy included the statement, "don't go to Jerusalem". Some may object to "reading something into a verse that is not there", but the fact that Luke tells us that Philip was living in Caesarea and was "one of the seven" (namely, one of those picked with Stephen in Acts 6:5), indicates that Philip had been driven out of Jerusalem (probably upon the

persecution of Acts 8:1), and the "tie in" to "they won't accept you either, Paul" is not unreasonable.

Acts 21:10 tells us that Paul and his company "tarried there many days". This could, perhaps, be showing us a hesitancy on Paul's part to proceed on to Jerusalem as well as telling us that Paul arrived in Caesarea well before Pentecost. We then see that God sends down a prophet from Judea, named Agabus, and he demonstrates what will happen to Paul if he goes to Jerusalem. After the people heard what the prophet had to say, "both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem." (Acts 21:12). Not only did the believers in Caesarea, Philip, Agabus, Philip's four daughters, and assumably a large Christian community, plead with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Luke makes clear that he also was against Paul going to Jerusalem as were those that traveled with Paul.

### **Should Paul Have Gone to Jerusalem? Part III**

In response to what must have been a unanimous appeal for Paul not to go to Jerusalem, Paul says, "what mean ye to weep and to break mine heart." (Acts 21:13). It is evident that all the people who were trying to convince Paul not to go to Jerusalem loved him. And it is evident that Paul loved them as well. It seems obvious that virtually everyone knew that Paul would be in deep trouble if he went to Jerusalem. And, when we see in Acts 21:20 that "many 'myriads of thousands' (myriad means 'ten thousand') of Jews there are which believe" are in Jerusalem, and "they are all zealous of the law", we cannot help but see two entirely different groups of Christians, those in the Jerusalem church or affiliated with it and those who did their best to plead the case that Paul should not go up to Jerusalem.

Paul also shows us his determination in Acts 21:13 by declaring "I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus". Implied in his statement is the fact that Paul also knew the risk he was taking. The question was not whether or not Paul would be at risk by going to Jerusalem. Luke tells us very clearly that Paul, and everyone else that he was associated with, knew he would be at great risk if he did go. As early as Acts 20:23, Paul told the elders from Ephesus that the holy spirit testified in every city he went to that bonds and afflictions awaited him if he went to Jerusalem. The only question that needs to be answered is whether or not God wanted Paul to go to Jerusalem.

Acts 21:14 is a verse that should be totally clear on the subject and should answer the question unequivocally. However, in the King James Version, as well as most other versions, it does not do so. Because of the way in which commas are added, it is made to say that when Paul would not be persuaded by all the evidence discussed above, to refrain from going to Jerusalem, the people "ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done." We are led to believe that after the people did their best to persuade Paul not to go to Jerusalem, and were virtually unanimous in their efforts, that they then admitted that they didn't know the will of the Lord after all and were finally saying, "whatever you do, Paul, it will be the will of the Lord."

With the commas removed, the verse says, "And when he would not be persuaded we ceased saying the will of the Lord be done." The sense of the verse becomes opposite without the commas. But, when we realize that there were no commas in the uncil and cursive texts from which the King James version ultimately came, we are forced to admit that the punctuation of the verse is a matter of interpretation rather than translation. If Luke did not spend so much time with the account of Paul's final trip to Jerusalem, perhaps we could afford to leave the verse as an undecided detail.

However, because Luke does spend so much time with the events leading up to Paul going to Jerusalem, the accurate understanding of this verse cannot be left undecided without clouding the whole reason for Luke going into such detail to tell us how extensively Paul was urged not to go to Jerusalem. If we understand Acts 21:14 to be saying that the people tried their best to persuade Paul not to go up to Jerusalem, including saying "through the spirit that he should not go up to Jerusalem" (Acts 21:4), beseeching him "not to go up to Jerusalem" (Acts 21:12) after hearing the prophet Agabus, and when he would not be persuaded they ceased to plead with Paul that "the will of the Lord be done", we must conclude that it was definitely not the will of God for Paul to go up to Jerusalem.

Such an understanding does not belittle Paul or take away from his stand for grace in any way. In fact,

God's grace is amplified when we consider the possibility that Paul could be disobeying God by going to Jerusalem and yet be delivered from his enemies there after ignoring a clear instruction from God that would have kept him from going in the first place. Such amazing grace is exactly what Paul shows us in his epistles. Our inability is overcome by His ability. Our error is corrected by His truth. Our imprudence is covered by His protection. Our sins are washed away and made not to count against us by our Lord. Such grace is truly amazing, but, as we shall see, it was an intolerable concept in Jerusalem. The unparalleled apostle of grace was hated in Jerusalem.

### **Paul Arrives in Jerusalem**

We can well imagine Paul's desire to go to Jerusalem and plead the cause of grace to the Jerusalem church even though God told him not to go. He was "bound in the spirit" (Acts 20:22). Disciples said to Paul through the spirit that he should not go up to Jerusalem (Acts 21:4). And the prophet Agabus came to Paul and demonstrated what would happen to him if he did go to Jerusalem (Acts 21:11). Paul went, and his Lord went with him, to mediate, defend, and deliver him. As Jesus Christ had told Paul to speak boldly in Corinth (Acts 18:9,10), so also He had told Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Paul disobeyed and yet his disobedience was not held to his account. He was delivered.

Hopes and dreams and compassion are powerful things- as are background and education. And, all these surely entered into Paul's determination to go to Jerusalem. He must have felt that if he could just reason with them from the scripture he could get them to see that the gospel of grace was bigger than they were. He must have felt that he could convince them that the moving of the spirit of God throughout the world was a move of God in a way the world had never known before and they should not fight it.

He must have felt he could get them to repent and accept Peter's reproof given in the council seven or eight years before, "Why are you tempting God, to put a yoke about the Gentiles which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear?" (Acts 15:10). In any event, Paul went to Jerusalem and Acts 21 is the record of what happened. Acts 21:17 tells us that the brethren received Paul and his company gladly. The following day Paul went to see James and all the elders were present at the meeting. This was a big meeting, and a serious meeting.

Paul reports what God had wrought by his ministry among the Gentiles and then James speaks. Acts 21:20 says, "when they heard, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him..." A. E. Knoch's translation says, (Acts 21:18-20) "Now by the ensuing day Paul had been in, together with us, to James. Besides, all the elders came along. And, greeting them, he unfolded, one by one, each of the things which God does among the nations through his dispensation. Now those who hear glorified God. Besides, they said to him..."

The question is, who does the speaking that follows? Certainly it was not a rehearsed speech that was spoken in unison. It had to be James that did the speaking, and he is obviously the head of the Jerusalem church. Paul went to see James, not a council, and not the elders. The elders went with Paul to see James. Clearly James is the head of the church. Notice also that the apostles are absent both from the initial group that greeted Paul and from the meeting the following day with James.

James says, "Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law" (Acts 21:20). Knoch's translation has it, "You are beholding, brother, how many tens of thousands there are among the Jews who have believed, and all are inherently zealous for the law". Eusebius, about 324 A.D., cites this same verse and says, "there were many ten thousands of Jews who were persuaded that he (Jesus) was the Christ of God". The difference between "thousands" and "tens of thousands" is substantial. It certainly impacts on the picture we develop of how extensive Christianity was in Jerusalem twenty seven years after the start of the church age. It also indicates how big the city of Jerusalem was at this time. The greek word used in the verse is not "chilias" or "thousands", but rather "murias" in its plural form "muriades" or "myriads" which means "ten thousands". The same word is used in Acts 19:19 where "fifty thousand pieces of silver" is "five myriads" or "five ten thousands".

The word, muriades, is the same word used in the singular by Paul in I Cor. 4:15, "Though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ..." and in I Cor. 14:19, where Paul says, "I had rather speak five words with

my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue". See also Jude 14, and Matt. 18:24 where *muriades* is also translated "ten thousand". Why just about all translations, including Moffatt, chose to erroneously translate Acts 21:20 as "many thousands" instead of "many ten thousands", as "*urias*" or "*muriades*" is everywhere else translated, can only be due to a failure to believe there were so many Christians in Jerusalem at the time rather than not understanding the greek word "*muriades*".

We see, unequivocally, that this was no small church of which James was the head. Notice that James says, "they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs." (Acts 21:21). We are not told how they were informed, only that they were informed. And James, the brother of Jesus, is the one who speaks the words. We are not told if the "information" was correct or not, but we do know from Paul's epistles that "neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision" (Gal. 5:6). Since the epistle of Galatians was written shortly after the Jerusalem Council, it was probably available, orally if not in writing, to the Jerusalem church. It also seems clear from the rest of Paul's epistles that the "information" the "tens of thousands of Jews that believed" had, was substantially correct, even if it was distorted and applied wrongly.

James' instructions to Paul clearly show his concern, not necessarily for Paul's safety, but for Paul acting so as to disprove the information that the Jerusalem church had in its possession. James wanted Paul brought under law, and thereby under his authority! (see Acts 21:24). Furthermore, he reminds Paul of the directive he had issued to the Gentiles, following the Jerusalem Council (Acts 21:25). The fact that Luke tells us these things make them stand out as important to our comprehension of the Jerusalem church at this time. Clearly, James was the head of the Jerusalem church and we have seen that this church had many tens of thousands of members at the time of Paul's arrival there. From what we have discussed earlier, it is also apparent the the Christians who "in every city witnessed that bonds and afflictions" awaited Paul in Jerusalem knew of the size of the Jerusalem church and that James was the head of that church.

In summary of the account in Acts 21, James tells Paul in verse 24 to go pay his Temple dues, and purify himself and pay the charges of four of James representatives, and then everyone would know that what they heard about Paul not keeping the law was false. He then reminds Paul of the letter he had written at the Jerusalem council, seven or eight years prior, regarding the Gentiles and amazingly enough, Paul does what James instructs.

### **The Effect of James' Advice**

Does it work? Is James advice sound? Absolutely not! All those tens of thousands of "believing" Jews in Jerusalem for the feast, did their best to try to kill Paul. And the only thing that saved his life was his Roman citizenship (and the mediation of Jesus Christ).

This is the same Jerusalem and the same feast of Pentecost where twenty seven years earlier a mighty deliverance began in Israel as recorded in Acts 2. Twenty seven years isn't much time for someone fifty years old. It's an incomprehensible amount of time for someone fifteen. But, there were sure to be many in the Temple who had been there twenty seven years earlier when everyone heard the apostles speak in tongues "the wonderful works of God" and some three thousand people believed.

Most had been adults during the following twenty seven years. They had seen the great deliverance in Israel during that time and now they were seeing God's deliverance in the other nations of the world as well. They were jealous.

It is possible that some would have been there who remembered the events of about sixty years before when Jesus was born and Herod had all the male children two years and younger in and around Bethlehem killed. They would have remembered the prophecies of John the Baptist, Anna, Simeon, and most of all, they would have known of the miracles that Jesus did and also that the nation of Israel caused His crucifixion.

Many of them had repented and had been born again and received a new nature and spoke in tongues and manifested miracles and received healing. How could they be so hateful to Paul? Who spread the hatred? Was it not, at least in part, the sect of the pharisees within the church? Was it not, at least in part, with the sanction of James?

Acts 21:27 tells us who started the turmoil that day. It was the Jews which were of Asia. And where had Paul been ministering for the previous seven years? Asia! And where was the Word of God growing mightily and prevailing? Asia.

And, were these Jews from Asia acting on their own behalf? Were they isolated from the rest of the "Christian Jews" or "believing Jews" who had been informed about Paul as James pointed out. It is not likely that they were. The context points to the conclusion that they were under the authority of the Jerusalem church headed by James and that they had been "informed" about Paul. If they were not among the many tens of thousands of Jews that believed, it seems irrelevant that Luke would point out that they were from Asia. Verse thirty says that they moved all the city. Verse thirty one says that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.

And, what was the accusation they leveled against Paul? Verse twenty eight says, "This is the man, that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the Temple, and hath polluted this holy place." Notice that the accusation was not only that Paul brought a Greek into the Temple. We are told that the main accusation was that Paul "taught all men everywhere" against the people, against the law and against the Temple. There was obviously a "kernel" of truth in what they were saying, but not in the sense in which they meant it. Also notice that the accusation did not include the fact that Paul taught the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Such an accusation could not have carried any weight with tens of thousands of Christian Jews being in Jerusalem.

### **The Nature of the Jerusalem Church**

It does not appear that twenty seven years after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ there was much of an argument in Jerusalem over the resurrection. James, Jesus' brother, was the undisputed head of the Jerusalem church and the ruling powers could say, "that isn't an issue anymore, go see James about it. He is the Lord's brother and is the head of that sect- with our blessings."

It seems clear that the High Priest and leaders of Israel had effectively contained the Jerusalem church within the framework of their authority. Nothing more was required. That church would do their bidding. Like many churches today- you can be a member but you can't speak in tongues. Or, you can be a member but you must follow the leader, right or wrong. In short, the people in Jerusalem were free like birds in a cage and after a while they got used to it and didn't even try to find a way out.

These people did not accuse Paul of teaching the resurrection, they accused him of teaching against the people- the "chosen of God", Israel! As one minister stated the situation, "To avoid the pain of persecution, they used the gospel to swell the ranks of Judaism. They were facing two ways, studying the safest, not the truest course, anxious to be friends at once with Christ and his enemies. The circumcisionists were true representatives of apostate Israel. They were a living embodiment of the moral and spiritual degradation to which the chosen nation had sunk." These were not a small minority in Israel that were "Christian". They were, in all probability, the majority.

And of them all, Paul would write about four years later in Colossians, that Aristarchus, Mark and Justus were the only members of the circumcision who were a comfort to him by that time (Col. 4:10-11). In that epistle, he would also give his answer to James' sentence about not eating anything strangled or offered to idols. Paul's "sentence" is, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath" (Col. 2:16).

There is a verse of scripture in the gospels that sheds light on the subject we are discussing, and is one that I misread for many years. Matthew 24:5 says, "For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ: and shall deceive many." I always read it, "Many shall come in my name saying that they are Christ and shall

deceive many." Clearly, that is not what the verse says. It says that many will come and declare that Jesus is Christ and yet they will deceive many even as they do so. Jesus Christ is clearly stating that there will be deceivers in the church. Paul points out the same problem when he says, "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30).

Paul also writes to Timothy, "Now the spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth (I Tim. 4:1-3). Clearly, there are those who will come and declare that Jesus is Christ and yet they will deceive many.

The evidence in Acts shows that James was one of these deceivers. He apparently admitted that Jesus was the Messiah, but his intention was to bring the people into the bondage of the law and under his authority and the authority of the Temple and Israel. Acts 21 and following show that either this was the case or else they show that James and the tens of thousands of Christian Jews in Jerusalem stood by helplessly as the people in Jerusalem tried to kill Paul. It is hard to believe that James and many tens of thousands of believers were helpless or powerless.

Paul had to appeal to his Roman citizenship to save his life. A man who's heart's desire was always that Israel might be saved, and who's ministry was unparalleled in the history of the world, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, concerning the law, blameless, has to appeal to his Roman citizenship to save his life while he is in the Temple in Jerusalem. To me, this is truly an amazing state of affairs!

Paul would state years later in the letter to Timothy that there were those who had a form of godliness, but denied the power thereof. His instruction to Timothy was, "from such, turn away" (II Tim. 3:5). Perhaps Paul's mistake in going to Jerusalem was in his mind when he wrote those words.

In Jerusalem, and in the Temple itself, Paul faced hatred and the people were incited to want to kill him. The location of the effort to take Paul's life is as significant as everything else Luke tells us about Paul's final trip to Jerusalem. There was no greater form of godliness than the Temple in Jerusalem and the whole structure of the Jewish nation culminated in the Temple. We even saw in Acts 6:7 that a "great company of priests were obedient to the faith." And yet, Paul had to be rescued from the Temple by the Roman authority and hustled out of town at night by the Roman guards in order to save his life.

Acts 21,22,23 show the absolute hatred and contempt that all of Jerusalem had for the apostle Paul. It is similar in many respects to the picture of Jerusalem when Israel killed Jesus Christ and when Israel killed Stephen. The end to God's delivering Israel as a nation is suggested by the deliverance of Paul from the nation of Israel by the Roman soldiers. Two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen are required to escort him out of Jerusalem (Acts 23:23). That is four hundred seventy soldiers securing the safety of one man on a trip of 55 miles from Jerusalem to Caesarea.

### **Paul's Defense Before the People of Jerusalem**

Acts 22 gives us the account of Paul's defense after being rescued from the Temple by the Roman guard. Paul's deliverance from certain death came from the Tower of Antonia which was connected to the Temple area and garrisoned by Roman soldiers. As Paul was being escorted up the stairs to the Tower, he asked the chief captain for permission to speak to the people and was granted his request. The speech that Paul makes to the multitude shows us many things that add clarity to the picture of Jerusalem at this time.

In the first place, Acts 21:31-32 tell us that "all Jerusalem was in an uproar" and that the people were beating Paul when the soldiers came to his rescue. We are also told in no uncertain terms that the intention of the people was to kill Paul (verse 31). Presumably this was because of the rumor that spread through the crowd that Paul had brought a Gentile past the court of the Gentiles, a capital offense. However, this is not necessarily the only reason they were incited to want to kill Paul. From what we have

seen from Acts 20 and 21, there must have been plenty of evidence, clearly seen by the Gentiles in every city where Paul ministered, that the Jews in Jerusalem hated Paul. To say that the rumor of Paul's bringing a Gentile into the Temple proper was the only cause of their hatred, denies the fact that Paul was well known in Jerusalem and that the "many tens of thousands of believers" there had been "informed" of Paul before he came to Jerusalem (Acts 21:20). It also seems highly significant that Luke does not mention that either James, the elders, or any of the "tens of thousands of believers" came to Paul's defense or even tried to intercede on his behalf. Once again, Luke's silence seems to speak loudly to us.

We are told that "Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue" (Acts 21:40). We are also told that "when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence" (Acts 22:2). Since Luke was in all probability an eye witness to this event (see Acts 21:17) he can hardly be exaggerating in his description of the crowd's attention. When we consider the fact that there may have been a hundred thousand people or more in the Temple area (which covered more than 20 acres) the magnitude of the event comes into focus.

Paul starts his defense by introducing himself as "brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel." (Acts 22:3). Since Gamaliel was the disciple and successor of Hillel, and since the school of Hillel was one of the two dominant schools in Jerusalem in New Testament times, Paul's credential as an intimate student of Gamaliel was bound to have an effect on the crowd. After saying that he had persecuted "this way unto death" (Acts 22:4), he goes so far as to say that the High Priest would bear him witness as would "all the estate of the elders" (Acts 22:5). If there were no other indications of Paul's being well known in Jerusalem, this verse would be sufficient to demonstrate the fact. Before a hateful crowd, Paul says that the High Priest and all the estate of the elders would bear witness to the fact that he actively persecuted the Christian church before his conversion.

The rest of Paul's defense adds to our knowledge of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus recorded in Acts 9. However, it does much more than this when we consider that it is given in the context of an angry mob wanting to kill Paul. In pointing out to the people that he was on an official mission authorized by the High Priest and "all the estate of the elders", Paul established that Jesus Christ interrupted the mission and countermanded the orders of the High Priest and the elders. That the people allowed him to proceed with his defense after mentioning Jesus Christ is in keeping with our being told that there were "many tens of thousands of Jews" who believed in Jerusalem. It also shows us that the people did not hate Paul because he believed in Jesus Christ, nor did they hate him because they doubted the fact that Jesus Christ appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus. They allowed him to speak until he used the word Gentile (Acts 22:21,22). When Paul said, "and He (Jesus Christ) said unto me, depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles", the Jews would listen no longer and "lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fitting that he should live."

The question to be asked is, "why did they conclude that it was not fitting that Paul should live?" The only answer that fits the substance of his defense is that he dared to state that Jesus Christ sent him to the Gentiles. They allowed him to continue speaking after he said the High Priest and elders would bear him witness of his actions before his conversion. They allowed him to continue speaking after he told them of his meeting with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. They allowed him to continue speaking after he told them that Jesus Christ had spoken to a man named Ananias in Damascus (not Ananias the High Priest) and that Ananias told him, "thou shalt be His witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard." They even allowed him to continue speaking after he reported that Jesus Christ came to him in the Temple and said, "make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me."

But, when Paul reports that Jesus Christ said to him, in the Temple, "Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles," they would not allow him to speak further but raised their voices and expressed their will that he should be killed. It seems clear that their hatred was focused on the "equal salvation" of the Gentiles rather than on "salvation" in general.

It is also interesting to note that Paul says in his "argument" with Jesus Christ in the Temple, that "I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believe on Thee." (Acts 22:19). In Acts 8:3 we are told that Paul entered "every house" and took Christians to prison. Since "house" and "synagogue" are different words in the Greek texts, we must conclude that Paul did both. Our earlier discussion of the magnitude of the Christian church in Jerusalem is confirmed by the statement that Paul went into "every synagogue" as well as "every home". It seems clear that the Christian Jews continued to attend the synagogues in Jerusalem rather than separating and meeting only in houses, as many suppose. And, to see "many tens of thousands of Jews" which believed in Jerusalem more than twenty five years later, is a fact that concurs in showing us that Christianity was well accepted in Jerusalem and among the dispersion. It was grace that was not accepted rather than the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The issue which generated conflict seems clearly to be the conditions under which salvation was acceptable to Israel rather than salvation itself. The church in Jerusalem, headed up by James, the brother of Jesus, seems to clearly stand for the superiority of the Jew over the Gentile, while the church represented by Paul clearly stands for the "new creation in Christ" where there is neither Jew nor Gentile. (see I Cor. 12:13, Eph. 3:6, Rom. 3:9, 9:24, 10:4,12).

### **Paul's Beating at the Hands of the Roman Soldiers**

After Paul was taken into the Tower of Antonia, the chief captain gave the order to have Paul interrogated by scourging so that he could ascertain just why the people were so upset (Acts 22:24). Since he had given Paul permission to speak to the crowd, it is evident that he heard Paul's speech and yet could not understand why the people were so upset with what Paul said. It is unlikely that the chief captain was totally ignorant of the Jews religion or of the fact that there were "many tens of thousands of Jews in Jerusalem which believed". If Paul was hated simply because he was a Christian, it seems that the chief captain would have drawn that conclusion from Paul's speech. However, the implications of the fact that the crowd stopped Paul from speaking when he mentioned that Jesus Christ had sent him to the Gentiles might well have escaped the chief captain. In any event, it is clear that the chief captain could not conclude from Paul's speech what was the nature of the problem.

It also should not be lost on us that the chief captain would have reexamined in his mind the content of Paul's speech while Paul was being "examined". He faced a severe disturbance and he was responsible to the Roman authority for maintaining order in Jerusalem. We can well imagine him sitting at his desk and outlining the major elements of Paul's speech on a note pad. From the statement that the High Priest and "all the estate of the elders" would bear Paul witness, he would conclude that Paul was well known and "well connected". That he had violated their "trust" would be apparent. That Paul was following their orders when he was interrupted by Jesus Christ, would probably be something he would put down as "Jewish superstition". And when he came to the point that Paul caused an uproar by stating that Jesus Christ had sent him to the Gentiles, he would have to shake his head and consider the Jews as "unfathomable" since they were always trying to make proselytes out of the Gentiles. Why they would be upset with Paul going to the Gentiles would certainly be unfathomable to him.

We can well imagine that the chief captain would be left to wonder how and why Paul could cause such a disturbance. And, we can well apply Paul's instruction, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Cor.2:14), to the chief captain. He evidently was not a Jew and he evidently was not a Christian. He could not, therefore, understand the hatred thrown at "the apostle of grace" by those "zealous of the law".

We see from Acts 22:25-29 that the chief captain was "afraid" when he found out that Paul was a Roman and that in having him bound and beaten, he had broken Roman law. Once again we see the word "afraid" applied to a courageous man (as we saw in Gal. 2:12 where we saw that Peter was afraid of those who came from James). It can hardly mean that he was a coward. But, it was a serious matter for him to have had a Roman citizen bound and beaten. And, no doubt more serious still, the chief captain realized that the "mob" in Jerusalem had been very close to killing a Roman citizen, and the consequences of such an

action could have precipitated all out war with Rome. Paul had implicated in the disturbance the High Priest as well as all the estate of the elders.

### **Paul's "Examination" before the Sanhedrin**

In Acts 22:30, we are told that on the following day the chief captain was still intent on getting to the "bottom of the matter" and therefore commanded the Sanhedrin to meet. From this fact, it is clear that Paul was not on trial before the Sanhedrin but rather that the Sanhedrin was "on trial" before the chief captain. Paul was brought "unbound" to the meeting, as a Roman citizen, and his actions at the meeting could hardly be described as those of a defendant before a judge and jury. The setting is clearly defined as one in which the chief captain was determined to pinpoint the cause of the previous days riot. It seems clear that he had not decided the issue and still held open the possibility that Paul was not to blame but rather the High Priest and the people of Jerusalem were to blame.

The first ten verses of Acts 23 are the record of the meeting called by the chief captain of the Roman guard. Paul begins the meeting by "earnestly beholding the council" and saying, "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." In other words, Paul declares that he is innocent of any wrong doing and is not responsible for the riot of the previous day. If it were not for the words in Acts 22:30, that the chief captain of the Roman guard "commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear" we would be inclined to think that the High Priest was in charge of the meeting. However, because we are specifically told that the chief captain called the meeting, we must understand the statements and actions in the meeting in the light of the chief captain watching the whole proceedings to decide how the riot of the previous day was caused. In that light, the order of the High Priest, Ananias, to have Paul slapped on the mouth is much more understandable. Paul's claim that "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day", could hardly, in itself, have been sufficient cause for the High Priest to have acted so precipitously.

However, if the High Priest's action is seen as a demonstration designed to convince the chief captain of the Roman guard that Paul's implication (that the High Priest and his agents were responsible for the riot) was wrong, then it is much more understandable. Paul's reaction to the blow was as out of character for a trial as was the High Priests reaction to Paul's opening sentence. Paul said, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?" (Acts 23:3). Knoch's translation says, "God is about to beat you, whitewashed wall! And you are sitting to judge me according to the law, and illegally are you ordering me to be beaten!" This meeting seems much more like a fight than an orderly judicial proceeding. Paul's use of "whitewashed wall" is reminiscent of Jesus calling the Pharisees, "whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness" (Matt. 23:27).

The "brethren" which were standing by must have been amazed by Paul's frontal attack on the High Priest for they said, "Revilest thou God's High Priest?" Who these "brethren" were, is not clear. However, in Paul's first defense on the stairs to the Tower, the day before, he addresses the people as "men, brethren, and fathers" and it seems to me that the "men" would be the men of Israel, the "brethren" would be the Christians who were "zealous of the law, and the "fathers" would be the elders of the people. If so, the "brethren" that were "standing by" would have been Christians of the Jerusalem church who were amazed that Paul would dare to "revile" the High Priest.

If these "brethren" were Christians of the Jerusalem church, then Paul's answer to them becomes much more understandable. He says, "I wist (knew) not, brethren, that he was the High Priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people." (Acts 23:5a). It seems clear that Paul knew he was addressing the "High Priest" from the fact that he said "sittest thou to judge me after the law" in his angry retort to Ananias' command to have him struck. Therefore, it cannot be an apologetic response that Paul is making. He certainly was not saying, "I'm sorry, I didn't know he was High Priest or I would not have offended him." The second part of Paul's answer to the "brethren" shows that he is emphatically saying that Ananias is not the High Priest at all! He says, "for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people." (Acts 23:5b).

If the "brethren" were Jewish Christians, and if, as is commonly accepted, the book of Hebrews was written about the time that Galatians was written, shortly after the Jerusalem council of 49 A.D., then we can assume that the content of the book of Hebrews was common knowledge among the Jerusalem Christians. If so, the "brethren" could readily conclude that Paul was drawing a contrast between the "secular" High Priest and the "High Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb. 6:20), Jesus Christ. Even if the position of some is admitted that Paul did not write Hebrews or that the book of Hebrews was written at a later date, it seems reasonable that the concept of Jesus Christ being High Priest was known and discussed during the first twenty five or more years of the church age. Certainly in Jerusalem it would have been discussed. With this in mind, Paul's answer to the question, "Revilest thou God's High Priest" seems clearly to be, "the High Priest you are referring to is not the High Priest at all because he speaks evil of the ruler of thy people, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the High Priest of the people."

There were evidently fifteen High Priests that served in the Temple in the thirty six years of the church age prior to the war with Rome which began in 66 A.D.. Not one of them was worthy to be compared to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was the High Priest forever, after the order of Melchisedec (all we know of Melchisedec is that Abraham gave him an offering from which some conclude that he was Shem). Since Jesus Christ had risen from the dead, and since according to the original Jewish law, the High Priest was High Priest for life, Jesus Christ was obviously the High Priest, not Ananias! The buying of the office from the Roman governor by the wealthy Sadduceeian families had made a mockery of the institution of the High Priest and many of the Pharisees would have understood Paul's point even if they did not wholeheartedly believe in Jesus Christ.

The record of the rest of the meeting is also significant. Paul causes the Sanhedrin to be split in two by his declaration that he was a Pharisee and had been called in question because of "the hope and resurrection of the dead". We can imagine Jesus Christ whispering in Paul's ear, "what we have here, Paul, is an opportunity for a little 'divide and conquer' strategy." Acts 23:6 says, "and when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other part Pharisees, he cried out in the council..." Certainly Paul knew the general make up of the Sanhedrin long before the meeting we are considering. Therefore, "perceived" must be considered in the sense of "it dawned on him" or "he recognized an opportunity in light of the fact" or "he received revelation" rather than finding out for the first time that there were Sadducees and Pharisees present.

In any event, the Pharisees and Sadducees began arguing among themselves over the issue and Paul was rescued by the chief captain of the Roman guard from what must have been a violent argument. It is helpful to our understanding of the picture of the extensiveness of Christianity in Jerusalem to realize that the Pharisees took Paul's side in the meeting and said, "We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God." (Acts 23:9). The fact that many tens of thousands of believers in Jerusalem had been informed of Paul, as well as the fact that the High Priest and all the estate of the elders knew Paul, make the Pharisees declaration "we find no fault in this man" much more significant. They were not siding with an unknown man but with a very well known man. It becomes apparent in the rest of Acts that their support of Paul did not run very deep. But, it did at least show the chief captain of the Roman guard where the problem originated, and the problem wasn't due to Paul's actions but rather to the actions of others in Jerusalem.

It is also very significant that the "rumor" that Paul had brought Trophimus into the Temple with him (Acts 21:29), was not brought up at this meeting. It seems obvious that no witnesses to that accusation could be produced by the High Priest or his people, or else they certainly would have brought it up and insisted on Paul's execution. Bringing a Gentile into the court of Israel was one of the few cases (if not the only case) where the Roman authority allowed the High Priest and Sanhedrin to administer capital punishment.

It seems clear that Paul was able to get the Pharisees to come over to his side by moving the debate from the matter of law to the question of the resurrection. Again we are drawn to the conclusion that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was accepted by many in Jerusalem and was not the reason for Jerusalem's

hatred of Paul. The controversy over resurrection in general had been fought over by Pharisees and Sadducees long before Jesus Christ came. On the other hand, the fight in which Paul was involved seems clearly to be over law and grace. Also, we cannot resist mentioning the possibility that James, the brother of Jesus, was at the meeting called by the chief captain of the Roman guard. He may even have been among "they that stood by" of whom Paul used the term "brethren" (Acts 23:4,5). If James was the head of "many tens of thousands of Jews which believe" (Acts 21:20), that fact would surely have been known by the chief captain of the Roman guard and James would likely have been among the "chief priests and all their council" who were commanded to appear for the meeting (Acts 22:30).

Perhaps the most significant thing about this meeting is that Luke includes it at all in the record of Acts. It is clearly not a trial and no evidence is given. Violence breaks out after Paul has spoken his first, seemingly harmless, sentence. Luke must have had a different purpose in mind than recording the events and outcome of a trial. The record of this meeting does show one thing very clearly, and that is conflict over Paul and what he stood for, in the highest levels of Jerusalem government and society. There does not appear to be any similar conflict in Jerusalem over James, who had lived in Jerusalem for many years, or over the many tens of thousands of believers that were in Jerusalem with him. Clearly there is a major difference between James and Paul and what they each stood for. Unless we say that Paul was wrong, a position that can hardly be taken by those saved by God's grace, we must conclude that James was wrong and at best, hid the gospel of grace in order to avoid trouble. At worst, he may well have been party to wanting to kill Paul.

### **Jesus Christ Rescues Paul from Jerusalem**

In Acts 23:11, we read that the Lord appeared to Paul the following night and said, "be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." Some will say that because the Lord appeared to Paul in Jerusalem, that it must have been the Lord's will for Paul to go to Jerusalem in the first place. However, from what we have already discussed, it is clear that Paul should not have gone to Jerusalem. The wording of Jesus' statement to Paul tends to confirm the conclusion that Paul should not have gone to Jerusalem. Jesus says, in essence, "because you have testified of me in Jerusalem, you must now go to Rome." It seems clear that Jesus is not instructing Paul to go to Rome, but encouraging him in his confinement and pointing out that this confinement will result in his being taken to Rome.

Paul had told the believers along the way to Jerusalem that he was willing to die in Jerusalem if need be and perhaps he thought he was about to die the night that Jesus appeared to him. If so, Jesus' words, "so must thou bear witness also at Rome" would have been words to cause Paul to "be of good cheer". If we are right in our conclusion that Paul should not have gone to Jerusalem, then the fact that Jesus appeared to him while there establishes the truth of Heb. 13:5, where Jesus' words are quoted, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

It was just such a message that Paul stood for and that the Jerusalem church could not accept. The unconditional grace of God is impossible to accept while at the same time believing that conditions are required in order to receive God's favor. Jesus Christ appearing to Paul in Jerusalem, after telling Paul not to go to Jerusalem, shows clearly that His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts, our thoughts (see Rom. 11:33-35). He will continue to be with us even if we do not always do His will. This is the crux of the conflict between law and grace. Law says that Jesus Christ leaves when we sin. Grace says that Jesus Christ will never leave us or forsake us so that we can boldly say, "the Lord is my helper and I will not fear what man may do unto me." (Heb. 13:5-6).

Paul certainly knew that nothing could separate him from God's love (Rom. 8:35-39). In that light, perhaps Jesus' meeting with Paul could be presented in a humorous light. We can imagine the Lord coming to see Paul and slapping him on the back and saying, "Cheer up, Paul! You wanted to come to Jerusalem and testify of Me. Now you've done it and it's no big deal. No matter that everyone here wants to kill you and are even now making plans how they can do it. We're going to Rome!" And we can imagine Paul's response, "I'm sure glad you have a sense of humor, Lord, 'cause things are looking pretty

bleak right about now." And, we can picture Paul saying to the Lord on the way out of town, "not a bad escort you've arranged!" After all, four hundred seventy Roman soldiers (Acts 23:23) was an impressive escort for one man.

So much for Paul's trip to Jerusalem. Outside of stirring the pot a little bit, it does not appear that he accomplished a thing. He certainly did not change the mind of the Jerusalem church nor Israel as a nation. Did God hold it against him that he decided to go to Jerusalem? No. Paul was given a pretty clear picture of what would happen if he did go. After he went, God got him back out of town in one piece.

In Acts 22:17-21, Paul recounts a former visit to Jerusalem and a similar "argument" he had with the Lord while he was in the Temple at that time. Jesus Christ had appeared to him and, in essence, said, "Hurry up, get out of town NOW!, for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me." The last trip was like the former, they would not receive his testimony concerning Jesus Christ!

The rest of the book of Acts tells of Paul's convoluted trip to Rome and his imprisonment there for two years. It ends with a picture of Paul dwelling in his own rented house and receiving all who came to him. He taught them concerning the kingdom of God and concerning Jesus Christ and the final words of Acts are "quite openly, and unhindered." The King James version says, "with all confidence, no man forbidding him." The picture we see is one of grace triumphing over law. Even in prison, Paul is able to proclaim the gospel "openly and unhindered." What he could not do in Jerusalem, he freely does in Rome! And, he does so even in prison. He also wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon during this time and what tremendous enlightenment and comfort they are, and have been to Christians through the ages.

We do not know for sure what Paul did after his imprisonment in Rome. We know that Paul presented his case directly to Nero himself because the angel of God said to Paul, "thou must be brought before Caesar" (Acts 27:24). We can assume that Paul was acquitted, or at least brought to trial at the end of two years of confinement since Acts ends so abruptly. If Paul was executed at that time, surely Luke would have mentioned the fact unless his motive for writing Acts was to present evidence in Paul's defense before Caesar, in which case Acts was finished before the case was heard by Caesar. This possibility seems to fit in with all we have shown of conflict in Acts and is certainly worthy of further study. There is evidence to show that Christianity was considered to be a part of Judiasm before Paul presented his case to Caesar. There is also evidence to show that afterwards Christianity was recognized as distinct from Judiasm. If Luke's motive was not merely to show conflict in general between law and grace, but rather to develop a specific position for presentation to Nero in defense of Paul, Paul's acquittal based on Nero's examination of the book of Acts is exciting to consider.

In the event that Luke did not write Acts to present to Nero, his abrupt ending still appears to signify Paul's acquittal. If Paul had been convicted and killed, that fact could hardly have been hidden from those who read Acts. Such an omission would have discredited the whole book if Luke ended it on a positive note when in fact Paul was killed.

Some say that Paul was again imprisoned in Rome in 68 A.D.. If so, Paul could have continued on to Spain as he had planned after his release in 62 A.D. (Rom. 15:24,28). Of one thing we can be sure, that wherever he was, he continued to teach the grace of God. And, of all his teaching, nothing could transcend his revelation that the mystery that was kept secret from before the foundations of the world was now revealed, that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs with the Jews and all those who accepted Christ as Lord, Jew and Gentile alike, would receive a new nature, that nature which is "Christ in you, the hope of glory."



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