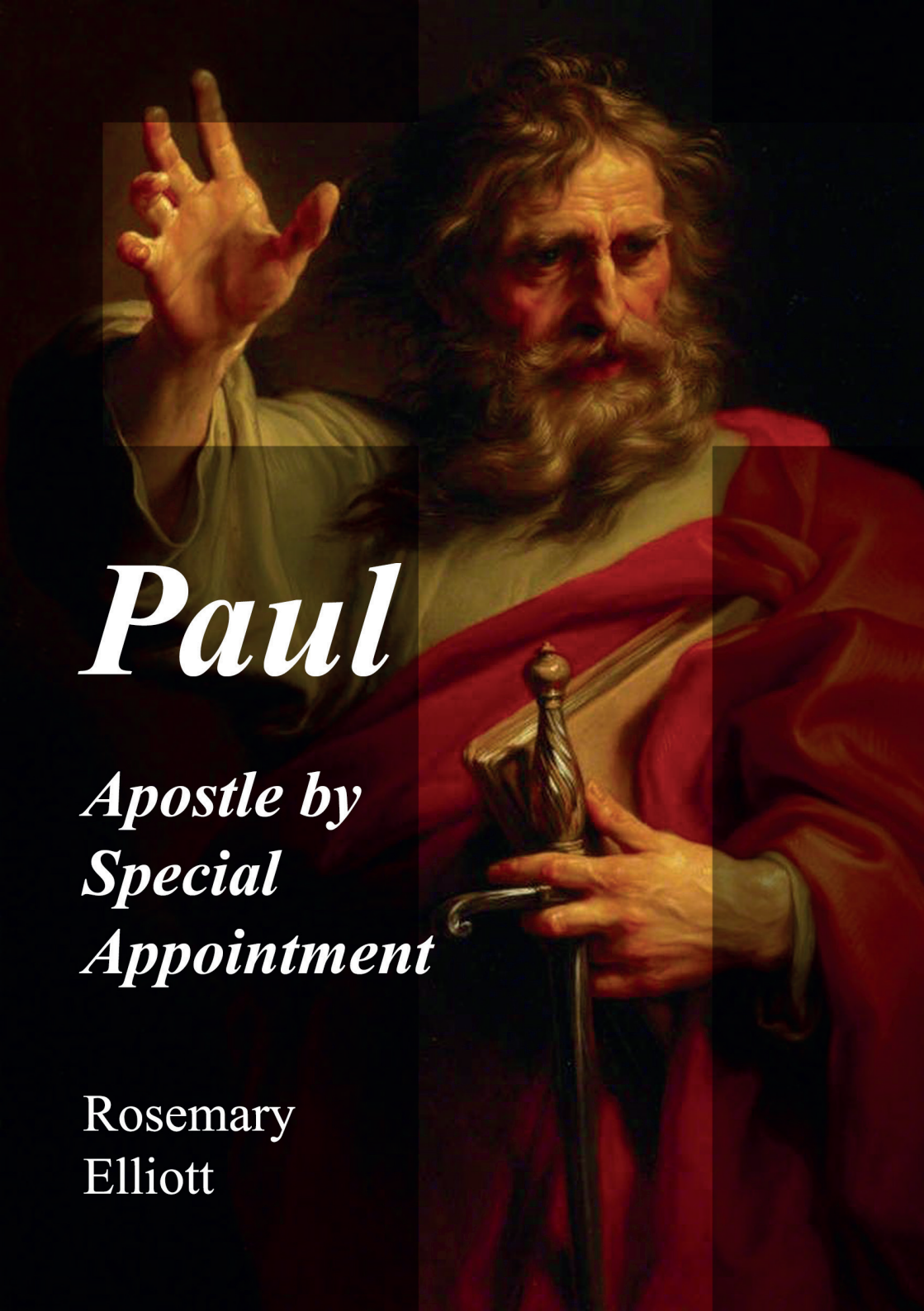




Paul

*Apostle by
Special
Appointment*

Rosemary
Elliott

Endorsements

Rosemary Elliot has very faithfully pieced together the biblical evidence we have for Paul's life and journeys, and I have read this book with great interest and much pleasure. Told as a story it holds one's attention throughout.

The author has done considerable historical research and paints a vivid picture of the various congregations and of the events which took place within them. Biblical interpretation at one level depends on understanding the context in which the letter was written and the context of the people to whom it was written. I am now reading Paul's letters with a much enhanced understanding of the congregations to which he wrote.

The book will be a valuable teaching aid in theological colleges and universities, but it would also be much appreciated by the general public.

The Rev Canon Nancy Charton

The first woman ordained priest in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa

The greatest strengths of the book are threefold. First, it is eminently readable. It can be read for pleasure as a lively, and imaginative account of a very remarkable person, whose ministry transformed the Church from being potentially a Jewish apocalyptic sect, into a universal religion, transcending' boundaries of language and culture across the Mediterranean region. Second, it presents Paul as a whole person – extraordinarily courageous, and astonishingly energetic, but also a generally likeable person for whom friendships were important. Third, it locates Paul in the diverse contexts in which he worked, taught and suffered.

Rosemary Elliott finds in Paul's life a man whose driving force was love, for his Saviour and for those to whom he sought to introduce him, living the life of faith in a generally hostile world.

Michael G. Whisson

Professor Emeritus of Anthropology
Rhodes University

Editor's Note

This is an enthralling, one might even say a rip-roaring, account of the life and work of one of the most singularly influential of human beings – Saul of Tarsus – more widely known by the Roman equivalent – as Saint Paul. His love for, and dedication to, his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, propelled him around the ancient world in a breathtaking series of missionary journeys. And he was uniquely placed, as a gifted lawyer, trained by the top Rabbi of his time – Gamaliel – to grasp the deep significance of the life, work and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth.

Paul left a series of letters, the subject of his penetrating insights, that have been foundational in the development of Christianity into one of the major religions of the world. That is a great story in itself, and is the subject of a huge and brilliant scholarship in both biblical and historical studies. But perhaps less attention has been paid to the narrative of the life, and particularly the intense human costs paid by Paul, in his missionary endeavours. This is the task Rosemary Elliott set herself in writing ‘Paul – Apostle by Special Appointment’.

The work is richly footnoted in mainly biblical references, so that the reader can follow the foundation from which the ‘Life’ is recreated. But her principal objective seems to have been to keep the narrative moving rather than for the dynamic of the story to become bogged down in the academic debates, important as they are, that cover virtually every aspect of Paul’s life and work. Sticking to this objective may have given fewer quotes of more recent scholarship, but has given us the compelling story for an appreciation of this remarkable person.

I was privileged to have known Rosemary Elliott as a child visiting my grandmother’s farm in Addo, Sundays River Valley, South Africa. She was a remarkable person and a social activist of note during the dark days of apartheid. This activity is placed in perspective at the end of the book in the tribute “Let Your Life Speak” Her work among disadvantaged communities had her branded as a ‘communist’ by some, admired by many and much loved by those whom she served. During the chaos of protest action the community Workshop Centre that she help establish, was burned to the ground. It became extremely difficult and dangerous to do any more at this time and, as she points out in her Forward, she found a great deal of strength in the life and struggles of Paul. So began her great project to research and write an interpretation of the life of this great man that occupied most of the rest of her own life. Hence the compelling narrative of the ‘Apostle by Special Appointment’.

The history of the work is of some interest. When complete the book was in the form of a mass of notes and data cards filling several filing cabinets. In

the early 1990s, her son, Philip Elliott, secured an old DOS model 386 computer for her, equipped with Manuscript word processor. And this is the format in which it was left until he undertook to convert it into a MS Word doc. And he then had a few copies printed for the family and Quaker Friends among whom Rosemary had been a leading member. A number of these including Adrienne Whisson, Rosemary VanWyk-Smith and Helen Hollerman, felt the book should be made available to a wider readership and asked Heath White, Quaker Communications Officer, and myself to prepare it in electronic format for loading to the Quaker website. The objective has been to provide full and free access to the book on the Web and hopefully for a wider readership.

Peter Rose
Professor Emeritus
Rhodes University

***Paul
Apostle by Special
Appointment***

Rosemary Elliott

3rd Edition

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Foreword

I had heard of the deteriorating situation in South Africa and during 1955 I felt God tell me that He wanted me to “Live in South Africa.” While I waited to complete my studies, I thought that Christ would have an answer for South Africa’s problems and if Christians looked for Christ’s answers they would be able to do something.

During the 1980s the situation in South Africa became very violent. By the 1980s the Nationalist government was implementing Grand Apartheid and things got very bad. I was living in Addo and became very involved in the black community, but the day the township schools were burnt down, the Handcraft Workshop I had started was also burnt. When some of the members complained to the ‘Comrades’, they said “Oh sorry, we thought it belonged to the whites!” I continued working in the community but I found a great source of inspiration and comfort from the life of Paul. In fact because of this I decided to write the story of his life, hence, “Paul, Apostle by Special Appointment.”

Rosemary Elliott

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EPILOGUE: AT THE BEGINNING!

CE 64

The knock at the door hardly penetrated to the workshop at the back where Priscilla¹ was supervising the workers.

She called to the young maid, “Julia, go and see to the door.”

In a moment the girl came back and said, “There’s a man and his servant.”

Priscilla sighed, Julia was going to take a lot of training.

“Did you ask his name and business?”

The girl looked surprised. “Oh. No!”

“Never mind,” Priscilla sighed again, the orders were piling up and they needed to get on, “I’ll go.” There was no presentiment that this visitor was bringing shattering news. Julia had shut the door in his face.

Priscilla opened it and said, “Luke!”

Before she could do more, he swayed and looked ready to fall. She put her arms round him and drew him inside, calling for their chief assistant, Xanthias to come and help.

Looking at his ravaged face she said, “No, don’t try to talk, come sit.” She helped Luke to a couch, then turning to Xanthias she bade him go to call Aquila² from the cutting ground. She ordered Julia to fetch wine, bread and soft cheese.

Then she looked at the man accompanying Luke, “Nicias!” He was paying off the porter who carried their belongings.

“What has happened?”

“I think my master must tell you that. He is grieving and exhausted. The ship from Rome docked this morning and we came straight here, but it took time for our baggage to be unloaded and for me to find a porter. Grief slowed our steps.”

Priscilla looked at Luke as he lay back on the cushions with his eyes closed. Julia brought in a small table with a flask of wine, chilled water and two cups. Priscilla poured half water and half wine and kneeling beside her friend, said gently; “Here my brother, drink this.”

Gratefully he took the cup and after drinking deeply, he sighed and looked at her. “They’ve all gone.” Tears filled his eyes.

¹ Priscilla: *Ephesus in CE 64 – Acts 18:18-29*

² Aquila: *Ephesus in CE 64 – Acts 18:26*

Priscilla took his hand, “Something terrible has happened?” Luke nodded. “Wait until Aquila comes before you try to tell us.”

Luke’s eyes were filled with tears, “Call the brethren, they also need to know.”

Priscilla looked at Nicias, who nodded, “He has told me that he would tell everyone at once, a retelling would be too much.”

Priscilla’s heart sank as she tried to guess what horrendous news could bring steady and faithful Luke to the brink of collapse. Thankfully she heard Aquila’s approach and signalling to Nicias to serve his master from the tray of food Julia had just brought in, she hurried over to her husband.

“Something terrible has happened. Luke wants us to call the brethren.”

Aquila looked across the courtyard to where Luke was once more lying back on the cushions, his eyes closed. He turned to his wife. “Maybe he’s come to tell us Paul has finally been executed.”

Priscilla looked troubled. “It seems to me that such news would not burden his spirit, because of all people, he knew how much Paul looked forward to seeing Our Lord face to face.”

Aquila looked grave, “Do you think he is strong enough to speak to the brethren?”

“I think he needs to, in sharing his grief, he will be sharing the burden of it.”

“Yes, you are probably right.” Aquila turned to his chief assistant.

“Xanthias, send the men to call the brethren to a meeting here after sundown this evening.” The man nodded and left.

Aquila crossed the room, Luke opened his eyes and made to rise.

“No, no, my friend,” said Aquila, “Rest yourself.” He reached down to embrace him. This released the pain and grief for Luke who held on to him and sobbed painfully. Aquila held him, knowing this was the first step to healing.

Priscilla came in quietly and said. “Why not take him to his room? Maybe he could sleep for a while and feel rested when the brethren come this evening.”

“Thank you my friends, I cannot remember when last I slept.” Slowly they helped him up the stairs and into a room.

Priscilla turned to Nicias, “Will you settle him and then come down to have something to eat?”

Later that evening, the brethren began arriving. Aquila greeted them and to anxious questions said, “No, we have no idea what he has to tell us, but we must be prepared for bad news.”

John³ arrived and Priscilla said, “I think it would be good if you went up to Luke and brought him down when he is ready. We did not tell him you are now living here in Ephesus and I know he will be pleased to see you.” She was right and presently as the last of the visitors arrived, she saw Luke following John downstairs.

When Luke came into the room, one by one those present rose and greeted him. Then Aquila indicated a chair where he could sit to address the gathering. Luke looked round the circle of faces, many he knew, some he did not.

He closed his eyes and waited a moment, then in a low but clear voice he began, “Dear friends, the news I bring is so heavy that I can scarcely find words to tell you.” He paused and for a moment his lips trembled, but taking a deep breath, he continued, “Nearly all the brethren of the Church in Rome have been put to death.”⁴ For one moment there was stunned silence and then cries of horror and weeping filled the room. Luke raised his hand. He felt weak, but knew the story must be told.

“On the night the Romans call July 18th a fire started apparently near the Circus Maximus.⁵ We knew nothing about it until the next morning when we could see the black smoke rising over the city. The people were terrified, especially as the wind changed direction several times. The streets were choked with everyone trying to save their possessions and get out into the country.” Luke paused as he remembered the horror of those days. There was a murmur from his listeners, but they were aware how painful this account was and waited for him to continue.

“Most of our brethren lost everything they owned, especially our poorer friends who lived in the crowded streets near the centre of the city. People were impressed because the emperor started relief measures immediately. Then the fire started again, this time on the grounds belonging to Tigellinus.”⁶ Luke looked at his listeners, of course they wouldn’t know who this man was. “He is the most notorious of Nero’s friends.”⁷ He leads him into one excess after another.”

He paused, “What had survived the first fire was burnt by the second. Practically the whole city was destroyed.”⁸ During the first fire, many of the younger brethren ran out shouting and singing through the distracted crowds

³ John: Ephesus in 64 CE – Tradition. John the brother of James, and Mary the mother of Our Lord are apparently buried at Ephesus. Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus attests in 196 CE that John, ‘who lay in the bosom of the Lord, rests at Ephesus and wrote the Gospel from there.’ *Encyclopaedia Britannica Book 13*. P 83c. 1959 edition.

⁴ Massacre of the Christians: Rome CE 64

⁵ Fire of Rome: July CE 64

⁶ Tigellinus: Friend of Nero

⁷ Nero: Emperor of Rome CE 64

⁸ 10 of the 14 precincts were burnt to the ground. Nero. *The Man and the Legend*. By J. Bishop. Published Robert Hale, London 1964

saying it was the time of the Lord's coming. Great joy filled the Believers, even Peter thought it might be the time for Judgement to begin." Luke stopped and looked round the intent faces.

"Very soon, rumours were circulating that Nero himself had started the fires. People said he wanted to rebuild his palace and clear the city of its slums. They said that while Rome and his palace were burning, he recited a poem he had written on the fall of Troy. I doubt this myself, but with Nero anything is possible.⁹ At any rate the rumours became so strong that the Emperor must have decided to lay them to rest by finding someone else to blame."

Luke looked at the horror within and finally in a choked voice he continued, "He found the brethren." His listeners gasped. They well knew the punishment for arson was death by burning.

"Many people have accused us of evil practices and were happy to respond to the call for information. Very soon the arrests began. Paul, was already in jail,¹⁰ Peter soon joined him. Paul had been waiting for sentencing and he and Peter¹¹ were condemned to death on the same day.¹² As a Roman, Paul was executed with a sword along the Via Ostiense about three miles from the city."

He paused, "He was like a bridegroom going to his wedding. We buried him nearby. Peter was sentenced to be crucified. He said he was not good enough to be crucified in the same manner as his Master and he insisted they put him upside down on the cross." There was a groan and several people started to cry quietly.

John asked quietly, "But that was not the end of it?"

Luke's face twisted in pain and he finally managed a strangled "No, that was only the beginning."

Epaenatus asked, "Are you able to go on, brother? Would you not like to rest and gain your strength?"

"Thank you, but I have carried the pain of what happened and if you will bear with me, I need to share it with you." The room became tense as each one tried to imagine what further horror could be coming.

Luke gathered himself and spoke quietly and without emphasis, "Many of the brethren were well known to the authorities. The Praetorian guard arrested those first, and through torture gained the names of many more. Those who were arrested were put to death. Nero had some of them tied to

⁹ Nero. *The Man and the Legend*. By J. Bishop. Published Robert Hale, London 1964

¹⁰ Paul: In Mamertine Prison CE 64

¹¹ Peter: Crucifixion in CE 64

¹² Tradition. This account of their deaths is supposition, because there is no clear evidence of when Paul actually was executed.

stakes and set alight in his own gardens while he drove his chariot to watch them die. Others were dressed in animal skins and chased into the circus where packs of dogs tore them apart. Others were crucified. Pudens¹³, who had hosted Peter while he stayed in Rome was forced to cut his wrists by Nero's men."

Except for the sobs and weeping of many, no one spoke until John asked: "Was no one saved?" Luke drew his mind away from the horror he had been contemplating and said "Yes, in some ways it was hardest of all for those left behind. Timothy and Mark had just arrived in response to Paul's last letter. Timothy has gone to Corinth and Macedonia to tell the brethren there. He will come here to Ephesus later. Mark left to return to Alexandria. The other Pudens and his wife, Claudia and Linus¹⁴ were away from Rome on their country estate. Some of the others managed to escape to the country. They missed a few slaves working in pagan households, but that is all. The whole church of Rome is destroyed. Why was I spared? I ask myself over and over, why couldn't I have gone with the others? I cannot bear the pain of the things I saw them suffer and know I could not help them. Even the children were killed. What was this Good News we preached? Where is Our Risen Lord that we so confidently expected? Why does He not come as He promised? Is it all a lie?" The words which had been pouring out of his broken heart, finally came to an end.

No one spoke, until John began: "I remember just before Our Lord was arrested he had been talking to us and amongst other things, he told us 'The world will make you suffer. But be brave! I have defeated the world.'¹⁵ Shortly after they came and arrested him. Then we saw him beaten and mocked by the Roman soldiers, we saw the Jewish authorities forcing the Roman governor to proclaim the death sentence on trumped up charges. Then I too wondered how Jesus could tell us he had overcome the world. I waited for a miracle – God's Judgement to fall on them all – but we saw him condemned and made to carry his cross to the place just outside the walls and there he was crucified. Then we all doubted. Not one of us remembered how he told us repeatedly he would be condemned to die. No one remembered he said he would rise from the dead. Like you, Luke, I wondered if it had all been for nothing. Had the darkness been able to overcome the Light? For two terrible days, we doubted until the women came to us saying he had risen from the grave and his body was gone. Of course, we did not believe them.

¹³ Although only one Pudens is mentioned in the Bible, (2 Timothy 4:21) tradition and speculation have it that Pudens was a converted Roman Senator, and Peter had lodged with him. He was martyred under Nero. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia Vol III*

¹⁴ It is thought this Linus was the immediate successor of Peter and Paul in the leadership of the Roman church and that he is possibly the son of Pudens and Claudia. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia Vol III*

¹⁵ John 16:33

We thought his body had been stolen by the authorities. Even so, Peter and I ran to the grave. Then I saw the napkin that had been around his head, folded up and laid apart from the other body wrappings,¹⁶ as if he had put it down as he walked out. I knew neither death nor darkness had been able to overcome him.” He stopped and no one spoke.

Then John asked: “None of you have seen the Lord Jesus in his flesh, yet every one of you testifies that he lives. How do you know this?”

Tychicus said, “Because God has put his stamp of ownership on us by giving us the Holy Spirit.”¹⁷

John smiled and nodded, “And now my brothers and sisters,” he continued, “Your hearts are full of grief, so let me tell you of Our Lord’s prayer for us and you. Before his trial, he prayed to the Father “I do not ask you to take them out of the world, but I do ask you to keep them safe from the Evil One. Just as I do not belong to the world, they do not belong to the world. And for their sake, I dedicate myself to you in order that they too, may be truly dedicated to you. I pray not only for them, but also for those who believe in me because of their message I pray that they may all be one.”

John’s voice grew louder. “Father! May they be in us, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they be one, so that the world will believe that you sent me. I gave them the same glory you gave me, so that they may be one, just as you and I are one. I in them and you in me, so that they may be completely one, in order that the world may know that you sent me and that you love them as you love me.

“Father! You have given them to me, and I want them to be with me where I am, so that they may see my glory...” Luke raised his head and looked at John for John’s face was filled with light.

“Righteous Father! The world does not know you, but I know you, and these knew that you sent me. I made you known to them, and I will continue to do so, in order that the love you have for me may be in them, and so that I also may be in them.”¹⁸

A low murmur of praise and thanksgiving grew. The weeks of pain and guilt seem to fall from Luke and tears filled his eyes as John’s words filled his mind and began the healing of his spirit. Then Trophimus began singing:

“I will proclaim your greatness my God and King:”

And the group answered: “I will thank you for ever and ever.” And so alternately the great hymn of thanksgiving filled the home of Aquila and Priscilla.

¹⁶ John 20:7

¹⁷ Ephesians 1:13

¹⁸ John 17 from 9 -

“Every day I will thank you:
“I will praise you for ever and ever.
“The Lord is great and is to be highly praised:
“His greatness is beyond understanding.”

The harmonies grew as they expressed their renewed faith in God until finally Trophimus’s voice rang out in the last line of praise

“I will always praise the Lord:
“and the triumphant reply
“let all his creatures praise his holy name for ever.”¹⁹

After a moment of breathless quiet, when even the silence seemed to vibrate, John rose to his feet and pronounced the blessing:

“May he bless you with all good and keep you from all evil:
“May he give light to your heart with living wisdom
“and be gracious to you with eternal knowledge:
“May he lift up his loving countenance to you
“for eternal peace.”²⁰

Quietly the brothers and sisters rose and after embracing Luke and murmuring words of love and blessing, they departed, leaving John with Tychicus.

Tychicus embraced Luke and said “I loved Paul and can only rejoice that he has finished his race.”

“He loved you my brother, and always knew he could rely on you.”

John embraced Luke, and said, “We will come again tomorrow when you have rested.”

Luke held him a moment saying: “Thank you for your words, you have opened a window on the darkness of my spirit.”

In the days that followed, Luke’s strength and tranquillity of mind gradually returned. His talks with Aquila and Priscilla allowed him to unburden some of the agony of those brethren who had broken under torture to reveal the names of others. His discussions with John renewed his sense of purpose as he explained how he had been writing a life of the Lord Jesus for many years, and had also nearly finished an account of the Acts of the Apostles since the Resurrection.

“I have been adding material to the history of our Lord’s life, and when Mark²¹ arrived in Rome with Timothy²², he brought with him an account he

¹⁹ Psalm 145

²⁰ Priest’s Blessing from *The Dead Sea Scrolls* by Millar Burrows, published Secker and Warburg, London 1956. Cf Numbers 6:24-26

²¹ Mark: Rome CE 64

²² Timothy: Rome CE 64

had also written of the life of our Lord. He left me a copy and since he includes many things about our Lord that I had not heard, I want to add this material to my other sources.”

“It has been much in my heart and mind to record my own account of Our Lord’s ministry, and the proofs he gave that he was the Messiah.” John remarked, “Would you let me read the account you put together?”

“It’s far from complete, but yes, you are welcome to read it, and tell me whether I have got things right. Mark’s own account is also unfinished, and I’m afraid he may not have the heart to finish it now.”

“Whatever do you mean?” asked John.

“Well, I think he feels bad that he has been spared while others died,” said Luke slowly, “When he handed me a copy of his gospel,²³ he said ‘I shall never complete it now.’ Luke took out the roll of papyrus and carefully unrolled it to the end.

“He is recounting the women’s visit to the tomb on the morning of the first day of the week. He tells how they saw a young man in a white robe who told them ‘Don’t be alarmed, I know you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is not here – he has been raised! Look, here is the place they put him. Now go and give this message to his disciples, including Peter: ‘He is going to Galilee ahead of you: there you will see him, just as he told you.’ So they went out and ran from the tomb, distressed and terrified. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.” Luke’s eyes had filled with tears.

“Mark blamed himself that he was not fearless, that he had let people down, like me he felt ashamed that we were spared dying at the hands of the emperor.”²⁴

The silence between them was companionable and then John asked, “Have you decided what you are going to do?”

“Yes, answered Luke, “I am going to Bithynia.²⁵ My father’s brother lives in Nicaea and I know he would let me stay peacefully with him and his wife while I finish writing an account of all that has happened.”

²³ Mark: Gospel of Luke

²⁴ Mark returned to Alexandria to continue his work in building up the brethren there. His success infuriated the nobles of the city and at Easter 68 he was seized, tied with a rope and dragged from street to street. In the evening he was thrown into prison where he had a vision of Christ who said to him, “Be strong, O my Evangelist, for tomorrow you shall receive the Crown of Martyrdom.” The next day the rope was tied round his neck and he was again dragged round the streets. In a few hours his head was torn from his body. Thus he attained three crowns; the crown of Discipleship, the crown of Evangelism, and the crown of Martyrdom. [From ‘The Story of the Copts. The True Story of Christianity in Egypt.’ By Iris Habib el Masri published by The Coptic Bishopric for African Affairs. 1956.]

²⁵ Encyclopaedia Britannica 1956 ed. Vol 14:475 states “If an ancient prologue to the Lucan writings (extant only in Latin) really goes back in part to Marcion or his circle, it may preserve a genuine tradition in stating that Luke died in Bithynia at the age of seventy-four...The same prologue, and indeed all early tradition, connects him originally with Antioch.

Priscilla had come in while he was talking and her kindly face was full of concern, as she said, “But why don’t you stay here with Aquila and me? You know you are part of our family.”

Luke gave her a rueful smile. “I know I can always count this as my home, but, dear friend, you cannot pretend it is quiet, with all the people needing help or a kind word or hospitality. Your home is more like an inn.”

Priscilla laughed, “Yes, I see what you mean, but you will stay until after the winter?”

“Well, I have been thinking if we make our departure soon, Nicias and I can travel some of the way by boat before the winter storms come, and then I can spend the winter shut in getting my notes put together.”

CHAPTER 1: SAUL IN JERUSALEM

CE. 31

ACTS 5:17-60 to ACTS 8:1-3

The Council Chamber was in an uproar.²⁶ The High Priest, Caiaphas²⁷ and his father-in-law Annas²⁸ listened in disbelief to the officer of the temple guards.

“The prisoners are not there! When we arrived at the jail, we found it locked and the guards on watch at the gates. We opened the gates and went into the cell, the door was open but no one was there!”

Annas, not one to suffer fools gladly, was gathering himself to order the arrest of the incompetent guards, when the door burst open and a member of the Sanhedrin rushed in.

“The men you put in prison are in the Temple teaching the people! Who let them out?”

Caiaphas looked at the man and said, “That is what we would like to know.”

On three benches in front of the judges sat the law students. The door opened again and the guards hustled the prisoners into the centre of the space in front of the students.

Caiaphas spoke with cold fury. “We gave you strict orders not to teach in the name of That Man, but you’ve spread your teaching all over Jerusalem and you want to make us responsible for his death.”²⁹

Caiaphas was referring to the arrest of Peter and John a few weeks previously, when they had been given a strong warning and released. Now most of the leadership amongst the followers of the man, Jesus of Nazareth, were in front of the court.

Peter stepped forward confidently and in his guttural Galilean accent said. “We must obey God, not men. The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from death, after you had killed him by nailing him to a cross. God raised him to his right hand side as Leader and Saviour to give the people of Israel the opportunity to repent and have their sins forgiven.”³⁰

²⁶ *Trial of Apostles: Jerusalem CE 31*

²⁷ *Caiaphas: High Priest AD 31 – Acts 7:1*

²⁸ *Annas: Father-in-law to Caiaphas – Luke 3:2*

²⁹ *Caiaphas: Trial of the Apostles – Acts 5:27*

³⁰ *Peter: Arrest and Trial in Jerusalem – Acts 5:29*

The rising tumult of angry shouting almost drowned his words, “We are witnesses to these things – we and the Holy Spirit who is God’s gift to those who obey him.”

The Council could contain its fury no longer and voices from all sides called for the death penalty.

Caiaphas shouted, “Silence,” to no effect. The officer and his men looked at the prisoners and could hardly credit their calmness in the midst of the storm they had created.

Finally Rabban Gamaliel rose and lifted his arm for silence. His action brought some order as the members of the Council hushed each other. The students were the first to sit, many of them were his pupils and had an abiding affection for his humility and wisdom.

When the tumult had subsided, Gamaliel said quietly to the Temple guards, “Take the prisoners out.”³¹

Then he turned to the Council, “Fellow Israelites, be careful what you do to these men. You remember that Theudas appeared some time ago, claiming to be someone great and about four hundred men joined him. But he was killed and all his followers scattered and his movement died out. After that, Judas the Galilean appeared during the time of the census: he drew a crowd after him, but he also was killed, and all his followers were scattered.”

Gamaliel looked round the circle of men staring at him, his eyes rested briefly on his most brilliant student, Saul of Tarsus. He noted with sadness his tight and angry face. He gathered himself and speaking slowly said. “And so in this case, I tell you, do not take action against these men. Leave them alone! If what they have planned and done is of human origin, it will disappear, but if it comes from God, you cannot possibly defeat them. You could find yourselves fighting against God!”

Many in the Council had been secret followers of the Nazarene and Gamaliel’s calm speech enabled a murmur of approval to grow into a general agreement.

Caiaphas looked at Annas. Would the old man allow his authority to be flouted in such a weak-kneed way? Although Caiaphas was the High Priest, the real power was still in the hands of his father-in-law, Annas, who had been deposed by the Roman Procurator some nineteen years previously.³² To his amazement, Annas seemed to be agreeing with the old fool. Annas in the meantime had not missed the look Gamaliel had exchanged with his pupil. His devious mind was already far beyond the present debacle and with a half-formed plan growing, he nodded to Caiaphas to proceed.

³¹ Gamaliel: *Defence of the Apostles* – Acts 5:34

³² *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* Vol 1:128

Caiaphas ordered the prisoners to be brought in. To the officer of the guard he said, “Whip them thirty-nine lashes each.”

To the prisoners he said, “You are never to speak in the name of Jesus again.” He rose and left the Council Chamber.

The student with whom Gamaliel had exchanged looks, Saul, sat in stunned silence. He heard nothing anyone said to him. Thoughts raced through his mind. ‘How could he? How could such a fine teacher as Rabban Gamaliel subvert his gifts to free those blasphemers and perverters of the Law?’ He got up and went blindly out through the Temple courtyard.

It was already dark when Saul finally returned to his sister’s house.³³ The evening meal was long since cleared away. Hannah dropped her spinning when Saul came in.

She looked anxiously at him and said quietly, “Saul, what’s wrong? Where have you been? We’ve been worrying about you.”

Saul went over to where his brother-in-law was sitting and gave him a long hard stare. “Did you hear what happened when those Nazarenes were brought before the Sanhedrin this morning?”

Abiel nodded, “It is all over Jerusalem.”

“How could Rabban Gamaliel let those blasphemers get away with it yet again? How could the High Priest,” his voice rose in disbelief, “agree to let them go?”

Abiel was considerably older than his wife and Saul knew him as a devoted, slow-thinking conservative pharisee of the Shammaite party – a man after his father’s heart. A traditionalist to the core and a successful merchant dealing in fine linens.

Abiel looked thoughtfully at his fiery brother-in-law. Finally he said, “Have you thought that the repercussions of admitting ten or twelve men escaped from a secure and heavily guarded jail might possibly be far more damaging than letting them go at this stage?”

“They must have bribed the guards – it’s inconceivable they just ‘got out’ and no one saw them.” Saul’s voice rose angrily.

“More than likely,” replied Abiel drily.

“But something must be done about it,” shouted Saul. Then the real hurt of the whole affair swept over him again.

“That’s not the main point.” His voice dropped in pain. “Rabban Gamaliel sounded as if he meant what he said when he related how other movements had died out when the leader was killed, but suggested that if what these

³³ Acts 23:16 Says ‘The son of Paul’s sister....’ Which suggests his sister lived in Jerusalem.

Nazarenes are teaching comes from God we may be fighting against God if we try to stop them.” His voice rose again. “How could he?”

“I think he did mean it,” said Abiel.

“Do you agree with him?” Saul burst out.

“Heaven forbid,” replied Abiel. “I too, am deeply troubled at the way these uneducated rabble-rousers are leading the gullible astray. They’ve circulated pernicious rumours over this resurrection story and unfortunately no one has been able to find any trace of the Nazarene’s body. They must have hidden it of course when the soldiers ran away after the earthquake and left the tomb unguarded. But it is difficult to silence these men- they are so fanatical and defy all authority. With all this emotional talk of miraculous healing, the rabble just flock to them. Also what point of LAW says it is a crime to heal?”

Saul’s eyes blazed with fury.³⁴ “It’s not healing we’re talking about – it’s blasphemy – they claim That Man was the Messiah – the” he choked on the words – “The Holy One of God. A man executed as a common criminal! As it says ‘He who hangs on the tree is cursed.’ He could never have been the Messiah. Nothing he did or apparently said fits the prophesies. The Law is clear, his followers should be stoned to death.”

Abiel asked, “And what of the general population? Do you think they’d stand meekly by watching? Or perhaps you expect them to join in? Do you know how many followers these people now have in Jerusalem? Five thousand according to reliable sources, and a good many of the Sanhedrin are also secret sympathizers both pharisees and some of the priests. You don’t really think Annas and Caiaphas agree with Rabban Gamaliel do you? Annas is a great deal too wily to make a fool of himself and cause an open split in the Sanhedrin, besides they know if a riot occurs with the rearrest of those men, Pontius Pilot is only too willing to add to his record of harassment and murder and you can be sure it won’t be Nazarenes he harasses!”

Saul nodded slowly. With his hooked nose and black eye-brows meeting across his nose, his face had a hawkish look.

“You’re probably right, but I shall never rest until these desecrators of the Temple and subverters of the Law are totally eliminated.” He rose and nodding briefly to Hannah as he went to his room.

Hannah’s dark eyes rested anxiously on her husband’s face, “What do you think he will do?”

“Oh, nothing stupid,” reassured Abiel. “He’s far too astute to rush into something unprepared. But if I was a Nazarene I’d watch out for him. He could be a very tough and unrelenting enemy.”

³⁴ *Saul: Antagonism to Jesus – Acts 8:*

Saul returned to his studies. If Gamaliel noticed a cooling of his best student's affection, he gave no sign. Saul in the meanwhile sounded out his fellow students, not all of whom were studying under Rabban Gamaliel, to see who felt as he did about the Nazarenes. To his surprise he found Asher, who always seemed so cheerful and good natured, was bitterly opposed to them. He came from a rich and influential family from Saul's own province of Cilicia. He also found Jared of Alexandria, a serious young student who felt as Saul did about the incontrovertible evidence of the Torah and the prophets. A Messiah from Galilee was unheard of and one who died a criminal's death gave conclusive evidence of the falseness of the claims of his disciples.

At first they tried to join the crowds of people who listened to the leaders preaching daily in Solomon's Porch in the Temple. However when the crowd found they were unsympathetic to what was being taught, they were politely but firmly excluded from the group.

Saul's plan was quite simply to keep check on all the places where the Nazarenes were meeting and gradually compile a list of names of all the adherents. It was thus the three friends decided to check out all the synagogues. At first Jared was horrified at the thought.

"Have you any idea how many synagogues there are in Jerusalem?" He asked Saul.

"I should think about two hundred or so." Saul replied.

"There are four hundred and eighty at the last count," declared Jared and Asher groaned.³⁵

"Well, we won't have to visit them all. We start in the synagogues in our area," Saul declared dogmatically.

"That's not much good for me," said Asher. "I live with my uncle on the hill and only the very rich attend the Synagogues in our area. I'm sure you won't find rich people subscribing to the Nazarene teaching."

"Why not?" Asked Jared.

"Because I've heard that these people are selling their property and giving it to the common purse like the Essenes, and you don't get many rich Essenes." Asher laughed.

Saul looked at him with disfavour. This was not a time for jokes.

"In that case choose an area where you think you'll find them."

They began attending Synagogues in the lower section of Jerusalem where the artisans and tradesmen lived.

³⁵ *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia Vol 1. Page 894*

Several weeks went by and then one morning Jared said to Saul, “I’ve found a synagogue where a Greek-speaking man named Stephen had the whole crowd spell-bound. I understand the president of the synagogue allows him to teach there each Sabbath.”

“Well, where is it?” Asked Saul.

“It’s the Synagogue of the Freedman, a lot of Greek-speaking Jews from Alexandria and Cyrene go there.”³⁶

“That’s it then. We will all go there next Sabbath and see what we can get this man to say. It should not be difficult to trap him into something incriminating.”

Saul went home that evening happier than he had been for weeks. As he left his sandals inside the door, he called out.

“Blessing on all who live here.” Hannah came hurrying from the courtyard.

“Saul!” She said. “Are you all right?”

“Of course I am. Why shouldn’t I be?”

“Well, I don’t think you’ve spoken a dozen sentences to us in the last month.”

He smiled bleakly and said, “Oh, well, I’ve had something important on my mind. Where is young Jonathon? I’ve not heard him honour his ancestors lately.”

Hannah smiled, she knew things must be all right if he wanted to take Jonathon in hand. At three, her son was inquisitive and lively, and on the whole Saul tended to ignore him.

“He’s inside with Huldah. I’m sure she would be glad to relinquish his help with baking bread!”

Saul called across the courtyard.

“Come, Jonathon, let me hear you honour your ancestors!” A little figure appeared and ran gladly up to him. The two then retired to the upper room.

Hannah could hear Jonathon’s voice saying, “We are the tribe of Benjamin, and my father was the son of Ithiel, who was the son of...”

Saul voice interrupted him. “No wait, start at the other end after our family came back from exile.” There was dead silence.

Hannah thought, “He’s only three.”

Then Jonathon began: “Meshullum was the son of Joel.” He said uncertainly.

“No,” said Saul. “He was the son of Joed.” Their voices faded away.

³⁶ *Synagogue of the Freedman: Jerusalem – Acts 6:9*

On the following Sabbath Saul, Asher and Jared met outside the Synagogue of the Freedmen in lower Jerusalem. This synagogue had originated some fifteen years before when the Senate evicted the Jews from Rome. Many of the members were the descendants of men Pompey had taken prisoner seventy-five years previously. Since then, many Greek-speaking Jews who visited Jerusalem from all parts of the Empire found the liberal atmosphere of this synagogue more acceptable than those dominated by the strict pharisees.³⁷

Saul and his companions were by no means the only pharisees attending this synagogue, but the vast majority of the men were trades people, artisans and visitors to Jerusalem. The hazzan greeted them as they entered the doorway. The door was in the side of the long wall, and faced the Holy Ark where the sacred scrolls were housed in an alcove behind a curtain. In front of this was a reading desk and on one side was the throne for the president of the synagogue. On either side of this were the chairs for the chief members of the congregation. Around the wall ran a stone bench and stretching round three sides of the building were wooden galleries where the women sat.³⁸

The synagogue was rapidly filling. Saul was surprised to see how big a crowd was present. The president of the synagogue had now taken his place.

Jared pointed to a young man, "That's him, the man I told you about. He is obviously going to preach today." Saul grunted.

The men unwrapped their prayer shawls with their blue fringes and a murmur of voices rose as the accompanying prayers were said. The head of the synagogue began the Shema.

"Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One...." The prayers were followed by the benedictions.³⁹

The hazzan then went to the Holy Ark and took out the Torah Scroll. He removed its cloth and opened it to the place designated for the day. He put it on the table and the head of the synagogue invited a Levite to read the first section. Next to the reader stood the interpreter. The reader read one verse with his eyes lowered onto the text. He would stop and the interpreter translated the verse from the Hebrew into Greek. With the final section read, the hazzan returned the scroll to its cloth covering and put it back into the Holy Ark.

The hazzan now took out the book of Jeremiah, the president of the synagogue nodded to Stephen to step up to read from it. He opened the scroll and began to read in Hebrew.

³⁷ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia Vol 2:360*

³⁸ *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia Vol 4:679 gives description of typical synagogues of that period.*

³⁹ *Shema: International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia.*

“The Lord Almighty, the God of Israel says, ‘When I restore the people to their land, they will once again say in the land of Judah and in its towns, ‘may the Lord bless the sacred hill of Jerusalem, the holy place where he lives.’ People will live in Judah and in all its towns, and there will be farmers, and shepherds with their flocks. I will refresh those who are weary and will satisfy with food everyone who is weak from hunger. So then, people will say, I went to sleep and woke up refreshed.”

He paused for the interpreter. Then he read.

“I, the Lord, say that the time is coming when I will fill the land of Israel and Judah with people and animals. And just as I took care to uproot, to pull down, to overthrow, to destroy, and to demolish them, so I will take care to plant them and to build them up. When that time comes, people will no longer say, ‘The parents ate the sour grapes,

‘But the children got the sour taste.’”

The translation was made and the young man continued;

“Instead, whoever eats sour grapes will have his own teeth set on edge: and everyone will die because of his own sin. The Lord says, ‘The time is coming when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the old covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt.”

The attention of the whole congregation was fixed on the interpreter and as he finished, Stephen continued, “The new covenant that I will make with the people of Israel will be this: I will put my Law within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. None of them will have to teach his fellow countryman to know the Lord, because all will know me, from the least to the greatest. I will forgive their sins and I will no longer remember their wrongs. I the Lord have spoken.”⁴⁰

Stephen came to the end and waited with his eyes downcast while the interpreter concluded. The Hazzan returned the scroll to the cloth wrapper and put it back in the Holy Ark.

Stephen looked at the congregation and said, “In our own times has this prophecy been fulfilled? We know how difficult it is to keep the Law and to remember every one of its requirements. Moses received the Holy Law from God to guide and teach our people, but the Lord God promised Moses there would be another prophet to be like him and to teach the people everything that God commands. God promised this because He knew that the people of Israel would fail to fulfil the Law and be punished. We know that everyone who sins is punished and that when our nation has sinned we have suffered again and again for it. But God’s loving kindness keeps seeking us out to

⁴⁰ *Jeremiah 31:23-*

bring us back into His Way. Through Isaiah and Jeremiah and the other prophets, God told of the coming of a Messiah, a Saviour. One who could finally deliver us from the consequences of our sins. He planned this long ago and in our times He has fulfilled His promises.

“Are you saying that the Law is no longer required?” Saul could not see who had asked the question, but he waited to hear the answer.

“No,” answered Stephen, “The One who is the fulfilment of these promises, said that not one smallest detail of the Law shall be done away with, but he also said that he came to fulfil the Law. And so I tell you that when Jeremiah said that God had promised to write His Law in our hearts, he did not mean the written Law of the Torah, nor the Oral Law of the Pharisees, he meant that through the power of His Holy Spirit living in us we should each one know and be able to live in holiness and righteousness without sin.”

There was a growl of disagreement.

Asher asked, “How can a man possibly live without sin? There is no way that he can avoid ritual uncleanness.”

“Yet,” replied Stephen, “Jeremiah tells us with God’s law in our hearts, he will forgive our sins, and teach each one what He wants.”

“What you say suggests that people will no longer have to offer the sin offerings in the Temple?”

“God does not live in houses built by men,” answered Stephen. “As the prophet Isaiah said the Lord says, ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house, then could you build for me?’”

Saul was listening intently, he began to see how this young man could be trapped into blasphemous declarations regarding both the Law and the Temple. He decided to keep quiet and wait.

“And so I declare to you the wonderful news of God’s mercy to us. Jesus taught us, not as the scribes and teachers of the Law, but with God’s authority. He died but has risen from the dead and is alive...”

The roar of anger came from Saul and his companions. They waited to hear no more but rushed up to the front and seized Stephen, dragging him out into the street and up the hill. The shouting and noise brought out more people to see what was happening. Stephen’s friends tried to help him, but the struggling group round him beat away the opposition and they dragged him up to the Court of Gentiles, there they handed him over to the Temple police. The officer asked for the charges against Stephen.⁴¹ A chorus of voices shouted first one thing and then another, finally Jared said “He was saying Jesus of Nazareth, a man executed as a criminal, taught with God’s authority.” His voice was filled with disgust, “He says the scribes and

⁴¹ *Stephen: Arrest in 31 – Acts 6:8-*

teachers of the Law do not teach with authority and that the Temple is no longer required.”

The Officer sucked his teeth, “I think that is enough to go on with.” Turning to the guards he said, “Take him and put him in the cell.” Stephen was marched across the Court of Gentiles he would stay in the cells until the Great Sanhedrin met.

It was midday and time for the second of the three Sabbath meals. Asher’s usually good-humoured face was still red and angry. Jared’s thin face did not show much emotion, but his eyes glinted with the unexpected excitement. Saul’s anger made his face look more than ever like a hawk. Their ways parted outside the gate and Saul went home to his sister’s house.

The Great Sanhedrin⁴² sat on the second day of the week in the Court of Hewn Stones⁴³ which was in the left corner of the Court of Israelites.⁴⁴ The bench of judges was nearly full. This was an important case. Since Gamaliel’s earlier ruling the Nazarenes had free run of the Temple area and their numbers were increasing rapidly. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were quite open about their support of the Nazarenes. Saul thought Simon of Bethany was also one, since he was often in the company of the other two. It was rumoured that some of the lesser priests were disciples too.

Caiaphas⁴⁵ and his father-in-law entered. The court began. Since the charges could involve the death penalty, Caiaphas had the witnesses brought in and said: “Perhaps the evidence you are about to give is based on conjecture or hearsay, or something said by another witness, or the statement made by a person in whom you have confidence. Perhaps, also, you are unaware that we shall subject you to a searching cross-examination. Take note that criminal cases are not like civil cases. In the latter a man forfeits his money and makes atonement; but in criminal cases the responsibility of his blood and the blood of his seed rests upon him until the end of the world.”

Caiaphas’s voice was bored, but Jared wondered uneasily if their evidence was as rock hard as they had thought. The High priest’s words carried a dire warning, and he was continuing, “Thus do we find it in connection with Cain who killed his brother, of whom it is said, “The voice of thy brother’s bloods crieth unto Me from the ground”. “The text does not read “Thy brother’s blood” but “Thy brother’s bloods,” meaning his blood and that of his seed. For that reason was man first created a single individual, to teach the lesson that whoever destroys one life, Scripture ascribes it to him as though he had

⁴² *Great Sanhedrin: International Standard Bible Encycl:*

⁴³ *Court of Hewn Stones: Where the Sanhedrin sat*

⁴⁴ *Everyman’s Talmud by Rev Dr A. Cohen published Dent and Dutton 1932. The following details concerning court procedure also come from this book.*

⁴⁵ *Caiaphas: Trial of Stephen – Acts 7-*

destroyed a whole world and whoever saves one life, Scripture ascribes it to him as though he had saved a whole world. You may perhaps say (since your responsibility is so grievous), “Why should we take this trouble upon us?” But it has been said, “He being a witness, if he do not utter it, he shall bear his iniquity,” or perhaps you may say, “Why should we be responsible for the blood of the accused?” But it has been said “When the wicked perish, there is shouting.”

Having given this solemn charge, the witnesses were escorted out. Jared was pleased that Asher, as the eldest, was called in first.

One of the rabbi’s began the cross-examination of Asher.

“In which Sabbatical period did the incident occur?”

“My masters, it occurred on the last Sabbath.

“Answer the questions as they are given.” Asher was sternly reprimanded.

Asher swallowed nervously, “In this sabbatical period, my master.”

“In which year?”

“In this year,” replied Asher.

“In which month?”

“In this month.”

“On what day of the month?”

“On the twentieth day.”

“On which day of the week?”

“On the Sabbath, my master.”

“At what hour?”

“At about the fourth hour.”

“In what place?”

“At the Synagogue of the Freedman, my master.”

“Did you know this man?”

“No, my master, but I have seen him before.”

“Did you warn him?”

“He was questioned as to the meaning of his words and I took it that he knew that we were concerned about the nature of his teaching.”

“What did he say?”

Asher hoped he was going to get the next part of his testimony right. “He said that neither the written Law, nor the Oral Law was needed any more because the prophecy of Jeremiah had come true.” There was a movement among the judges and several whispered to their neighbours.

“What else did he say?”

“He said because people could now live without sin, they no longer needed to offer sacrifices in the Temple.” There was an even greater stir amongst the judges.

“Have you anything else to add?”

“He said this Jesus of Nazareth had done away with the Law and the Temple.”

The Rabbi conducting the cross-examination called for the next witness, and Asher thankfully left the chamber.

Jared was asked the same questions, and if at any time there was a discrepancy between the evidence of the two witnesses, the accused would be discharged.

The evidence was identical until Jared was asked,

“Did you know this man?”

“I had seen him before.”

“Did you warn him?”

“Those present asked him questions about the things he said and he persisted in proceeding.”

“What did he say?”

“He said that the prophesy of Jeremiah has been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth and that people no longer needed the Holy Law of Moses.”

“What else did he say?”

“He said it was now possible to live without sin because everyone knew God’s Law in their hearts.”

“Have you anything else to add?”

“Yes,” answered Jared, “He said God does not live in the Temple and sacrifices do not purify people from sin.”

There was an outbreak of outraged comment from the judges and the students on the front benches. Jared thankfully left the chamber and joined Asher outside, where a considerable crowd had begun to gather.

After consultation, the judges agreed that the evidence of the two witnesses concurred and Stephen was invited to make his defence.⁴⁶

Caiaphas asked Stephen, “Is this true?”

Stephen said in a clear voice, “Brothers and fathers listen to me, before our Ancestor Abraham had gone to live in Haran, the God of Glory appeared to him in Mesopotamia and said to him, ‘Leave your family and country and go to a land that I will show you.’ And so he left his country and went to live in Haran.”

⁴⁶ *Stephen : Defence at his trial – Acts 7:2-*

Stephen's deep calm voice, with its pleasing musical intonation impressed his listeners. His opening words also pleased them. Here was someone who could put an argument together. They listened with growing attention as Stephen recounted their beloved history rehearsing God's promise to Abraham to give his descendants a land of their own, and the institution of the rite of circumcision as a sign of the Covenant.

He retold in simple straightforward words the selling of Joseph to the Egyptians by his brothers and the coming of Jacob and all his family to Egypt to be saved by this same brother, now Pharaoh's respected governor.

Stephen traced how God's promise to Abraham to make his descendants a great people, developed in the life and leadership of Moses.

His audience was paying close attention as Stephen laid the foundation of his argument. This was meat and drink to his listeners, great teachers of the Law, with acute and finely trained minds. Suddenly a new note came into the young man's voice as he continued "Moses is the one who was rejected by the people of Israel, 'Who made you ruler and judge over us?' they asked. Yet he is the one God sent to rule the people and set them free with the help of the angel who appeared in the burning bush. He led the people out of Egypt, performing miracles and wonders in Egypt and at the Red Sea and for forty years in the desert. Moses is the one who said to the people of Israel, 'God will send you a prophet, just as he sent me, and he will be one of your own people.' He is the one who was with the people of Israel assembled in the desert: he was there with our ancestors and with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and he received God's living message to pass on to us."

Stephen paused. Saul was impressed in spite of himself by the power of Stephen's arguments. So far, he had heard nothing with which he could disagree. Gamaliel was watching the young man intently. Gamaliel loved seeing the minds of the young reach out and grasp the Eternal Truths held sacred in the books of the Torah and the Prophets. Nicodemus was sitting next to Simon of Bethany – a man Nicodemus had never liked very much, until Jesus had healed him of leprosy and Simon had become a somewhat reluctant follower. Simon glanced at Nicodemus. He was sitting with his eyes shut and Simon guessed he was praying fervently for Stephen.

Stephen took a step forward, "Our ancestors refused to obey Moses, they pushed him aside and wished they could go back to Egypt."

Gamaliel nodded. Yes, it was true. Moses had repeatedly been rejected by the Israelites.

Stephen's theme was nearly at its central point, he elaborated on the Tent of God's presence and how it had been carried constantly with them until the time of David when the idea of building the Temple was first proposed, but

only executed later by Solomon. Stephen's voice rose, "But the most high God does not live in houses built by men; as the prophet says

"Heaven is my throne, says the Lord
and earth is my footstool.

What kind of house would you build for me?

Where is the place for me to live in?

Did not I make all these things?"

Suddenly Stephen's careful arguments burst apart as the awareness of his beloved Lord's rejection by these very people flooded his spirit. "How stubborn you are," he cried. "How heathen your hearts, how deaf you are to God's message." He had lost them. Nicodemus' eyes opened and tears came into them. Now he knew there could be no hope for this much-loved young man. Annas' eyes had also been shut. He found the speech tedious but since the two witnesses had been so inept, he had been trying to plan a new strategy to trap these cursed Nazarenes. He thought the young Pharisee Saul, a headstrong young man, might be useful if set in the right direction. But now Stephen's sudden break from his argument made the High Priest look at him closely – the fool was about to convict himself. He listened attentively.

"You are just like your ancestors: You too have always resisted the Holy Spirit! Was there any prophet that your ancestors did not persecute?" The Council began to stir angrily. Stephen's voice rose, "They killed God's messengers who long ago announced the coming of his righteous Servant. And now you have betrayed and murdered him. You are the ones who received God's law that was handed down by angels – yet you have not obeyed it!"⁴⁷

Roars of angry denunciation drowned Stephen's voice, and he stopped speaking. He looked up and light flooded his face. All those assembled paused in wonder. The day was dull and overcast, yet the sun's light seemed to fill the Council chamber. "Look," said Stephen, pointing over their heads, "I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right-hand of God."

Total Pandemonium broke out, strict pharisees covered their ears in holy outrage. Caiaphas nodded to the Temple police. Saul was so angry, he forgot his new robe and tore it down the front. Cries of "Blasphemy" mingled with "Stone Him" and like a hive of angry bees, Stephen was surrounded and rushed out of the Council chamber. Then Saul saw how Annas had prepared for Stephen's execution⁴⁸ – the Temple courtyard was filled with a rabble of disreputable looking people, who immediately took up the cry and screamed "Stone him, stone him."

⁴⁷ See Acts 7:1-53

⁴⁸ Stephen: Execution – Acts 7:57-

Saul, Asher and Jared rushed out together. The crowd was pushing and shoving its way across the courtyard and out of the Beautiful Gate into the Court of Gentiles and out through the gate leading down into the Kidron Valley. Stephen was flung down and the first stone hit his shoulder. Asher, still smarting after his foolish testimony, took off his cloak and handed it to Saul. Jared also tossed his at Saul's feet and picked up a stone.

Stephen stood up and, lifting his hand up, called "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" The crowd roared and stones hit him from every side. He knelt down and in a loud voice said, "Lord, Do not remember this sin against them." A huge rock hit him on the side of his head and he fell. More stones rained down on him, until the captain of the Temple guard put up his hand and said "Enough, he is dead."

Saul picked up Jared's cloak and handed it back to him.⁴⁹ Jared had a look of fierce exultation on his face. For some reason, Saul found it distasteful as an unwanted picture of Stephen's calm face provided a disturbing comparison.

Later as Saul and his companions entered the Court of the Gentiles, Annas's son Alexander, a man younger than Saul stopped him and said, "The High Priest wants to see you in his palace."

If Saul was surprised, he gave no sign but followed Alexander through the Court yard and out across the bridge onto the other side into the upper town. The wall facing the street gave no sign of the richness of the interior. The outer door opened into a hall way which looked through a pillared portico into a paved courtyard. Still without speaking, Alexander led Saul into a cool inner room where his father Annas and his son-in-law Caiaphas were reclining behind a low table on which lay a plate of dried fruits, almonds and dates. Two ornate gold and silver wine beakers also stood on the table.

Alexander inclined his head with no sign of servility and said "Here is the man you asked for father."

Saul found himself looking into the eyes of the most powerful man in Jerusalem. The wealth of the High Priest's family was proverbial and his monopoly of the sale of requisites for the Temple sacrifices such as sheep, doves, wine and oil was a source of much anger and distress amongst the traders. No one would dream of addressing Annas as anything but 'High Priest'.

Saul and Annas looked at each other without speaking. Saul's lack of servility seemed to please the old man and he grunted. Then he spoke. "I take it you do not approve of these Nazarenes?"

⁴⁹ Saul: Approval of Stephen's murder – Acts 8:1

Saul's eyes filled with anger and he said forcibly, "They are blasphemers, distorters of the Law and they should be destroyed before they do any more harm."

A bleak smile flitted across Annas' face as he sipped his wine. "Our thought entirely. I believe you and your friends were instrumental in getting Stephen brought to trial?" Saul nodded. Annas looked at Caiaphas and they exchanged almost imperceptible nods. "In that case, I take it you know others who are likewise infected by this pernicious heresy?"

"Yes," answered Saul, "We know where they congregate and which synagogues they seem to favour. We also have —"

"It is our view," interrupted Annas, "That now is the time to destroy this sect for ever, not by attacking the leaders, which might cause a riot and bring trouble with the Romans, but by picking off the followers." He paused and again sipped his wine. "It is our observation that if you pull enough leaves off the vine, you kill the root."

Saul's eyes lit up, "You mean arrest all those who claim to be followers?"

Caiaphas might defer to his father-in-law, but he was by no means a fool. "It seems to us quite a simple matter to identify followers of this Nazarene because they claim he rose from the dead. They are so fanatical about this so-called 'fact' that we think you can use it to sort out genuine followers from those who are merely attracted to a new fad. It would also give the waverer's a loop-hole to avoid imprisonment. It is my contention that nothing weakens a Cause so much as to have its adherents do the undermining themselves." He gave a laugh and looked at his father-in-law.

Annas said, "I don't think you need be too fussy about who you arrest. They can be sorted out when they come to trial, and a little genuine terror does no harm."

Saul felt elated. Here was authorisation from the highest source for cleansing the spreading infection of this cursed Nazarene. "What resources can I use to arrest these people?"

Caiaphas answered, "The captain of the Temple guard is at your disposal. He has been instructed to assist whoever I send to him. He will make available all the guards you need. Might I suggest that it is good to begin as soon as possible while the minds of these people are still engaged in burying their companion and they are less likely to be able to cause trouble?"⁵⁰

Saul returned to the Temple and sought out the captain of the guard, he began "The High Priest sent me.."

The captain gave a short laugh and said "Oh, so you want some men." He turned and walked into the guard room. It was a large room, here the Levites

⁵⁰ Acts 8:1 States 'That very day...'

responsible for guarding the various gates in the Temple area assembled, ate their meals and kept their weapons. Men were chosen for this duty for their size and strength.

The captain shouted to six men who came forward. “You are instructed by the High Priest to accompany this man and arrest whoever he tells you to.”

Saul could see they did not think much of obeying a short academic like himself, but he knew actions would speak louder than words and he merely nodded to them and turned and walked out. After a moment’s hesitation, he was relieved to hear them following him.

And so on the day of Stephen’s death, Saul began systematically to arrest disciples of the Nazarene.⁵¹ He found Caiaphas’ assessment that these people would have been thrown into disorder by Stephen’s death was correct. They offered no resistance and he found it simple to sort out believers from non-believers.

When the door of a house was opened, sometimes by a maid or by the woman of the house, or even by a child, Saul would ask “Do you believe Jesus is risen from the dead?”

At first, not suspecting a trap, the eyes of the person would light up and they would say “Oh yes, Jesus lives.” Or “Jesus is God’s Messiah”, an answer which filled Saul with fury. Then the whole household would be arrested, men, women and adult children. It meant nothing to Saul that small children clung to their mothers and often only a slave girl would be left to care for them.

As the arrests continued, Saul found even the slaves of the household did not deny they believed Jesus was risen, and so sometimes whole households were arrested and the business left open to the street for vandals and thieves to take what they wished.

The only day Saul did not go out hunting the Nazarenes was the Sabbath. On these days he was filled with dissatisfied unrest. That day from being one of joy and pleasure, dragged by leaving him feeling unrefreshed. Hannah worried over him, but Saul had put up such a barrier between himself and his family she could not penetrate it. He seemed possessed.

After several weeks, the number of arrests began to drop. People had fled. The leadership was also dispersed, and the huge public meetings in Solomon’s Porch no longer occurred. From information obtained under torture, it appeared many of the brethren had left for Samaria, Damascus, Antioch and other towns outside the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin.

Saul was still filled with outrage and the behaviour of those he arrested added to it. Often they accepted the rough arrest with quiet dignity. While

⁵¹ *Saul: Begins persecution of Nazarenes – Acts 8:1*

they were distressed, they were not afraid and some even used words similar to Stephen “Lord, forgive these men.” He decided to ask the High Priest for a letter of introduction to the synagogues in Damascus and a troop of soldiers to go to arrest some of those who had fled from Jerusalem. His request was considered with some amusement, but subsequently granted.⁵²

⁵² *Saul: Asks for a letter to Damascus – Acts 9:2*

CHAPTER 2: SAUL IN DAMASCUS

SPRING CE 31

ACTS 9:1-23

Saul, together with four Temple guards left on the following first day.⁵³ They rode mules and led two pack animals carrying their provisions. The journey would probably take about ten days with a compulsory stop over for the Sabbath. The Temple police had come to know Saul over the weeks as a taciturn man who did not encourage light conversation, but they looked forward to the break from routine and were happy to let Saul ride along alone, wrapped in his own thoughts.

They chose the shorter route through Samaria. The countryside was still green from the spring rains. Farmers were busy in the fields. The sky was soft blue and the birds were singing. It was a time of surging life, and the men with Saul often sang as the mules tripped effortlessly along the roads. For Saul, there was no light and even the sunshine seemed dark. After the second day, happy memories of his boyhood came back to him. He had often ridden the sturdy Cilesian horses when his parents left the sultry heat of Tarsus to go to their summer house in the foothills of the great Taurus mountains. The memories came back to remind Saul of his young longing to serve the Lord God.

He remembered his father's pride in his quick learning and grasp of the Law. He thought of the winter days in his father's workroom where he learnt to sew the black Cilesian cloth into tents, or the pale canvas made from cannabis stalks for canopies. The joys of the Sabbath listening to the exposition of the scriptures. The sunlit memories seemed to darken his present mood.

The days of the journey seemed endless. They stayed overnight in the local synagogues often crowded with other travellers. One of the older guards, Caleb prepared their evening meals for them and then the guards would join the travellers in the courtyard to exchange news, but Saul, dispirited and tired would say the Shema, roll himself in his cloak and wait for sleep. Tired as he was, it would not come. Faces flashed before his inner eye. Men and women he had arrested and behind them all, Stephen's calm face at the moment of death and the words he had spoken. These had burnt themselves as an irritating refrain into Saul's mind, 'Lord, do not remember

⁵³ *Saul : Departs for Damascus – Acts 9:2*

this sin against them.’ What did these people have in common? He tossed on the narrow bed and the night seemed unending.

The journey continued up through Galilee. The weather was cool and the countryside beautiful. They reached Lake Galilee and the next day they crossed the Jordan river at the ford of the Daughter’s of Jacob. The melting snows from Mount Hermon had filled the river and their mules splashed showers of icy water over them. The countryside was changing as they climbed towards the desert plateau. They hurried on to get to a caravansary. It was the day before the Sabbath and they must be settled in before the ninth hour⁵⁴ in order to complete their preparations before sunset. The Sabbath began when the sun was about one diameter of its disc from the horizon. Later they said the prayers together and ate their first Sabbath meal.

The following morning the men said the Shema together. Saul felt a deep depression settle on him and left the caravansary to walk a short way up the hill until he was out of sight. There he began to wrestle once more with the plaguing thoughts and images that were haunting him. He wondered how he, a young and respected rabbi could be more than halfway to Damascus, pursuing heretics. Surely this was not the role of a rabbi? He felt a sudden revulsion at how he had himself chosen to hunt these people down. He remembered the beatings they had suffered after their arrests. He recalled the quiet dignity with which they accepted all that came upon them, even to the point of death. He thought of those who had recanted under pressure and denied they were followers of the Nazarene, how they had cursed him and he remembered the brokenness of those men and women. Why had he got caught up with these people? He knew he was called to be a teacher. His small stature would never permit him to be a member of the Sanhedrin, but he could become a respected rabbi with many pupils.⁵⁵

His mind switched, why did he not marry as his father urged? He was already in his early thirties and the unmarried state was frowned upon. He saw how Hannah and Abiel were satisfied with one another’s company and knew that a good wife could bring him peace of mind and body. Yet there was a hunger that went deeper than this, and somehow he knew that the married state would not satisfy it.

The day wore on and the sun dropped once more towards the western horizon. The food which had been prepared the day before was now finished. Except that the rules concerning fasting on the Sabbath were so strict, Saul would not have eaten. After sunset with the beginning of the first day of the

⁵⁴ 3 PM

⁵⁵ *The Jews believed God favours those who have a good physique, that qualification was also noted in the appointment of men to positions of responsibility in the community. The rule was ‘We elect to a Sanhedrin only men of tall stature.’ Page 240. Everyman’s Talmud. Rev.Dr.A.Cohen published 1932 by Dent and Dutton.*

week, Caleb once more produced his pot and supply of grains and lentils and began to prepare the first meal of the new day. For Saul the Sabbath had been long and painful.

The next day they rode hard and made good progress. One more day and they should reach Damascus. On the morning of the ninth day since leaving Jerusalem they passed oxen being driven round threshing the grain from the barley harvest. One of the oxen balked and the farmer hit it to get it going again. The ox kicked out against the goad and only with great difficulty could be persuaded to resume its sedate trampling of the barley stalks.⁵⁶ They began to drop down towards the plain. Damascus could be seen in the distance. Apricot orchards, their flowering finished, were full of fresh green foliage. The sun was shining out of a clear blue sky.

Suddenly, there was a brilliant flash of light and a great rumble of sound. The mules plunged with fright. Saul fell to the ground. There was no sign of a storm. The men got off their frightened mules, trying to calm them. They saw Saul was lying on the ground and he appeared unconscious. Then he opened his eyes and struggled to get up.⁵⁷

They heard him say, "Who are you, Lord?"

Esau said, "It's me, Esau."

Esau saw something was wrong, "Are you all right?" Saul did not reply but struggled to get to his feet.

Again Esau asked, "Are you all right?"

Finally Saul said, "Why has it suddenly gone dark?" The men looked at each other. Maybe the lightning had struck him blind.

Esau said, "It's not dark, the sun is shining."

Saul asked, "Did you hear the voice?"

"There was no voice, just a loud roll of thunder," replied Esau.

"No," said Saul, "There was a voice." He said no more and the men looked at each other.

"Caleb, you lead his mule. Elias help me lift him," ordered Esau.

Saul fell forward onto the mule's neck, so Elias and Esau helped him down. Elias led the mules, while Esau led Saul by the hand. The strange procession joined the crowds heading towards Damascus. Saul was silent and withdrawn. He did not seem to be in any pain, but remained unaware of his surroundings. Esau felt he needed the attention of a doctor.

They entered the city and the tax collectors at the gates asked them their business, counted the mules and demanded the set tax per animal, which Esau paid.

⁵⁶ See Acts 26:14

⁵⁷ Saul: Conversion on Road to Damascus – Acts 9:3 -

Esau asked for the Jewish section and found it was in the southeastern section near the gate through which they had come. They located a synagogue and found the hazzan just opening up for evening prayer. He admitted them to the courtyard. The moment they stopped, Saul sank to the ground.

“Can you show us a room where we can put him?” Esau asked the hazzan. The man opened the door to one of the rooms surrounding the courtyard.

“What’s wrong with him?”

“That we don’t know. He fell off his mule when we were in sight of Damascus.” Esau decided the details only complicated the story.

“Maybe he’s had some kind of fit,” the hazzan was anxious, no way did he want a man dying on the premises. “You should take him to the doctor.”

“Is there one near here?” Esau asked.

“There’s Judas, he lives in Straight Street and is a member of the synagogue near him.”⁵⁸ He lives about half way along on the left. There is a goldsmith on one side and a coppersmith on the other. He is good with his herbs and potions.”

Esau turned to his men, “Elias you come with me. You men unpack the mules and start preparing the evening meal.”

The two men helped Saul onto his feet and followed the directions. For those used to the steep and crooked streets of Jerusalem, Straight Street was an amazing sight. Both men stopped in surprise, true to its name, it ran absolutely straight as far as they could see. Down each side colonnades gave shade to small shops and stalls which were doing a busy trade. Chariots, horsemen, laden donkeys and camels filled the middle section, while pedestrians shoved their way under the colonnades. Parts of the street were completely covered in by private dwellings stretching across the road. The noise, smells and heat awoke every sense.

Esau and Elias pushed their way through the milling crowds and finally saw a door with a doctor’s symbol beside it. The coppersmith and the goldsmith on each side just as the hazzan had said. Elias knocked. After a while, a young slave girl came and Esau asked if the physician was in.

The girl stood aside and said, “If you will wait my masters, I will call him.” She went through an archway into a courtyard.

Presently a tall man of middle years came through the archway and greeted them. “You have need of help, my brothers?” He asked.

Esau explained what had happened. Judas looked at Saul and said to Esau, “Bring him in.” When he saw how Saul appeared totally unaware of his surroundings he said, “You had better leave him here. I have a room where I

⁵⁸ Judas: Straight Street, Damascus – Acts 9:11

can examine him and treat him.” He turned and called his assistant “Jabin, take this man and make him comfortable, I will come shortly.”

A sturdy Syrian slave came and took Saul’s hand, but when he found how inert he seemed, with no apparent effort he lifted Saul and carried him off.

Thankfully relinquishing his responsibility, Esau said, “I will come round in the morning.” Judas nodded and the two Temple guards left.

Judas turned to find his wife Anna regarding the new patient. “What is the matter with him? He doesn’t look like the ordinary blind man.”

“No,” replied Judas, “he was blinded by what seemed to be a flash of lightning about midday. He seems to be in a sort of trance.”

Anna was a tall stately woman in her middle years. Although she was also a Jewess, she dressed much more in the Greek manner, without a veil and with her hair piled on her head held in place with jewelled combs. “Do you want the girl to prepare some food for him?”

Judas said, “Let me first examine him, then you can see if he will drink some of that chicken broth of hers.” Presently Jabin returned.

He waited until Judas looked at him, “He has not spoken a word. I took off his sandals and outer robe. He seems to have no injuries. I washed him and he is lying there. I cannot tell if he wakes or sleeps.” Judas nodded and went to see the patient. He greeted him and felt for his heartbeat. Saul said nothing, neither did he open his eyes. He seemed totally withdrawn and cut off from all that surrounded him. His heartbeat felt strong and even. His skin was not hot, nor was he in any distress of breathing.

Puzzled, Judas said, “Would you like something to eat or drink?” There was no answer. Judas shrugged and left him.

Time stood still for Saul. When the light flashed from the sky he had not been aware he had fallen, but he heard a voice “Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?”

“Who are you Lord?” He had asked, and then the shocking, thrilling words. “I am Jesus, whom you persecute.” Suddenly a light penetrated his very soul and he KNEW that the voice belonged to the man he had fought, hated and yes, feared for so long. Jesus! The Nazarene WAS alive. The voice said “Get up and go into the city where you will be told what you must do.”

A great joy filled him. He rose and wondered how night had come so quickly. He heard Esau say “It’s not dark, the sun is shining.” But it did not mean anything because the voice, the wonderful voice was still ringing in his ears. He asked, “Did you hear the voice?” But again he did not notice the answer. He was caught up and heedless of all that subsequently happened to him.

He was unaware that a slave tried to give him something to drink. He was suspended between heaven and earth and his soul was filled with wondrous joy. He knew Jesus was what his followers claimed Him to be, the Messiah, the Holy One of God. He Lived!

When Esau returned from the doctor, he found the hazzan was just closing the synagogue after the evening prayers. “The man I took to the doctor, is Saul of Tarsus. He has been authorized to deliver the letters from the High Priest, but as we approached Damascus he seemed to be struck by lightning even though there was no storm. He seems to be totally blind.”

“Do you know what the letters are about?” The hazzan asked. He was curious as to why officers of the Temple were required to deliver communications from the High Priest. Usually such letters were brought by a Levite.

“Saul has been responsible for the arrest of many of the followers of the one they call Jesus of Nazareth. He has come with authority to arrest those who escaped from Jerusalem.”

The hazzan felt a twinge of anxiety, “We have several of our members who claim to be followers of the Nazarene, but they make no trouble.” The last thing the Jewish community needed was to draw attention to themselves with King Aretas’s governor and the city authorities. So far the Jews in Damascus had been left alone, but any disturbance could upset this pleasant state of affairs, especially as King Aretas was at war with King Herod.⁵⁹

“Well,” remarked Esau, “I suppose we’d better wait and see how well he recovers. Maybe we will conclude our business here in a day or two.”

Alarmed at the news, the hazzan contacted the president of the synagogue to inform him. The next day he had several anxious people calling at his house to ask if the rumour was true. Had Saul of Tarsus come with letters to arrest the brethren?

He confirmed that it was indeed true. Great fear filled the brethren. Some of them had lost family members to stonings. Others, both men and women had died after infection set in following beatings they received. The brethren gathered in prayer for strength and guidance.

On the morning of the third day, a man called Ananias was on the roof of his house praying. Suddenly he heard a voice saying “Ananias!”⁶⁰ “Here am I Lord,” he answered and the Lord said. “Get ready and go to Straight Street. At the house of Judas, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying,

⁵⁹ Aretas – *King of Damascus: War with Herod*, Flavius Josephus – *Complete Works* by Whiston (1867). Published Pickering and Inglis 1960 Book 18 Ch 5.

⁶⁰ Ananias: *God tells him to heal Saul* – Acts 9:11

and in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come in and place his hands on him so that he might see again.”

Ananias shook with fear and replied, “Lord, many people have told me about this man and about the terrible things he has done to your people in Jerusalem. And he has come to Damascus with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who worship you.”

Ananias felt the Lord smile and say, “Go, because I have chosen him to serve me, to make my name known to Gentiles and Kings and to the people of Israel. And I myself will show him all that he must suffer for my sake.” Ananias remained where he had been kneeling, he murmured the benediction for time of danger, “Do Thy will in heaven above: grant tranquillity of spirit to those who fear Thee below and do that which is good in Thy sight. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, Who hearkeneth unto prayer.”⁶¹

Ananias knew Judas the physician but he was not a believer, and he did not know what kind of man he was. He arrived at the door of Judas’s house his heart was thumping uncomfortably. He was further agitated to find his hands were trembling slightly. He repeated the benediction, “Do Thy will in heaven above...”

The door opened to his knock and to his relief, he saw Judas descending the stairway.

Judas crossed the hall, “Can I help you?”

Ananias swallowed before saying, “I hear you have a man Saul of Tarsus here and he is blind. May I see him?”

“I don’t know if there is any point. He has neither spoken, eaten nor drunk since he arrived three days ago. I am deeply troubled as to how to treat him for I have never seen a case like it before.”

Ananias looked at Judas and saw that he indeed was troubled and he took heart, “The Lord has sent me, his illness has been of the Spirit, not the flesh.”

Judas called the slave girl and said, “Show this master to the stranger’s room.”

Ananias followed the girl up the stairs and along the balcony to an inside room. There he saw a figure lying absolutely still on the bed. He looked down on the man most feared by all the followers of Jesus. He murmured, “May it be according to your will O Lord.” And he knelt down beside the bed, “Brother Saul, the Lord has sent me – Jesus himself, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here. He sent me so that you might see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

⁶¹ *Everyman’s Talmud* by Rev. Dr.A.Cohen published Dent and Dutton 1932

At Ananias' words, the figure stirred and Saul sat up.⁶² Immediately something like fish scales seemed to fall off his eyes. He tried to rise to his feet but he was extremely weak. Ananias helped him up.

Saul embraced him and said, "Praise the Lord Jesus, who truly lives, before I was blind but now I see. I would like to be baptised so that all can know that in baptism, the old Saul is dead and the new Saul is reborn into Jesus."

"Come" said Ananias, whose own joy almost matched Saul's. "Let us ask Judas if he has a private mikvah."⁶³

As Ananias assisted Saul down the stairs, Jabin coming through from the back kitchen stopped in amazement. It has been his task to try and get the patient to drink and here he was walking!

He ran quickly to where Judas was sitting and said, "Come quickly my master, there has been a miracle."

Judas followed him into the courtyard and he too stopped in surprise, then he hurried over to the two men. "What miraculous medicine did you administer?"

Ananias smiled and Saul laughed. "It is Jesus the Living Lord who sent Ananias to bring healing to me. Now I would be baptised to be purified from all the sins I have committed against the Lord Jesus and his people. Have you a mikvah in your house?"

Judas had heard about the sect of the Nazarenes, but he felt it was an extremist section of the Essenes or some such and had taken no further interest in its adherents. Now these two men were claiming what he knew was a miraculous healing. He felt confused.

However he said, "Yes, if you follow Jabin, he will show you where to go."

Jabin led them across the courtyard. A short flight of steps led down into a tiny pool of water. Saul took off his outer robe and in just his linen breeches, he walked rather unsteadily down the steps. The pool was deep enough so that when he reached the bottom step, he could completely immerse himself.

Ananias, also shedding his outer robe, entered the water with him and laying his hand on Saul's head said, "You are baptized into union with Jesus and now you are clothed so to speak, with the life of Jesus Himself."⁶⁴

Saul came out of the water and joy such as he had never experienced poured through him. He began the benediction of the daily prayer service "Thou sustainest the living with loving kindness, revivest the dead with great

⁶² Saul: Healed and converted – Acts 9:18

⁶³ Ritual bath for cleansing after incurring impurities

⁶⁴ Galatians 3:27

mercy, supportest the falling, healest the sick, loosest the bond..." But the joy was so overwhelming and new words took over, as Saul felt a uniting of his spirit with the very Lord himself and he began to praise Him in words he had never heard. Ananias joined and the two men sang in strange and beautiful harmonies with strange and beautiful words. Their singing brought the whole household to watch in wondering amazement. Presently they 'came down to earth' and looked at Judas and Anna, together with a circle of servants peering from behind.

Saul laughed. "See, I have been reborn. I am a new man in Jesus of Nazareth." Then his days of fasting caught up with him and he would have fallen if Judas had not put out a hand and caught him.

"You may be 'reborn', but you are as weak as a baby and need nourishment to put strength back into your legs. Anna, see that he gets something to eat and drink." Jabin helped Saul into his robe and steadied him as they walked back across the courtyard.

Judas turned to Ananias and said, "Will you join us at our midday meal?"

Ananias watched their progress and said, "I thank you, but I think my brethren will need to hear of this truly wonderful news. I will call round tomorrow if I may."

Judas smiled. "You will always be welcome. I think I too would like to know more of this Jesus of Nazareth. He seems a fine physician and perhaps I can learn from him."

Ananias laughed, "You can indeed," he turned to go.

"Wait," said Judas, "what are we to tell the men who accompanied Saul? Their officer, Esau has been here daily to see how Saul progresses."

Ananias's face became grave. "I had not thought of that." He paused, "They are not likely to call at this time of the day are they?"

"No," replied Judas, "He will come soon after the third hour. He does not seem happy about the delay. We will need to come up with something before he arrives tomorrow."

Ananias thought and then said, "I think you should discuss this with Saul. After all it is his problem, but we will support him in any way we can." Judas nodded and Ananias took his departure with a sombre face.

That evening, Saul and Judas were sitting in the courtyard. The evening meal had been cleared away. Lamps had been lit and Saul was propped up against a pile of cushions. Anna was standing spinning and listening to the conversation. She was a calm, efficient woman who liked order in her life. This stranger had brought disturbance and possible danger to them. She hoped Judas would make arrangements for him to leave as soon as possible.

Saul said to Anna, "Thank you for a meal that has restored my strength. I hope that tomorrow I will relieve you of the anxiety of my presence." Anna was surprised that he had found words for her thoughts.

She looked up from her spinning and said gravely, "You are a surprising patient. I am glad you have recovered so quickly."

Judas cleared his throat. I – er, have you thought about the future?"

Saul's bright eyes met Judas's and he smiled, "Yes," he said, "The Lord Jesus has changed my plans." He thought a moment, "But I think He will also give me the answer as to how I must proceed."

Judas looked worried, "Esau has called every day to enquire on your progress. He could see for himself that you were beyond medical help, but tomorrow he will see you recovered and expect you to take up your commission."

Saul smiled. "If it will not inconvenience you I would like to see Esau and the other police officers together so that they will all see and hear that I am a changed man." A quick movement from Anna made Saul look at her.

"Does this trouble you? Then we will make an alternative arrangement."

"No, no," said Judas, "Of course you must see them here..."

"My friend, I would not cause you or your wife any embarrassment. Tomorrow I will go straight to the synagogue and talk to Esau. The letters I hold commission me to take any of the believers into custody." Saul paused, thinking. "If I wrote a letter to the High Priests explaining I am unable to fulfil it I would think all Esau can do is to return to Jerusalem."

Judas gave a rather grim smile and said, "I don't imagine the High Priest will be very pleased when he gets it."

Saul's eyes looked sad as he said reflectively, "No, I don't suppose I shall be able to return to Jerusalem for quite a time."

The next morning began for Saul as had every one since he was old enough to remember.

As he woke he said, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, Who revivest the dead." Joy flooded him as he remembered his sense of spiritual rebirth.

"My Lord, I have sinned before Thee." How deeply, he only now realised. Today he would see the brethren face to face; some of whom had been imprisoned and subjected to thirty-nine lashes; some of whom...he resumed the benediction.

"May it be acceptable before Thee, O Lord my God, that Thou grant me a good heart, a happy lot, a good inclination, a good friend, a good name, a generous eye, a liberal soul and a humble spirit." The familiar words took on a new and deeper meaning.

“May not Thy Name ever be profaned through me and let me not become a byword among my fellow-creatures.” Tears filled his eyes as he remembered the fear and hatred his name inspired, not only amongst the brethren, but even his own colleagues. Gamaliel’s sensitive, wise face came into his mind....

“May my fate not be to be cut off from Thee, nor my hope turn to despair.” Just how cut off he had been from God and how despairing he only now knew. A new sense of God’s presence filled him with intense joy.

“Let me not be in want of the help of others and let not my sustenance be dependant upon them, for their gift is small but the shame they inflict is great. Set my portion in Thy Torah...” He paused. He knew he had a closer relationship with God through Jesus than he had ever had in all the years of studying the Torah. He would have to think about this.

“Preserve Thy Temple and Thy Holy City all our days....” Stephen’s words came into his mind ‘God does not live in houses built by men’⁶⁵ He could see he had a great deal of thinking to do....

He dressed and went downstairs where Jabin poured the water over his hands and feet, so he could wash. Then he saw Anna through the open doorway in the kitchen and said.

“I am going to the synagogue. May I leave my bag here until I find somewhere to lodge?”

Surprisingly she smiled at him. Anna had found Saul’s sensitivity to her thoughts and fears remarkable. She found she actually liked the strange little man with the brilliant eyes, “If you wish, you would be welcome to stay.”

Saul smiled at her and said, “Thank you, but I know my presence may yet become an embarrassment to you and your husband. I am sure the Lord will provide for me.”

She watched him as he crossed the courtyard to the room where Judas was sitting. He looked up as Saul entered and before he could speak, Judas said, “I am coming with you to the synagogue. I think this will be a most remarkable morning service, and I would not miss it for the world.” Saul laughed.

Ananias’s news of the transformation of the High Priest’s representative had spread rapidly through the Jewish sector of the city. Already a crowd of men were gathered round the door of the synagogue. The members of the Nazarene sect had caused considerable stir in recent times. But there were many parties and sects represented in the Jewish community and they had learnt to live peaceably together in a Gentile world. Sometimes debates caused more heat than light, especially with the unorthodox claims of the

⁶⁵ *Everyman’s Talmud* by Rev. Dr. A.Cohen Published 1932 by Dent & Dutton. Page 67

Nazarenes. Often a group would break away and form another congregation. So Damascus, like many other large gentile cities, had several thriving synagogues serving the Jewish community. However no one viewed the coming of the High Priest's representative on a Nazarene-hunting mission with much favour, so there was intense interest as to what he would now do.

Saul saw the crowd round the door of the synagogue and for a moment his heart failed him. Then he thought of that vivid vision of the Risen Lord and he knew what he had to share was far more important than what people might think of him. He was grateful for Judas's presence.

Ananias was standing with a group of men. When he saw Saul he went forward, embraced him warmly and murmured, "Are you ready for this?" Saul nodded and turned to be introduced to Ananias's friends.

The hazzan arrived a little breathless to open the doors. The waiting men entered the synagogue. Prayer shawls were put on and a quiet murmur of voices rose as the men put on their phylacteries.

Saul put his on hardly noticing what he did, but when he came to tie the tefillah for his forehead saying, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us with Thy commandments and enjoined upon us the command about tefillin," he stopped and thought about the contents of the four compartments. The text in the first two were from Exodus, to remind all Jews of how God delivered them from Egypt. Saul thought, I too have just been delivered from bondage. The second, reminds each Jew how God bought them out of slavery by the death of every firstborn male Egyptian and every animal. Was Jesus's death on the Cross a form of sacrifice to buy back people like himself from sin? He needed time to think. There was so much he did not understand. The text in the third compartment was from Deuteronomy and tells how God will bless those who love him whole-heartedly. Something bothered Saul.

The prayers were said followed by the readings for the day, but Saul remained sunk in deep thought. It was something to do with the action of binding on the phylacteries to the outside of his body as a reminder of God's power and love and yet he suddenly realised the greater reality was on the inside of him. His inner spirit was irradiated by the living presence of what Ananias had called 'the Holy Spirit.' Nothing he had ever done in the way of external cleansing of his body and following of the ancient rituals had ever reached the intense awareness of the living God he now experienced. He needed time to think!

Suddenly he was aware the hazzan was addressing him, "The president of our synagogue invites you to address us."

Saul looked around him and saw every eye was upon him. The synagogue was full yet he knew that being an ordinary working day it would normally

have barely the ten men necessary for the customary prayers. He moved forward until he stood before the Ark.⁶⁶

Turning to the Elders sitting alongside him he began,⁶⁷ “My fathers and you my brothers, you have heard how zealous I have been in hunting down all those who claim Jesus as their living Lord. Many of you have fled before me from Jerusalem, and I, in my self-imposed determination to eradicate what I thought to be an intolerable heresy against the Lord God, obtained letters from the High Priests to give to you my fathers, so that I might arrest any who were followers of the Way of the Lord; both men and women and bring them back to Jerusalem.” The silence intensified.

“Four days ago, as my companions and I came near to Damascus about midday, a bright light from the sky flashed suddenly round me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me ‘Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute me?’ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked. ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you persecute.’”

A murmur of amazement swept round his listeners.

“I asked ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Get up and go into Damascus, and there you will be told everything that God has determined for you to do.’ I was blind because of the bright light, and so my companions took me by the hand and led me into Damascus.

“Yesterday, brother Ananias came to see me and laid his hands on me and said, ‘Brother Saul, see again.’ At that very moment I saw again and looked at him. He said ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know His will, to see His Righteous Servant and to hear Him speaking with His own voice; For you will be a witness for Him to tell everyone what you have seen and heard.’ Then he took me immediately and baptized me to have my sins washed away.” He stopped.

The Brethren were laughing and crying and praising God. The unbelieving Jews did not know what to make of this statement and were conferring.

Suddenly the door burst open and in came a very angry Esau, followed by Elias. Before he could speak, the president of the synagogue rose and said, “Much has been said that we do not understand. This man has obviously undergone some mystical experience. I would suggest everyone returns to his home or business and we will gather at sundown this evening.” Slowly and reluctantly the men began to unwind their tefillin, remove their prayer shawls and depart.

⁶⁶ Saul: Preaches in Damascus – Acts 9:20

⁶⁷ Saul: Account of his conversion – Acts 9:1-4

Ananias came to Saul's side and said quietly, "I will wait for you and you will come with me." Saul nodded as he turned to face the full fury of Esau.

"I go to the house of Judas to be told you are better and I shall find you here. Furthermore I hear some rumour that you no longer intend to seek out and arrest the Nazarenes."

Saul looked at the angry man and said gently, "I have always believed what these people claimed was a lie and it was my duty to uproot and destroy those who propagated it. You were with me when I was struck down. In the blazing light I saw the Risen Jesus and now I know that I was wrong and they were right. He lives!"

Esau was puzzled. He knew Saul and how implacable he had been against the Nazarenes. He had seen the light and heard the roll of thunder, both of which were unaccountable and had frightened them to the extent they had all fallen on the ground. He looked at Elias and saw no help from him.

"You are commissioned to arrest the Nazarenes that escaped from Jerusalem and fled here and we have been sent with you to bring them back in chains for trial and punishment. What are you going to do?"

Saul said, "I will write a letter to the High Priests to tell them I can no longer persecute the followers of Jesus of Nazareth."

Elias interrupted, "What about the letters from the priests?"

"You can take them back."

Esau's anger had gone but he was deeply troubled. "You realise what you are asking us? We could be punished in the way the High Priest intends to punish the prisoners we fail to produce?"

"My letter will make it clear that it was my responsibility entirely and your story will confirm that you could do nothing else except return empty-handed."

"Then," said Esau, "I think you should not return the letters because he will ask me why I did not deliver them and effect the arrests instead." He gave a grim smile.

Saul nodded and turned to the hazzan, who had been stretching his ears to hear the exchanges. "Where can I find the president of the synagogue?"

"He lives over his shop down the street. I can take you there if you like." The hazzan hoped to include himself in the group to hear the rest of the discussion.

"Thank you," replied Saul, "Perhaps later. I think we need to reflect on the matter a little more," he turned to Esau and his companions.

"Let me go and write the letter. The decision must rest with me and I will return before the sixth hour to discuss its contents with you."

Esau nodded. He suddenly found this little man a lot more human, even though his abrupt change of heart was putting him in a very unpleasant position.

He turned to his companions and said, “Come, let us prepare for our return.”

Saul looked at the hazzan and decided he was not someone who could be trusted. He had the appearance of one who would use confidential information to his own advantage.

“I will return.” Saul turned and walked outside to where Ananias was waiting with two of the brethren.

“I have asked Raphael and Laban here to wait. I think we need to decide what must be done about your future.” Saul looked at the two older men waiting with Ananias. He smiled. The immediate problem could not affect the overwhelming joy that still flooded his soul. The three men grinned back and suddenly hugged him. They too knew the intensity of joy that filled Saul, even though persecution and troubles had seen that first euphoria fade for them. Their faith had deepened and strengthened.

“Come, let us go to my house,” said Ananias, “I want you to stay with me and my family while you remain in Damascus.”

“May you be blessed,” replied Saul. “I need to decide what I must do with my commission from the high priests and the letters they have given me to the synagogues in Damascus.” The street was crowded and conversation was difficult as they thrust their way through the stalls and shoppers. Soon they came to a narrow alley and Ananias turned down it. At the end was a door and after knocking, it was opened by a short, fat, jolly-looking woman carrying a baby, with another child holding onto her skirts. The room was small and a doorway at the far end let in a pool of sunlight from the yard where two young boys were playing with stones and pieces of wood and roads marked out in the dust.

“This is my wife, Dinah, and this is Keziah, touching the little girl peering from behind her mother’s skirts. And this fatty is Isaac.” The baby gave a gurgle of laughter. Ananias pinched his cheek. “We named him well, he laughs at everything!”

Dinah looked curiously at Saul and said, “You are most welcome, sir.”

Saul smiled and Ananias led them through the room and into the yard which had a number of rooms leading off and a staircase going up to the roof. Ananias took the three men up the outside stairs. Striped canvas in one corner gave a pool of shade.

Ananias turned and called to the two small boys playing down below, “Ezra and Uriel, bring up the mats and cushions, quickly now.”

The boys scrambled to their feet and shortly they came panting up the stairs with mats to put on the dusty roof and cushions to sit on.

When they were settled comfortably, Raphael, an older man, his beard streaked with white, turned to Saul and said, “We are here to help you in any way we can.” Laban nodded.

Saul said slowly, “I have letters to the synagogues here in Damascus. My first thought was to send them back to Jerusalem with my escort and a covering letter, but Esau, the captain of the guard, pointed out that this would put him and his men in a compromising position and they could quite likely suffer the fate of the prisoners they fail to produce. The High Priest, Annas does not like to be thwarted and he is not known for being merciful.”

“What do you want to do?” Asked Laban.

“I need your advice,” Saul replied, “I feel I am in duty bound to deliver the letters but I can no longer fulfil my commission to arrest the believers.”

There was an awkward pause and then Saul asked, “Has there been much opposition to the followers of Jesus here in Damascus?”

Ananias replied, “Not really, we attend the synagogue services and sometimes we are invited to preach. We also meet on first day evenings and sometimes on fourth day evenings to share a fellowship meal together.”

Raphael continued, “After the influx of refugees from Jerusalem, we have been occupied with helping families get on their feet. Many lost all their possessions. There were a few believers already resident here in Damascus, but it has been hard to help everyone.”

Saul’s eyes filled with tears. “How can they ever forgive me?” He asked. Raphael realised the effect of his account on his listener and leaned over and took Saul’s hand.

“I am not telling you this to make you suffer,” he said kindly. “I am explaining how it is that the Hebrew community here has not really taken much notice of the brethren. We’ve not posed a threat.”

Laban could see that Saul was suffering deep remorse. He said, “Our Lord Jesus taught us to forgive our enemies and to pray for them. We have been praying for you every day since the first refugees arrived from Jerusalem.”

Saul looked up in surprise. “You have been praying for me?” he asked.

Laban nodded. “You see Jesus taught that we must forgive those who sin against us, so that God can forgive us our sins.” Saul was silent. Again his eyes filled with tears and he bowed his head.

Ananias got to his feet. “When the Lord spoke to me that I should come to the house of Judas and lay my hands on you for healing, he also said something else.” Saul looked up in surprise.

“At the time it seemed so strange that I did not feel able to tell you, but now I will. The Lord said to me ‘I have chosen Saul to serve me, to make my name known to Gentiles and Kings and to the people of Israel. And I myself will show him all that he must suffer for my sake.’”⁶⁸ A deep quiet followed on Ananias’s words as he once more sat down.

The silence continued for some few moments and then Saul looked up and said, “Thank you, my brother. The Way of the Lord can be hard.”

“Yes,” said Raphael, “But He walks with you every step of it.”

Saul smiled at him. “If I were to deliver the letters, would it cause a problem, if I also explained my change of heart?”

“It seems to me,” replied Raphael, “That if the High Priests wrote the letters, you are under orders to carry them out, and should you fail, then your escort should make sure they are obeyed.” His listeners looked grim.

Raphael smiled, “However, it seems to me that if the escort returned without you and you then delivered the letters, that would answer nicely.” His listeners laughed and so it was decided.

Saul asked, “Is there someone who can write a letter for me. I should let Esau have it as soon as possible so they can start on their return.”

Laban said, “I have a young Scribe from Jerusalem working in my carpentry shop. He is not much of a woodworker, but he has a lovely script. Come now and we will get that letter written.”

The men rose and Saul turned to Ananias, “I have left my travelling bag at Judas’ house...”

“Don’t worry, I will send young Ezra round to fetch it. Uriel can go with him. It will come to no harm.”

Saul looked worried, “The letters are in the bag. Are you sure they will not be robbed?”

Ananias was reassuring and so Saul followed Laban.

Raphael said, “Don’t forget we will want to hear you tonight at the synagogue.”

Saul turned, “No,” he said soberly, “I have not forgotten, but I’m less sure how I can speak to those who have suffered so much at my hands.”

Laban walked quickly through the streets and Saul realised they were returning to Straight street. Sure enough some way down on the opposite side from Judas’ house, Laban stopped at a small shop. Outside it was piled with exquisite small tables, stools and chests inlaid with ivory, rare woods and even gold. A young man was sitting on a mat in the doorway. He rose when he saw them.

⁶⁸ Acts 9:15

Laban said, "This is my young apprentice, Phinehas. Go, my son, brother Saul here needs a letter written."

Phinehas's eyes lit up. He greeted Saul and said, "Sir, if you will wait inside, I will fetch my writing things. We can go out and sit under the tree in the courtyard."

Laban laughed, "Didn't I say he likes writing better than serving in a shop?"

Saul smiled and entered the shop which was further crowded with finely made tables of all sizes and heights; chairs, stools, bigger chests for clothing and bridal chests with delicate inlays.

Laban said, "Go through the back door, you'll see the tree. There is a bench beside it."

Saul walked out into the sunlit courtyard and sat waiting on the bench. Along the opposite side were the workrooms where slaves and apprentices were busy under the expert eye of a man who could only be Laban's son. He glanced at Saul but his attention returned to a slave sawing a plank of dark wood. Behind Saul there was a kitchen with the smell of bread being baked.

Phinehas came hurrying from his room carrying a small table and his writing materials. He was excited, "I do not get much call to write."

He opened his pen box and brought out some dried ink from which he carefully cut a short length to put in his inkwell. He added water and stirred it until the ink had dissolved. Then he took out the reed pens, and after careful examination, he selected one before finally unrolling the length of papyrus. Phinehas tested the ink on his hand, gave a satisfied grunt and looked up at Saul.

In the meanwhile, Saul had been thinking what he should say. It was not going to be an easy letter. He started dictating, "From Saul, who was commissioned to seek out and arrest all those followers of Jesus of Nazareth living in Damascus. To the High Priests, Annas and Caiaphas, greetings."

Saul gave an account of what had happened on the road to Damascus and briefly reviewed his own antagonism to the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. Then he continued, "I know and have seen this Jesus who was put to death in Jerusalem and I must now declare that I believe he was who he claimed to be..." Saul stopped, the next words would infuriate the priests and forever alienate him from them. They also had the power to seek him out and have him destroyed. It would be hard, if not impossible for him to return to Jerusalem. What would his father say when he heard? What would Hannah feel? He shut his eyes and prayed for guidance.

He opened them to find Phinehas was watching curiously, Saul continued, "I know He is the Messiah, the Holy One of God. When He spoke to me four days ago, I knew without doubt, He lives! It is therefore impossible for me to

carry out my assignment and I now understand I have been working against God's will." He paused to let Phinehas catch up. "May God's Grace be with you."

He realised this letter would leave many questions unanswered, but he knew he was not in a position to give any other explanation. It was also important to get Esau and the men back on the road as soon as possible.

Phinehas sanded the ink, carefully cut off the excess papyrus and then sealed the letter.

Saul asked, "Would you write another letter for me? I need to let my sister know what has happened."

Phinehas looked up, "With pleasure sir." He took the piece of papyrus, picked up his pen and waited expectantly. Saul found this letter to Hannah more difficult than the one to the High Priests. There was so much to say and yet he did not know how to explain. In the end he simply said he would not be returning to Jerusalem and he would write as soon as his plans were finalised. He realised that this would cause Hannah a great deal of worry and he wondered if he could ask Esau to explain a little of what had happened to him.

Laban insisted Saul stayed for their midday meal. Saul was grateful for his kindness since he was still feeling weak. After the meal Phinehas handed the letters to Saul who said, "Your writing is outstanding. Thank you for your help." He took out two silver coins from his purse and handed them to him.

Phinehas backed away, "No, no! Please accept my small effort as a thank offering to Laban. He has been so good to me."

Saul looked at Laban and said, "Please accept this on Phinehas' behalf. I am sure he could use it." Laban smiled his agreement and took the money.

Saul hurried back up Straight street to the synagogue. He found Esau and his men with the mules packed and ready.

Saul handed both letters to Esau and said, "I am sorry to ask you to bear this burden back to Jerusalem."

"I do not enjoy the thought of handing it to the High Priest," answered Esau, "but if you have written what you promised and you are not there to hear his response, hard words are not likely to break our bones."

Saul was troubled, "I told him what happened as we approached Damascus and if he cross-examines you, your evidence will support my letter. Then I said that I had always thought those who claimed Jesus was alive were frauds; I now had to confess that the person who spoke to me was Jesus and he is the Messiah, the Holy One of God and I have no doubt He lives, and I can no longer carry out my assignment as I now understand I have been working against God's will."

Esau looked at Saul. He knew the uncertain future that would now face this little man. Suddenly he embraced him and said, “Go with God.”

Deeply touched, Saul asked, “Would you give this second letter to my sister? She will be worried when I don’t return.”

Esau nodded before turning to his men. He bid them mount and without a backward glance they set off. Saul stood looking after them as they rode through the gateway. He waited for a moment thinking of what was still before him and then he returned to Ananias’ home to wait for sundown.

The evening service was even fuller than the morning one. After evening prayers were finished everyone waited expectantly for Saul. There was no one who did not know why he had come. Practically every believer in Damascus had come to see and hear their enemy and rejoice in the power of God to save. The leaders of the other synagogues were also there. Saul’s mission would have involved them. They wanted to know what he intended to do now. Saul stood in front of the Ark and turned to the sea of faces.

He then began to recount the reasons of his presence in Damascus and all that had happened to him. When he finished the brethren began to praise God. Many were laughing as they hugged each other, but there were also frowns and discussion between the leaders of the synagogues.

Then the President of the synagogue, a short stout man with an aura of wealth and authority, rose from his seat. Slowly the meeting quietened again, “May I ask what you intend doing now?”

Saul stood, “I have the letters from the High priests and it was my intention to deliver them to all the synagogues in Damascus and I would also give my testimony that I was unable to fulfil my commission. I have written to the High priests to tell them of these events and the Temple guards are on their way back to Jerusalem.” There was a moment of astonished silence as the import of Saul’s words struck those present.

The president of the synagogue smiled and said “Clever, very clever. You make sure the means of arresting and transferring any followers of this Jesus are gone, yet you obey your commission by delivering the letters.”

There was laughter which quickly hushed as he continued, “This leaves the elders and leaders of the synagogues to decide if we must take action on the contents of the letters which I presume you have with you.”

Saul reached into his pouch and brought out four letters addressed to the presidents of the four synagogues.⁶⁹ He handed them to the hazzan.

The president grunted and then said, “I think that we must confer after we have read these letters. We will let you know the result of our deliberations.”

⁶⁹ This is a guess There is no evidence of the number of synagogues in Damascus, except there were more than one. See Acts 9:2

With that, he nodded to the other leaders, “Shall we meet tomorrow then at the fourth hour in my house?”

Saul felt drained and exhausted. The brethren had gathered round him to greet and embrace him. Judas said to Ananias, “If you don’t get Saul home, he will collapse again.”

Ananias nodded. He turned to the brethren, “Brothers, let me take Saul home now and we will meet again tomorrow night.”

An elder from one of the other synagogues said, “Let him come to the synagogue in Weaver’s street tomorrow.”

The next morning, Saul woke early when Ezra and Uriel were about to creep out of the room. He said the benediction on waking and his heart was filled with joy as he realised how God had answered this prayer. He rose, rolled up the mat. The whole family was busy washing and the cheerful family life further lifted his spirits.

He asked Ananias, “What work do you do?”

“Two brothers, Reuban and Samuel have a carpentry workshop. I work in partnership with them, nothing like Laban’s fine work.” He added somewhat ruefully, “We do plain work – doors, tables, camel saddles, whatever people need. We have plenty of work.” He omitted to say it was hard and did not bring them much income, but Saul knew that it must be so.

“They too are believers, why don’t you come with me and then we can talk about your future plans?” Saul was only too pleased to accept. He badly needed advice. He was now without family or position and, although he had some money with him, it would not last very long.

Dinah packed up some barley loaves and a small piece of goat’s milk cheese and handed them to Ananias as he and Saul left.

“How long have you been in Damascus?” asked Saul as they made their way through the as yet cool streets.

“I was with the Lord during his ministry in Galilee, and I was one of the seventy men he sent out to preach the Good News of salvation.⁷⁰ It was the most wonderful time. People flocked to Jesus to be healed. They hung on every word he spoke and the whole country was on fire for him. We knew he wanted to take the message of salvation to all people everywhere. When we heard Jesus had been crucified in Jerusalem at Passover last year, we were utterly cast down.” He paused and the grief of that news filled his face.

Saul asked gently, “Then what happened?”

Ananias turned to him, “Then Peter and the others returned to Galilee. They told us the Lord had risen and he had made his final appearance to them

⁷⁰ *A Syrian tradition has it that Ananias was one of the Seventy. In the Steps of St Paul by H.V.Morton published Methuen and Co 1936*

by Lake Tiberias. At first we couldn't believe them, but then we heard their testimony. We saw they were changed men and we believed what they said was true."

"Reuben, Samuel and I decided to come to Damascus late last year. We wanted to take the Good News of Salvation to other places. It was quite a hard move, we all have families, but Reuben has some family here and God was good. We have managed to make enough to live on and have time to preach the good news to our neighbours."

They came to a small open square and Ananias turned to the house on the corner. The front was plain except for the door that opened into a cool room and led out into a good sized yard surrounded by pillars above which the upper rooms gave welcome shade and shelter. One side of this shaded area was stacked with raw wood, waiting to be sawn into timber. A half-finished wagon was standing near the workshop. Two men were looking at it and discussing something. Chickens scratched round about, two dogs were lying under the wagon and when they saw Saul with Ananias, one of them gave a half-hearted woof. Children ran out from the kitchen shouting and laughing. A bigger boy was standing near the workbench drilling a hole in some timber. The same sense of happy family life flooded over Saul. How different from his own home where his father kept strict discipline. Laughter, when it was heard, was subdued and half muffled.

Reuben and Samuel greeted Saul warmly. They had heard his testimony the previous evening and knew how radically Saul's conversion was going to affect his life. They remembered the uncertainty that came when they felt the Holy Spirit directing them to move to Damascus.

Reuben stopped a boy of about eight as he chased his slightly older cousin across the yard. "Abner, take our guest up to the roof. Take some cushions and a mat and see him comfortable."

The child stopped and gave Saul a brilliant smile, "Come my father, I will show you the way."

Reuben said, "I expect you need some quiet but we will join you later."

Abner showed him a corner on the roof shaded by an old stretch of canvas. When he was alone, he fell on his knees and found himself praising the Lord with words which welled up from his spirit and seemed to unite him with the Person he now knew was God's Messiah. Time passed and it was the fifth hour when he became aware of his surroundings once more. A woman appeared carrying a small table.

She greeted him, "I am Samuel's wife, Michal. The men are ready for their meal and they thought you could speak quietly together up here." Before Saul could reply a short plump woman came panting up with a platter of fresh baked barley loaves.

She said, “Greetings brother Saul. I am Rachel, Reuben’s wife. You are welcome to our home.” She was followed by a girl of about ten carrying four drinking beakers and another girl, slightly younger carrying a pitcher of water. An even smaller child came behind carrying the salt bowl.

The sound of men’s voices came up the stairway and Reuben’s wife said, “Go, brother Saul, young Simeon is waiting to help you wash.” Saul smiled his thanks and followed the two women and the girls down stairs. Sure enough the boy who had been chased across the yard by Abner was waiting for him next to the row of water jars. Saul asked where the privy was. Simeon pointed to the corner behind the workshop. Saul thanked him and then returned to wash his hands.

When he came back to the rooftop, he saw there was a large bowl of lentil and barley soup on the table, with a platter of barley loaves alongside.

Reuben said, “Blessed be God for the fruits of the earth.”

The men sat on cushions. The bowls were filled with soup and the bread was broken and salted.

Ananias turned to Saul and asked, “Have you thought what you are going to do?”

Saul looked gravely at him, “I seem to be floating between heaven and earth. There are things I need to think about. I need to study the texts and see how we have misread them concerning the nature and work of the Messiah. Yet I know I need to make a living. I must also let my father know I have left Jerusalem and the reason for it.”

Reuben asked, “How do you think he will take it?”

Saul remembered his father’s grim face when anything displeased him, said shortly, “He will find it hard to forgive me.”

“Pray for him,” said Reuben.

Samuel asked, “Have you a trade?”

“My family are tent-makers. I was trained in my father’s workshops.”

“Then,” said Samuel, “You will always find work wherever you go. Have you still the tools of you trade?”

Saul smiled, “No,” he replied, “I haven’t touched a needle and thread since I left home 12 years ago. My father wanted me to complete my studies as a rabbi and has sent me an allowance during these years.”

Ananias said thoughtfully, “I have a feeling that you should not stay here in Damascus. There are several leaders in our community who are very angry that you have not fulfilled your commission from the High Priests. They have now read the letters you handed over and I think they may decide to have you brought to trial before the synagogue elders. Up until now the elders have not objected to the presence of the brethren because we still pay our taxes to the

Temple and support the local synagogues, but I don't think they will treat you with leniency because of the nature of the letters you brought."

Reuben looked at Ananias, "You are right. I heard two of them talking last night. I think they are up to something. What do you suggest Saul should do?"

Samuel said, "I wonder..." He stopped. The others looked at him.

Reuben said, "Well, go on, what is it?"

Samuel said slowly, "You remember John the Baptist was driven out of the community at Qumran for breaking his vows when he started preaching repentance to the common people along the river Jordan? Many people joined that group then. Andrew, was one. John, son of Zebedee had followed John the Baptist from Qumran of course⁷¹. There were many more. Some of these disciples of John's became followers of the Lord, but not all, at least not while John was alive. After Herod had him executed, John's disciples formed a community down on the east side of the Dead Sea. Several more Essenes who were living in the villages of Galilee became followers of the Lord Jesus and some joined them. I believe quite a strong community is living there now. They are still very similar to the Essenes but dedicated to preserving Jesus's teachings and also preaching in pairs round the countryside, just as we did when the Lord Jesus sent us out."

Saul was looking intently at Samuel while he spoke. This would solve many problems.

Reuben said thoughtfully, "Don't you think it might be difficult for Saul to join this group? It is not as if they have not heard how he persecuted the followers of our Lord. At least I would be surprised if they didn't know."

Ananias remarked, "I don't know how brother Saul feels about the idea, but they would have no problem with his applying for sanctuary if he joined them as a penitent. They preserve many of the rules of the Qumran community and they would certainly make sure his conversion was genuine!"

The three men look at Saul, who said slowly, "I think this would be the solution to many of my problems. I need time to think, pray and study. I have no family who would accept me if I am under the disapproval of my father. To be with a community of men dedicated to the Way of the Lord, would be a great privilege." His face suddenly lit up. "May you be blessed for your suggestion brother Samuel."

Reuben said more soberly, "They deny themselves and follow a strict regime of prayer, fasting, study and work."

⁷¹ John 1:37-40 John the Baptist was 'standing there with two of his disciples, one of whom was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. John son of Zebedee's name is not mentioned but the first verses of his Gospel are very similar to teachings given in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Saul answered, "I would welcome such a regime."

Samuel turned to Ananias, "You could write a letter for him to take." Ananias nodded agreement.

The women came up to clear the tables and Reuben said to his wife, "Brother Saul here is thinking of joining the community of John the Baptist's disciples in Arabia."⁷²

Rachel stopped with the small table in her hands and surprisingly said, "Thank the Lord! I was worried. Brother Saul, you need a home and someone to care for you." She turned to her husband. "How is he going to travel there?"

Reuben laughed, "You want to get rid of him so soon?"

Rachel looked grave, "No, but at the well this morning Abigail and I overheard two servants from the Potter's street synagogue saying the new preacher was going to be arrested."

"Did they say when?" Ananias looked worried.

"No, but it seemed soon."

"Then," said Reuben getting up, "We must move quickly. Samuel, call the boys. We will send them round the brethren telling there will be a collection for brother Saul tonight. After the meeting we will make sure you are surrounded and we will take you to the inn by the East Gate." He turned to Ananias. "Can someone find out if there's a caravan travelling south?"

Ananias said, "I can ask the inn-keeper. For a small consideration, he might have a suggestion!"

Saul reached into his pouch and handed some silver coins to Ananias. Ananias looked at him and took them, saying, "You've judged about right. Information at an inn does not come cheaply!"

Saul said, "How can I thank you all for your kindness?"

Reuben said, "You don't have to, you pass it on. In the Lord we are all brothers."

He felt himself loved and cherished. Again the picture of his father's grim face came before him and he knew he had joined a new and very special family. He rose and embraced the men as they left to put their plan into action.

That evening, Saul testified once again that Jesus was the Messiah promised from the beginning. He preached with great power and conviction. The elders sitting in the front of the congregation were amazed. The gallery was packed with women and the synagogue was full to over-flowing. It was obvious from the response of the crowd that any move to arrest Saul would cause a riot. A collection, which had been taken secretly amongst the brethren for fear of alerting the Jewish leaders, was given to Saul. Then Ananias and

⁷² Galatians 1:17

Reuben left Samuel to take the women home, while they took Saul to the inn at the East Gate.

Ananias had found a Nabatean trader by the name of Zabdiel who was travelling south with a string of donkeys and was willing to take Saul with him for a fee. He proposed to leave at first light the following morning.⁷³

⁷³ Luke only recounts one visit to Damascus, with Saul returning to Jerusalem. Luke gives the story of Saul escaping in a basket. (Acts 9:19-25) Paul records two visits to Damascus in Galatians 1:17-18 and 2 Corinthians 11:32-33. It is this version which corresponds with Acts. It seems more likely to have come later than earlier since if the king was serious about arresting Paul, it would have been difficult for him to return to Damascus within three years.

CHAPTER 3: SAUL IN ARABIA⁷⁴

CE 31-33

GALATIANS 1:17

The journey from Damascus took nearly six weeks. For the first time in years, Saul was free of all responsibilities and could enjoy the freedom of walking wrapped in his own happy thoughts. It was for him a time of joy and peace. Zabdiel and his nephews traded with the small groups of Nabateans herding their flocks of sheep and herds of camels through the desert. His visits to these isolated groups of families was always welcome. He brought news of the outside world; a few luxuries ranging from jewellery to beautiful Indian cottons, and even silken scarfs from China. He also brought necessities such as barley, lentils and onions. He traded for spun wool and knitted socks made by the shepherds as they watched their flocks. The women traded finely embroidered goods.

One day they topped a hill and saw the Dead Sea in the distance. They crossed several deep dry gullies which drained storm water westward into the Dead Sea and finally Zabdiel turned his string of donkeys down a long narrow path. Summer heat lay over the land and this became ever more intense as they dropped from the brown hills into the rocky gorge. Turning yet once more round a spur of rock, they saw a group of brown tents at the bottom of the valley where it flattened out a little. Thorn trees provided scant shade. As they approached, Saul could see men sitting in an open-sided tent apparently praying or studying.

When Zabdiel's party reached the floor of the valley and approached the tents, one of the men rose from the group and came to greet them. Zabdiel said, "I have brought you this man from Damascus. He will explain who he is."

The man looked at Saul and said quietly, "You are welcome brother." Then he turned to Zabdiel and pointed, "Camp over there. Later we would see your goods. We have some honey to trade."

⁷⁴ Paul's statement in Galatians 1:17 that he went at once to Arabia after his conversion and only returned to Jerusalem three years later, poses the question, "Where and to whom did he go in 'Arabia'". He obviously needed time to think and somewhere to hide from presumably angry authorities in Jerusalem. I am suggesting that there were still some disciples of John the Baptist in the area. John had been executed by Herod in his palace at Macheros, which is on the east side of the Jordan. Three groups have intertwined connections in that area, the Essenes at Qumran on the West of the Dead Sea, the Ebionites – a very strict Jewish Christian sect, which rose to prominence in the second and third centuries, but who had strong affinities with much of the Essene teachings and Hebrew Christians, who called themselves Nazarenes. The group who became Ebionites rejected the admission of Gentiles without conversion to Judaism first and hated Paul as an apostate to his Jewish origins because of his teachings concerning circumcision. The disciples of John the Baptist seem to me to be the logical origin of a sect such as the Ebionites.

Zabdiel's nephews turned the string of donkeys and began to unpack them and set up their tents.

The tall quiet man turned back to Saul, "I am Arach of the tribe of Judah. What brings you to our poor community?"

"I am Saul of Tarsus, son of Jonathon of the tribe of Benjamin."

Saul looked across to where the other brothers were praying, "I have come to ask you for sanctuary. I have a letter here from brother Ananias of Damascus."

"We do not accept just anyone, except those who are called by God. The life we live is hard and from your dress I see you are a pharisee, few of your party have wanted to join us."

Arach took the letter Saul offered to him, broke the seal and began to read. After a moment he looked up at Saul, "You have come to spy on us," his voice was hostile, "I wondered why your name sounded familiar, now I see you are he who persecuted the disciples of Jesus, the One John told us to receive as Messiah."

Saul said nothing. When Arach saw Saul was not going to defend himself, he continued reading. He gave a couple of grunts and then stopped short, surprise making him look up at Saul. "Is this true? You were struck blind by God and after receiving back your sight, you accept that Jesus is the Messiah? You who persecuted his followers and put them in prison?"

Saul nodded, "Out of his great mercy, God revealed his son to me, and I, who am the most unworthy have been saved from my many sins."

Arach grunted and motioned for Saul to follow him to where the others were standing singing in the shade of a large tent. The singing ended and the men, numbering about twenty sat on reed mats while one of their number began to preach.

"This is for the man who would bring others to the inner vision, so that he may understand and teach all the children of light the real nature of men, touching the different varieties of their temperament with the distinguishing traits thereof."

Saul listened with interest as the man, who seemed to be in his middle forties continued, "All that is and ever was comes from a God of knowledge. Before things came into existence, he determined the plan of them: and when they fill their appointed roles, it is in accordance with his glorious design that they discharge their function. Nothing can be changed. In his hand lies the government of all things. God it is that sustains them in their needs.

"Now this God created man to rule the world, and appointed for him two spirits after whose direction he was to walk until the final inquisition. They are the spirits of truth and perversity."

Saul found himself nodding agreement, although Saul did not realise it, the man was teaching one of the fundamental tenets of the Covenanters who lived at Qumran on the other side of the Dead Sea.

“The origin of truth lies in the Fountain of Light, and that of perversity in the Wellspring of Darkness. All who practice righteousness are under the domination of the Prince of Lights, and walk in ways of lights: whereas all who practice perversity are under the domination of the Angel of Darkness and walk in ways of darkness.

“This is the way those spirits operate in the world for the enlightenment of man’s heart, the making straight before him all the ways of righteousness and truth, the implanting in his heart of fear for the judgements of God. A spirit of humility, patience, abundant compassion, perpetual goodness, insight, discrimination, a sense of the Divine Power.”⁷⁵

Surely this was what had been lacking in his life until his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road? He had followed the letter of the Law and totally missed this inner quality of goodness. He felt lifted up and inspired.

“These were the things that come to men in this world through communion with the spirit of truth. And the guerdon of all that walk in its ways, is health and abundant well-being, with long life and fruition of seed along with eternal blessings and everlasting joy in the life everlasting and a crown of glory and a robe of honour and light perpetual.”

His voice grew grim as he continued, “But to the spirit of perversity belong greed, remissiveness in right-doing, wickedness and falsehood, pride and presumption, deception and guile, cruelty and abundant insolence, shortness of temper and profusion of folly, arrogant passion...”⁷⁶

Saul recognised a description of himself when he went out to destroy the followers of Jesus. He was appalled at the thought that he, who had given his whole life to the study of the Torah and to God’s service, could have yet been so far away from the spirit of Light.

He heard the man saying, “Abominable acts in a spirit of lewdness, filthy ways in the thralldom of unchastity, a blasphemous tongue, blindness of eyes, dullness of ears, stiffness of neck and hardness of heart, to the end that a man walks entirely in the ways of darkness and evil cunning.”

The words pierced Saul’s heart and he found himself weeping bitterly.

There was a time of quiet while the men thought about what had been said. The sun was beginning to sink towards the hills, but the day was still hot and flies buzzed. Saul began to feel thirsty and wondered how long the study period would continue.

⁷⁵ cf Colossians 3:12

⁷⁶ cf Colossians 3:5

Suddenly he heard another voice saying, “We know that our dear brother John taught that people must turn from their sins and be baptized. If they wanted salvation they mustn’t say that Abraham is their ancestor, because God can take these stones and make descendants for Abraham! He taught that people must show by their actions that they belong to the Spirit of Truth which brother Jairus has been telling us about.⁷⁷ When we preach repentance to the people make it clear to them that they have a choice and if they fail to choose the Light and continue to live in the darkness the axe is ready to cut down the trees at the roots; every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.⁷⁸ Time is short, the Messiah has already come and the Day of Judgement will soon be here.”

After a period of quiet a younger man said in a soft voice, “The Lord Jesus said, ‘Be on your guard against false prophets; they come to you looking like sheep on the outside, but on the inside they are really like wild wolves. You will know them by what they do. Thorn bushes do not bear grapes, and briars do not bear figs. A healthy tree bears good fruit.’ The Lord Jesus gave the same warning as brother John, ‘A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a poor tree cannot bear good fruit. And any tree that does not bear fruit, is cut down and thrown in the fire. So then you will know the false prophets by what they do.’

“He further taught, ‘Not everyone who calls me ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only those who do what my Father in Heaven wants them to do. When Judgement Day comes, many will say to me, ‘Lord! Lord! In your name we spoke God’s message, by your name we drove out many demons and performed many miracles!’ Then I will say to them, ‘I never knew you. Get away from me, you wicked people!’”

Saul was amazed. It was the first time he had heard Jesus’s own words quoted. The authority and confidence of the person who uttered them suddenly brought home to him why so many people flocked to listen to him. Saul saw that Jesus taught with an authority none of the rabbis possessed for they always backed up their arguments with long strings of references from the scriptures. He had done it himself!

There was another prolonged silence. The sun disappeared behind the hills opposite then the man who had introduced himself as brother Arach rose and pronounced the blessing, “Those who fear God, do his will, keep his commandments, hold fast to his holy Covenant and walk blamelessly in all

⁷⁷ See Luke 3:3-

⁷⁸ See Luke 3:9

the way of his truth- that is, such men as he has chosen to be partners in an eternal Covenant which shall stand for ever.”⁷⁹

The men began to rise from their mats, when Arach said, “Before you go my brothers, I would read to you a letter which this stranger has brought.” The men resumed their seats.

“From Ananias, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus, the Holy One of God; Greetings to our brothers in Arabia.

“My brothers, I recommend to you our brother Saul of Tarsus, who was sent by the priests in Jerusalem with letters to arrest all those who are followers of the Way of the Lord, both men and women and to take them back in chains to Jerusalem.

“By the gracious mercy of the Everlasting God, our brother was struck blind by the Lord on his way to Damascus. His sight was taken from him in order that he may be healed of that inner blindness which prevented him from seeing the Lord Jesus as the One appointed by God to be our Saviour.

“When he arrived in Damascus he was taken to the house of Judas the physician, who could do nothing for him. In the meantime I heard the Lord call me in a vision and tell me to go to Straight Street, and at the house of Judas ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. When I heard this of the Lord, I was afraid and said, ‘Lord, many people have told me about this man and about all the terrible things he has done to your people in Jerusalem. And now he has come to Damascus with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who worship you.’

“The Lord said to me, ‘Go, because I have chosen him to serve me, to make my name known to Gentiles and Kings and to the people of Israel. And I myself will show him all that he must suffer for my sake.’

“So I went and entering the house where Saul was, I placed my hands on him and said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord has sent me – Jesus himself, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here. He sent me so that you might see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’

“Immediately brother Saul received back his sight and I baptized him. Straight away he went to the synagogues in Damascus and testified that Jesus was the Son of God. His preaching was so powerful and he provided such convincing proofs that none of the Jews living in Damascus could answer him.

“However after a few days, the Jews met together and made a plan to have brother Saul killed.⁸⁰ He cannot return to Jerusalem and he needs to learn

⁷⁹ *From Scriptures of the Dead Sea Sect. Theodor H. Gastor published Martin, Seckor and Warburg 1956 P 97 For blessing laymen*

⁸⁰ *Acts 9:3-*

more of the Way of the Lord. I therefore commend him to you as a brother in the Lord.

“The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. Greetings from Ananias and the brothers with me in Damascus.”

Arach finished the letter and looked up and said, “Have you anything you want to say brother Saul?”

Saul found everyone was looking curiously at him, he felt tired, hot and thirsty but he knew he needed these brothers. He needed the time to learn more about the Lord Jesus and time to think of his own life and the wrenching change his conversion had brought to it. Finally he cleared his throat and said, “I am an Israelite by birth, of the tribe of Benjamin. As far as keeping the Jewish Law is concerned, I have been a Pharisee and as far as a person can be righteous by obeying the commands of the Law, I was without fault. But all these things that I might count as profit I now reckon as loss for the Lord Jesus’s sake. All I want is to know Jesus the Messiah and to experience the power of his Resurrection, to share his sufferings and become like him.”⁸¹

Arach looked at the other men, “Do we agree to give him sanctuary?”

The oldest man asked, “Why don’t we let him begin his time of probation straight away?”

Arach answered, “Because you will note the prophecy given in this letter by Ananias. If he is to convert Gentiles and Kings he won’t be staying with us.”

Another man said, “I think he should be given sanctuary, we can see how he progresses in our ways, in the meanwhile he can participate as a lay brother.” Others nodded.

Arach turned to a man of about Saul’s own age, “Seba, you take Saul of Tarsus and show him what we do.” To Saul he said, “You will be expected to obey our rules and participate fully in all our activities. After a year, if you are still with us we will consider your position. While you are here you will own no private property. We hold everything in common.” With that Arach gave his dismissal and the brothers quickly dispersed.

Seba rose from where he had been sitting and embraced Saul. “Welcome, my brother. I am Seba son of Malachi. We lead a very simple life here as John taught us. We try to continue his ministry, although none of us have been blessed by God’s power as he was.” He led Saul towards another tent.

“Were you disciples of John then?” Saul asked.

“Many of us were Covenanters along with our brother John, but when John received God’s call to preach and baptise to the wider community, he

⁸¹ See *Philippians* 3:5-

was excluded from the sacred food and later dismissed.” Seba’s voice was sombre, “Many of us went with him.”⁸²

They arrived at the tent where Seba produced a camel hair tunic which reached Saul’s knees, also a linen loin cloth, a further length of material to cover his head and a plain leather belt. All these things were in a small store of clothes which was kept in a rough box. From another box he produced a pair of sandals which consisted of a flat sole and long thongs to wind round Saul’s legs.

Finally Seba gave him a light mantle, “You sleep in this and can use it when it rains. When the weather gets cold you will change it for a long cloak.”

Saul looked at the garments with dismay, he had not worn a short tunic since he was a child. Seba caught Saul’s look and said, “It’s all right, your own clothes will be kept safely until you decide whether to wish to join our community or return to your old life.”

Saul smiled and began to undress. The tunic was a little large, but the belt took care of that problem. When Saul finished tying on the sandals and stood up, he felt half naked. He folded up his old clothes and watched while Seba put them in the box, which Saul could see contained very little.

Seba said quietly, “We observe silence except for the free time in the middle of the day. You must hand over all your own clothes and any money you possess. Brother Jairus is the keeper of our common purse.” He nodded towards the man who had recommended Saul be given sanctuary for a year.

The sun was gone and twilight filled the valley, “We eat at dusk and then we pray.”

He led Saul to where a row of goat skins were hanging under the shade of a small tent. There they joined the queue of those waiting to wash. Saul noticed two other brothers had roused the fire on which a water-filled clay pot sat ready for cooking. No one spoke, except Saul noticed each man murmured, “Blessed are thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us by thy commands, and hast commanded us concerning the washing of hands.” Each man washed his hands under the small trickle of water and then held the neck of the goatskin for the brother behind him in the queue.

Saul went up to Jairus and without a word handed him his money pouch. Jairus took it also without speaking.

They returned to the large tent with its sides rolled up. The other brothers smiled a greeting to Saul and one or two embraced him. They stood while

⁸² Although there is no direct proof of this association, the circumstantial evidence is strong. John the Baptist came from the desert; his proclamation of ‘Prepare a road for the Lord; make a straight path for him to travel’ is identical to the texts ⁸³ The Dead Sea Scrolls. Millar Burrows; Published Secker and Warburg 1956 Compare with Romans 3:25,26

Arach said the blessing on the meal, “Blessed art thou, O Lord God, who bringeth forth bread from the earth.”

The men reclined on their own mats while the two cooks brought a huge platter of flat, coarse-grained round bread and a pot of thin gruel which seemed to consist mainly of onion and some herbs. Salt was handed round in a pottery container. Without the gruel, Saul would have found the flat bread impossible to chew, it was tough and hard.

At the end of the meal the men stood and said the final grace before washing and returning to the large tent. It was now completely dark, no lamps were lit, the faint star-light enabled Saul to see that the men once more were standing round in a circle. One of the brothers began;

“As for me, if I slip, the steadfast love of God is my salvation for ever;”

The other brothers sang antiphonally the alternate verses,

“and if I stumble in the iniquity of flesh,”

“My vindication in the righteousness of God will stand to eternity.”

The hymn ended with;

“And in his steadfast love he will bring my vindication.

“In his faithful righteousness he has judged me,

“and in the abundance of his goodness he will forgive all my iniquities.”⁸³

The brothers then began a time of prayer, interspersed with songs of praise and thanksgiving. Saul wondered if they sang and prayed thus all night. He was exhausted by his journey and longed to roll himself up in his cloak and sleep. It was with a sense of relief that the last hymn was sung and the final prayers before sleep were said, ending with the thrice-repeated lines;

“Behold, he that guardeth Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

“For thy salvation, I hope, O Lord.

“I hope, O Lord, for thy salvation

“O Lord, for thy salvation I hope.

“Stand in awe and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed,

“and be still.”

Seba tapped Saul on the shoulder. He indicated by picking up his own mat for Saul to do the same and motioned him to follow. With a gesture he indicated where Saul could put his mat. At last Saul rolled himself in the rough cloak and fell instantly into an exhausted sleep.

⁸³ *The Dead Sea Scrolls. Millar Burrows; Published Secker and Warburg 1956 Compare with Romans 3:25,26*

He was woken before dawn by the softly singing brothers entreating the sun to show himself. Each man rolled up his mat and folded his mantle before joining the queue next to the water skins, where once more each brother trickled the water for the next one to wash, each saying the prayer for washing.

Without any speech the brothers then departed to do their various chores. Four or five of them took the empty water skins and disappeared round the bend in the valley to fetch water. The cooks began measuring out the coarse meal, preparatory to kneading it into dough. No one was idle and no one spoke. Saul looked round for what he should be doing and found Seba motioning him to follow.

They joined two other men carrying axes and holding a bundle of leather thongs. It appeared they were going to collect wood. As they walked up the valley past the place where Zabdiel was encamped, Saul saw Arach and brother Jairus engaged in trading. The countryside was burnt brown in the heat of summer and they walked some way before they came to a grove of thorn trees. While two of the party chopped some of the larger branches, the rest of them gathered the dry bits lying on the ground. Bundles were made up and tied with the leather thongs before being hoisted onto their heads to return back to camp, singing a song of praise.

The sun was now well up and hot. Saul's group took the wood to the cooking area and added it to the pile. Then they fetched their mats and unrolled them. There was still no idle chatter. Grace was said and a single large pot was put on the ground together with a platter of the same round bread of the night before, the only difference being that this bread was still warm. There was no speech throughout the meal. Saul was to discover this would hold good for his whole time with these men. They preserved a calm and holy silence in all they did. However Saul was longing to ask questions and understand more of what exactly kept these men together.⁸⁴

Once more washing after the meal, one of the younger men went to a row of tall jars stored in a small tent to one side. He removed the lid and carefully took out a scroll in its leather case. He brought it to the tent where the men had regathered.

The scroll was handed to the oldest of the men who prayed the prayer before study.

Saul was surprised to hear the customary benediction at the beginning of study. He felt in some way the emphasis would have been on Jesus, rather

⁸⁴ *From Scrolls from the Dead Sea by Edmund Wilson. Published W.H.Allen 1955 Page 42 describes the disciplined day of the Essenes as recorded by Philo and Josephus.*

than the Torah. If, thought Paul, he is the Anointed One of God, then surely... but his thoughts were interrupted.

The Rabbi, as Saul immediately thought of him in the absence of knowing any name, took the cover off the scroll and began to read, “When the Canaanite king of Arad in the southern part of Canaan heard that the Israelites were coming by way of Atharim, he attacked them and captured some of them.”

He looked up to explain the verse, “This shows that even when the people of Israel are led by God himself, some will be captured by the enemy.”

He returned to the script, “Then the Israelites made a vow to the Lord: ‘If you will let us conquer these people, we will unconditionally dedicate them and their cities to you and will destroy them.’”

He looked up, “This means that those who dedicate themselves totally to the Lord, can call on him in the time of trouble. He will enable us to overcome the enemy. Praise be his name for ever!”

Saul found this didactic method of teaching tedious. Somehow he expected something different and his attention wandered.

After some time he heard the old man read, “The Lord told Moses to make a metal snake and put it on a pole, so that anyone who was bitten could look at it and be healed.”

He then said, “When we looked for God’s Holy One, we looked in the palace of princes. We never thought that the Holy One of God would choose to hang from a tree.”

Suddenly Saul’s attention was caught. Here was an explanation of the incomprehensible death of the Lord Jesus. He listened carefully.

“It was in God’s plan to bring salvation to Israel and to deliver all of us from the consequences of sin, that our Redeemer should hang where all could see him and be cured.”⁸⁵

He read the next line, “So Moses made a bronze snake and put it on a pole. Anyone who had been bitten would look at the bronze snake and be healed.”⁸⁶

He looked up, “Anyone who knows they have been bitten by sin, can look at the One who died for the sins of the many, by hanging from the cross.”

The rabbi then summarised the teaching he had been giving, “We are led by God, but some of us will be caught by the Enemy. Those dedicated to God can call on him in time of trouble. Those who oppose God will be destroyed.

⁸⁵ John 12:321 Corinthians 10:9

⁸⁶ Numbers 21:1-9

Sometimes the way that God intends us to go, seems to lead in the opposite direction.”⁸⁷

He stopped suddenly in his summary and looked straight at Saul, “Do not lose patience that the Lord will not fulfil his purpose in us. If we do question him and become unfaithful, he will send disaster upon us and force us to return to him for help.”

There seemed to be a special warning for Saul in what the old man said. He stored up the words to think about them later. For the old man had not finished.

“If we return to him and seek his help, he will respond. We have been given salvation in Jesus, the Holy One. God intends that we should go out to the people who cry for help and direct them to the means of their salvation.”

Suddenly Saul thought of Ananias’s prophecy for his own mission. He was chosen by God to make his name known to Gentiles and Kings and to the people of Israel. How was this to be accomplished?

“God has answered the cry of those who long for his righteous Kingdom. He sent Jesus to die as a criminal in our place to redeem us from the consequences of our sin.” He concluded and returned to his mat.

There was a period of quiet, and then Arach rose and said, “You have spoken well, brother Ezekial. Truly the Jews did not expect a Messiah who would die. Yet we read all through the Torah that God deals with the sin of mankind through ritual sacrifice. Our most Holy Day of Atonement shows how one goat is sacrificed for our sins and the other is sent into the desert to take the sins of the people away. God used sacrifices of animals to purify and restore our relationship with him. We should have expected that the Messiah should have been a sacrifice, once and for all to restore forever the Covenant between God and his people.”

Arach stopped and looked to the brother to his right. This was one of the cooks, who began, “Brother Arach reminds us of the cost of sin. In the temple, we see thousands of animals sacrificed for sin offerings by the people.” He gave a prolonged and tedious record of all the different sacrifices required to restore the relationship with God. Then he said, “Our brothers of the Covenant at Qumran have already rejected the Temple services as corrupt and will have nothing to do with them. We follow them in this.”

The day was once more burning hot, and the flies were buzzing round the seated men. Saul was tired. This kind of dissertation had never impressed him. He wondered if each man was going to contribute some word to the theme. He felt his head nodding. Suddenly he jerked awake.

⁸⁷ This method of exegesis is similar to the Commentaries on the scriptures recorded in the Scriptures of the Dead Sea Sect. T. H. Gaster Published Martin Seckor and Warburg 1956

The cook's voice changed tone as he said, "Jesus's death at the Passover, and the shedding of his blood, is God's once and for all means of protecting his people from the consequences of their sin. Sin that brings death not only to the body but also the soul. Jesus is our Paschal lamb and when we share in the sacred meal he ordained before he died, we share in his death and more important, his life everlasting." The man ended and there was a prolonged period of quiet.

Each brother spoke in turn from the oldest to the youngest. Each spoke according to his inclination, some only a few words, some a prolonged dissertation. No one was interrupted and there was no discussion. No one expected Saul to speak and when they were all finished, they began a time of praise.

The study continued until the sun dropped behind the hills, when the pattern of the previous day was repeated.

When it was finished Seba sought Saul out and said quietly, "You may talk until the evening meal. Maybe you want to ask me some questions which I will try to answer."

Saul did indeed want to ask many questions. He was not sure where to begin but he wanted to check on their relationship to the Temple.

"Don't you ever go up to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice?"

Seba shook his head, "The priesthood in Jerusalem is corrupt and the times and dates of the festivals have been advanced."⁸⁸

"So who determines the dates of the festivals?" Saul asked.

"We follow the rule of the Covenanters who divide the year into fifty-two weeks of four equal seasons, each of which begins on a Wednesday. All our festivals fall on the same day of the week, either the first, fourth, or sixth day, thus avoiding the problem of having a major festival falling on the Sabbath."⁸⁹

Saul was stunned, "But then Passover must begin to fall in winter. Don't you put in an intercalary month?"⁹⁰

⁸⁸ One of the crimes of Antiochus Epiphanes, who became king of Judaea in 175 B.C., was he sold the High Priesthood to the highest bidder. This corrupt dynasty began to Hellenize the country and even forbade circumcision. When Antiochus Epiphanes was overthrown, the office of the High Priesthood passed into a lesser branch of the family until Herod the Great, from which time the appointment of the High Priest became the prerogative of the sovereign. Antiochus Epiphanes had also altered the calendar (Daniel 7.25). *Ancient Israel* by Roland de Vaux Published Darton, Longman and Todd. London 1968

⁸⁹ *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*. Edited Michael E. Stone Published Van Gorcum 1984 Page 100. He refers to the Book of Jubilees, which is a re-written version of Genesis 1 to Exodus 4. This was written, significantly about 168 B.C. There was a very close link between this book and the Qumran community.

⁹⁰ The authorities are clear about the Qumran calendar, but there is no reference to the problem of the divergence between the 364 days of their official calendar and the 365 and a quarter days of the Solar year, the divergence between the years and the seasons would soon be manifest. Roland de Vaux in *Ancient Israel* page 188, suggests they must have made some adjustment.

“Yes, we see the seasons falling behind the calendar and then extra days are added at the end of the year, we follow the Qumran community in this.”

“But, but-” too many objections flooded Saul’s mind, “If you follow that calendar it must also means there is no full moon for Passover.”

Seba said, “You will see that we manage very well. There is no doubt on the date of each festival.” He sounded complacent.

Saul was far from satisfied but the time for the evening meal had arrived and all the brothers once more formed the queue to wash. This first day was repeated without variation in the days and weeks which followed, except for the Sabbath, when no work was done, and there were extended times of study and prayer. Also on the Sabbath their meagre diet was augmented with dates and honey.

After a while Saul began to value the tranquillity of the routine. He had needed time to think and pray, and he found he had plenty for both. Although he was not permitted to speak in the study sessions, he found them stimulating. Even those whose contributions which were trite and predictable, challenged him to reformulate what was said.

The nights became colder, and the first indication that winter would bring changes came when a group of eight men and two small boys, arrived in camp one evening. They were dusty and travel worn, but their arrival was greeted with joy and celebrations. The evening time of prayer and praise was augmented by a tale of the travellers’ adventures.

Saul discovered the men had been preaching the gospel throughout the villages of Judaea, Galilee, Samaria and surrounding territories. The first two men who spoke described the reception they had received on the plain of Sharon.

The elder of the two, a short, strongly-built man called Athaliah with a deep resonant voice told, “We were everywhere received with great joy. Since the death of the Lord Jesus no one is teaching them. Those they call Apostles have been sitting in Jerusalem, at least until the persecution broke out there and brother Stephen was stoned. Then we met people who fled Jerusalem because of the arrests taking place.”

Athaliah stopped because he could see his listeners were looking at the strange little man in their midst. Arach intervened at this point, saying, “We will hear from you all first, and then we have something to share.”

Saul felt increasingly uncomfortable as the evening wore on, especially when the two brothers who had been visiting the villages around Jerusalem reported. They had brought the two children with them, the youngest boy was already fast asleep on the lap of one of the men.

The one brother began, “We too were greeted with joy by the villagers. Many of them had heard brother John preach and some had been baptised by

him. The people were hungry for teaching. All had heard of the Lord Jesus, some had even seen him die on the cross. The persecution that broke out in Jerusalem and surrounding villages was very hard on the brethren. Many lost family members, some lost everything, their homes and their businesses. These two boys were orphaned and when no one could be found to care for them we were asked if we would bring them back here. Their parents were visitors to Jerusalem and died in jail.”

Saul bowed his head in grief and shame. It had become an agony for him to sit listening to these men, especially as they did not yet know who he was.

Arach turned to the elder of the two boys, “What are your names and who was your father?”

The elder boy, who was about seven years old said, “May it please you sir, my name is Andrew and my brother is Joash, our father,” his voice faltered, “Our father was John of Antioch.”

“Have you relatives in Judaea or Antioch?”

The boy shook his head, “My father’s father and mother died before we were born, and I don’t know my mother’s family, my mother’s sister use to live with us, but she died of a fever soon after Joash was born.”

Arach said gently, “Then my son, you have been given a special family by God himself.” He got up and hugged Andrew, then laid his hand on the sleeping head of Joash.

He turned to one of the brothers, “It is long since time for these young brothers to sleep. Peleg help brother Obadiah take them and put them to bed.”

The man holding the child, rose and Peleg motioned to Andrew to follow him. Presently both men returned and once more sat in their places. Saul thought he could hear the sound of sobbing, but it was muffled. His own eyes filled with tears as he thought of how many lives his zeal had disrupted and destroyed.

The other brothers gave their reports in similar manner. Questions were asked and finally Arach said, “Most of you have mentioned the persecution which broke out in Jerusalem and surrounding villages earlier this year. The ways of God are truly wonderful and we must trust that he has everything in his care. Here is brother Saul. It would be best if he told you about what happened to him.”

Saul was horrified. He had never addressed the brothers. He had never been allowed to talk in assemblies and now Arach was calling on him to tell these strangers, who had seen the effects of his persecution, that here in their midst was the chief persecutor. He breathed a silent prayer and then began slowly, “I am he who approved of the murder of Stephen and then set out to destroy all those who believed in the Lord Jesus.”

Saul could hear indrawn breaths. He swallowed and continued, "I went from house to house and dragged out both men and women and threw them into jail. When I had finished in Jerusalem and the surrounding villages, I went to the High Priest to ask for letters of introduction to the synagogues in Damascus. I had heard that many had fled to that city." Saul once more recounted all that had happened to him in Damascus and how he now came to be with the brothers in Arabia.

At the end of his recital there was a moment of intense silence, which was broken when Laban said, "May God be praised," and they all said, "Amen."

The evening continued late as the brothers talked. It ended when they sang a hymn and then retired to sleep.

Before the autumn storms broke six more brothers returned from preaching, so that when Arach gave notice it was time for them to move to their winter quarters, there were thirty-seven brothers, including Saul and the two young boys.

The move to the caves was a heavy and time-consuming job. The caves were situated in a valley about half a day's journey from their camp. The brothers had no donkeys to assist with the removal and everything had to be carried. During the time they had been living in the tents, Saul had marvelled at how little they had, the brothers purposefully kept their possessions to the absolute minimum. They called themselves the 'Poor Brothers' and wanted to identify with the poorest members of society.⁹¹ The heavy tents, to say nothing of baskets and baskets of firewood which had been cut and stored through the summer months, all had to be carried on the backs of the brothers. Also the bags of grain and the other stored food, to which each of the brothers had added on their return from their travels. It was their custom to purchase food, rather than bring home the money given to them. Sometimes it proved impossible for them to spend all the money they were given since they could carry no more. Then the small sums would be added to Arach's communal purse.

The move was accomplished in three exhausting days, but Saul had to agree that their new quarters looked dry and more likely to keep them warm during the cold, wet winter months.

With the change of venue, there was a change in their pattern of work. As soon as the first rains fell, all the brothers, except the cooks, took mattocks and went to a flat field in the bend of the dry river bed where they broke the ground and prepared for a crop of fava beans. Soon the dusty river began to trickle and then it filled and rushed with each passing rainstorm. A seed bed was also prepared for onions.

⁹¹ *Ebionites in Hebrew means 'Poor Men'. This group of John's disciples would very likely be called by some such sobriquet.*

A brother, Hosea took charge of the gardening. Whether it was fine or pouring with rain, the brothers went out. They treated the weather as if it did not exist, making no difference to either their work or the clothes they wore if it rained. Saul dreaded the wet days, try as he might to copy the other brothers indifference to the weather, he would shiver his way through the day. The only relief came was when they returned to pray or study and they could wrap their long rough-woven cloaks around themselves.

Another concession to living in the caves was the lighting of oil lamps during the evening services. Their studies were to prepare themselves for preaching the message of salvation throughout the villages of Judea and Galilee. Idle gossip was discouraged and so little of what was happening in the wider community was shared. Saul longed to know what had happened in Jerusalem when he failed to return, but since the brothers avoided the city, with what they considered its corrupt and evil ways, there was no way for him to find out. He worried also that he had not fully explained to Hannah what had happened and she would wonder where he was.

Saul was touched at the tender way the brothers treated the two children. In no way could they be said to be spoilt, but the rule of silence was relaxed for them to talk and answer questions. One man was appointed to teach them the Torah and the two childish voices could be heard repeating their lessons in high sing-song voices. When lessons were over, they played like any two normal boys and generally seemed contented, except some nights young Joash could be heard crying softly and calling for his mother.

The presence of the children weighed increasingly heavily on Saul. Finally after many sleepless nights he approached Arach, waiting silently for permission to speak.

When Arach nodded his permission, Saul began, "I am deeply burdened that Andrew and Joash are orphaned because of the arrests I made of their parents. How can I continue to live here when they have no knowledge that the cause of their plight is here living with them?"

"Do you think that telling them who you are would make them happier and more content?" Arach's voice was deep and compassionate.

Saul shook his head, "No, it would not help them, but I cannot forget that because of my action, they are deprived of their family."

"Our teaching is that you shall hate all hypocrisy, and everything that is not pleasing to the Lord. However you shall not forsake the commandments of the Lord, but you shall keep what you received, 'adding nothing to it and taking nothing away.' In the congregation you shall confess your transgressions, and you shall not betake yourself to prayer with an evil

conscience. This is the way of life.⁹²“ Arach looked at Saul, “My brother, we do not cut you off from the common meal as the Covenanters at Qumran do but you should go through a time of fasting and repentance, the Lord himself will open the door of your spirit to know and receive his forgiveness. Then receive the yoke of the Lord, so you will be perfect.”⁹³

With Arach’s blessing, Saul left the community and went deep into the desert. His spirit was in agony. How could God forgive him if he could not forgive himself? What if the two boys found out he was the one who had orphaned them? Would they not be filled with hatred and loathing for him? His thoughts whirled. He tried to pray but the words meant nothing and seemed to go no where.

He thought how sure he had been of doing God’s will in rooting out the followers of Jesus. He had truly believed Jesus had been accursed by God. He thought of his devotion to the Torah and how he had strictly obeyed every part of the halachah, designed to keep a person in ritual purity – but this purity had not kept him from sin. Saul groaned.

The day had been warm but the night grew bitterly cold and the stars glittered like ice crystals in the dark sky . Saul huddled in his cloak and finally fell into an exhausted sleep. He was woken by the sun warming him. The second day was no better than the first. He began to examine the shocking fact that if Jesus was truly the Son of God, he, the Sinless One, had died the shameful death of a criminal. Why? Why did he have to die? What killed him?

Saul thought of those days before the Passover when Jesus arrived in Jerusalem and the city was awash with rumours that he was the Messiah. Then came news of his arrest. Saul thought how the religious and political leaders conspired to get a death sentence passed. He thought too of how Jesus had offended those selling the animals for the temple sacrifices, how he had overturned their tables and freed the doves. He remembered how angry he himself had been when he had overheard Jesus calling the pharisees, ‘hypocrites and false teachers’.⁹⁴ It was almost as if he had set out deliberately to challenge the whole leadership of the nation and all its religious practices. Why?

A small thought intruded itself into his mind, ‘Because none of these things could put us right with God.’ But why did Jesus have to die? How did this put people ‘right with God.’ Saul thought his way slowly forward – he died as a sacrifice – as a sin offering – he took the punishment which should

⁹² *The Didache IV.12-14 The Didache, also called The Teaching of the 12 Apostles, was written around CE 100 and has many themes common to the writings of Qumran, but it is also an early manual for Christian teaching.*

⁹³ *The Didache VI.2*

⁹⁴ *2 Corinthians 5:16 Could be a direct reference that Paul knew Christ ‘according to the flesh’.*

be ours because of our sins. Why? Had not God himself told Moses to make the sacrifices for sin? Did not thousands of beasts die each year as sin offerings for the people?

As if a dam had burst in his mind, the ideas tumbled over each other. Hadn't the prophets said for a long time, that these sin offerings were not enough? Yet he had obeyed the Law rigourously and what had he learnt from the Law? Certainly not the kind of righteousness that God required. It hadn't made him good – in fact all it did was to make him know he had sinned!⁹⁵ Abraham had been saved, not because he had obeyed the Law because this had only been given to Moses four hundred years later. Paul recollected the passage and stopped, stunned by the implication he had never perceived before – Abraham had believed and obeyed God and God had accepted him as righteous!⁹⁶

He spoke aloud, "It was faith then, that made Abraham righteous, not the Law." He paused, working it out, "It was nothing I did that made me righteous. In fact when I thought I was pursuing God's will most vigourously, I was furthest from him. It wasn't until Jesus himself spoke to me on the road to Damascus that I knew how wrong I had been!"

The thoughts came thick and fast. "The moment I heard the voice say, 'I am Jesus, whom you persecute,' I believed him! It was the grace of God through the man people claimed was the Messiah that I was saved – me, who had tried to destroy all those who believed in him!"

Suddenly the tears came and he fell on the ground. It was as if a dam had broken inside of him. The burden of the guilt he felt for the suffering he had caused was melted and washed away. Finally the storm of emotion passed and he rose to his feet and lifted his arms, "In you, Lord Jesus, I am a new man. It is no longer I that live, but you Lord! I am dead!"

Joy overwhelmed him, "I am raised to life with you!"

Saul returned then to the brothers. It was past midday and the brothers were studying outside in the warmth of the sun. Arach could see Saul had been released. He smiled a welcome as Saul took his seat in the circle. It was after this that Saul was invited to join in the discussion on the study.

The tranquil days passed and winter came to an end. The brothers set up the tents near the fields where the fava beans were ripening. With the end of the winter rains, they took to watering the onions from the rapidly drying stream. The brothers would not move to their summer camp until the crops were harvested. Most of the brothers prepared to set out preaching through the countryside. This year Arach went with them. When they had all left, the

⁹⁵ *Romans 3:20*

⁹⁶ *Romans 4:13 cf Genesis 22:18*

remaining group consisted of Jairus, the eldest brother, a man of quiet dignity and greatly respected, Saul, the two boys and three other men. The brothers took it in turn to prepare the common meal, the two boys helping the cook for the day.

This Passover would be the third since Jesus's death and resurrection. Saul watched the brothers leave with mixed feelings. He felt part of a family in a way he had never felt before. There was no pressure on him to be an outstanding pupil, nor a successful teacher, yet he was beginning to feel he could not stay here for ever.

Surprised by his thoughts, he stopped and wondered, "But why don't I join them?" Even as he asked himself the question, he knew that he was not one of them. They had given him sanctuary and had come to respect him, but when he thought about it, not even the brothers seemed to expect him to become one of them. It was true their rule was not as strict as the Covenanters at Qumran, where a postulant waited a year before he could even join the common meal, and a further two years before he could take the final oath, but even these brothers demanded three years before they accepted someone into final fellowship.

The harvest was gathered and stored. They decided to leave the bulk of the bean harvest in the large jars in the cave, where they also hung most of the onions in bunches along poles. A wandering shepherd might find the stores, but little or nothing would be stolen and it saved them carrying everything to the summer camp.

The move proved exhausting with so few of them. They did not return to the same place as the previous year. They needed a site with both water and wood. Obviously the brothers had some routine, because there did not seem to be any discussion or doubt that those who were away would be able to find them.

They fell easily into the summer routine. Athaliah proved to be an expert honey gatherer and any time someone saw bees heading off into one direction he was told. Athaliah would follow the bees back to their hive, usually in some crack, often up a cliff face. Nothing deterred him and usually with young Peleg to assist they would smoke them out and retrieve the honey. Honey was one of the few items of value they had to trade.

The seasons passed quickly and the brothers who had been preaching through the summer began to return. One day Athaliah was leading the afternoon period of study and instead of one of the books of the prophets, he took a teaching of the Lord Jesus himself.

Athaliah began, "When Jesus's disciples asked him concerning his return and what will happen to show that it is the time for his coming and the end of the age.

Saul was listening with half an ear as Athaliah recounted Jesus's teaching about the end times. Suddenly his attention was caught as Athaliah said, "But whoever holds out to the end will be saved. And this Good News about the Kingdom will be preached through all the world for a witness to all mankind; and then the end will come."⁹⁷ Athaliah's dark eyes were burning with fervour.

Saul felt as if someone had stuck a knife into him. The words seemed to shout themselves over and over in his mind. He heard nothing that anyone said. It came to his turn to speak but he was unaware of the group waiting for him.

Since Athaliah was leading the study, he said rather irritably, "Brother Saul have you nothing to say?"

Saul remained withdrawn and unaware he had been addressed. Arach, who knew when a man should be driven or left, indicated to Laban to close the afternoon's study.

The brothers left the tent and went to prepare for the evening meal. Saul remained seated, 'And this Good News about the Kingdom will be preached through all the world for a witness to all mankind...' The awful significance of these words hammered in Saul's mind. When the brothers went out on their preaching missions, they went to the villages and synagogues of Judah, Galilee and the surrounding territories. He knew they never shared their teaching with Gentiles, but here was Jesus saying it had to be preached through 'all the world.' This must mean to everyone – to Gentiles and barbarians. But that was unthinkable!

Yet what had God said to Abraham? 'Through you all the nations of the world shall be blessed?' Was this the fulfilment of that promise? That Jesus should be preached to the nations of the world? He remembered Ananias's prophecy in Damascus, 'I have chosen him to serve me, to make my name known to Gentiles and Kings and to the people of Israel...' Had God picked him, Saul, to go into 'all the world?'

Saul answered himself, "Yes, it would seem so!" So what was he doing about it? It was as if he had been in a safe womb, protected and sealed off from the world. What did God require of him? He suddenly realised he was alone. The other brothers were queueing up to wash in preparation for the evening meal. He rose, and still abstracted, joined the line.

During the winter months Saul's uneasiness grew. Arach had seen that something was troubling Saul, so it was no surprise when Saul sought him out and after being given permission to speak, said, "You have been both home and family to me and I have been content but it is time that I left."

⁹⁷ *Matthew 24:14*

“What brings you to this decision?” Arach asked.

“My heart was pierced when brother Athaliah repeated the Lord’s words ‘This Good News about the Kingdom will be preached through all the world for a witness to all mankind; and then the end will come.’”

Arach showed no surprise. He had seen very early on that Saul was not one of them. He had done everything the other brothers did, he had obeyed the strict and hard way of life they followed, but Arach had suspected there was more to Saul than meek obedience to the leadership and rules of the ‘Poor brothers’. He said nothing, but waited for Saul to finish.

“I see the people of the world covered in the darkness of sin and despair. I saw the love which the Father has poured out for the whole of mankind in the life and death of his child Jesus, and his patience in withholding final judgement because he wants to give these people the chance of salvation.” He stopped. His mind shied away from the conclusion. This was no joyful revelation of the Risen Messiah who spoke to him on the Damascus road. This was pain and doubt; uncertainty and even fear.

“What do you wish to do?” Arach asked gently.

“I need to return to the brothers in Damascus, for confirmation of the prophecy Ananias received for me. After that I must see what the Lord requires of me, maybe I must go back to Jerusalem.”

“Is that wise? The authorities will have long memories for what they see as your betrayal.”

“I need to see those called Apostles. Are they taking the news of salvation throughout the world?”

Arach was worried by the direction Saul’s remarks seemed to indicate. “I am sure that they continue to preach the Good News to all the pilgrims who attend the festival in Jerusalem and they are surely spreading the message through the Diaspora.”

“And the Gentiles? Are they preaching to them?”

“If they come to the synagogues, you know they are always welcomed as ‘God Fearers’ until the time they are ready for circumcision.”

Something in Arach’s tone warned Saul to go no further. In fact he had gone too far already, for the brothers were taught not to question, but to lead blameless lives and obey the rules of the brotherhood.

“May I stay until the brothers leave in spring?”

“Stay, and then go in peace,” Arach’s voice was grave.

The last remaining weeks seemed to drag. The work was endless and meaningless. Even the times of study became hard to bear because the questions Saul longed to ask were not to be thought of amongst these devout and humble brothers. Finally the time came for him to depart. He was given

back his own clothes, clean, but crumpled. He was even given a small amount of money to buy food. He joined two brothers who were travelling up the east side of the Jordan, heading for Pella in northern Perea. There Saul left them with a sense of relief.

CHAPTER 4: RETURN TO DAMASCUS

CE 33

ACTS 9:23-32

ACTS 10:1-48

GAL. 1:17-19

GAL. 3:15-29

Saul entered Damascus late one afternoon.⁹⁸ His future was more uncertain than at any time since his conversion. He knocked on the door of Ananias' home hoping he would find some answers. It was opened shortly by a little girl of about six years old.

Saul searched his memory and asked, "Are you not Keziah?" The child continued to look at him with solemn round eyes and then nodded.

Saul tried once again, "Is your mother here?" Again the child nodded.

With that, a voice called from the yard, "Keziah, who is it?"

Keziah answered, "A man."

Suddenly Dinah came from the sunlit yard and after peering at Saul, her face lit up with joy, "Saul! Our dear brother! Come in! Don't stand in the street. Come in!" There was no doubt as to his welcome. With a feeling of relief, he walked into the room.

Dinah called to the back, "Uriel, run quickly to your father and tell him Brother Saul has arrived." She bustled about calling to Keziah to fetch water and wash Saul's hands and feet. She herself went to fetch water and a handful of dried apricots and set them on a low table for him to eat and refresh himself.

A little boy of about three came to watch Saul solemnly as he sat and drank the water and ate the dried fruit. Saul said, "I think you are Isaac." The child gave a sudden brilliant smile and nodded his head.

Saul rejoiced in the presence of children. The three years in Arabia amongst the brothers had lacked both women and children, for he had little contact with the two orphan boys and it was not until now he realised he had missed them.

Dinah returned from the back and asked, "Have you come far, brother?"

Saul said, "I have come from the brethren in Arabia. The journey has taken nearly three weeks," then he asked, "Are you all well?"

⁹⁸ *Saul: Return to Damascus CE 33 – Galatians 1:17*

Dinah gave a warm smile, “Yes” she said, “Blessed be the Lord, we are all well, and the business prospers.”

With that the door opened and Ananias came in followed by Reuben. They both hugged him and praised the Lord for his arrival. It took some time for the excitement to die down, by which time Samuel arrived. He had been tidying up their workshop before following the other two, the greetings and excitement were repeated once more.

Ananias said to Dinah, “Send the children up with cushions to the roof. Let us sit there and hear all of brother Saul’s news.”

When they were finally settled Ananias looked at Saul and said, “Well, my brother, are you in health?”

Saul smiled at them, “Yes, praise the Holy One, I am in health and you gave me the right advice when you suggested I should go to stay with the brothers in Arabia. I have learnt much that I needed to know but I am not meant to stay in that desert retreat. The Holy Spirit put it in my mind that I should come back to see you, but after that I have no clear guidance.”

Reuben said, “Do not worry, we will pray for you. Even if you do not see the way clearly, the Lord has his plan for you and in his time you will know what it is.”

Saul asked, “Is all well with the brethren here? Do you prosper?”

Ananias answered, “Yes, praise the Lord, we prosper both in our business and in the quiet growth amongst the believers.”

“A bit of news which may interest you,” said Reuben, “Last Passover the Proconsul Vitellius, replaced the High Priest Caiaphas with Jonathon when he visited Jerusalem for the festival and he gave many other concessions to the people.”

Saul remembered that Jonathon was brother to the supercilious Alexander who had summoned him to the High Priest’s house. He doubted if he would be any less oppressive and corrupt than his predecessors. Saul said, “It does not seem possible for me to return to Jerusalem in that case.”

Ananias remarked, “A great many people remember you with anger. If you do go, you should not stay long.” He thought a moment and said, “Is there some special reason you need to go?”

Saul said, “I am not sure where the Lord wants me to go, but I feel I must see my sister and hear the news of my parents. I’ve heard nothing from the family for three years and my father is no longer young. Then I would like to see Peter and the other men who were particularly close to the Lord.”

Shortly afterwards Samuel and Reuben left to go home to their evening meal.

Saul followed Ananias from the roof to join the family for supper, “Are you having problems with the synagogue authorities?” He asked.

“Well, sometimes,” replied Ananias reluctantly, “But it was also a problem that the believers are scattered among the four synagogues and we needed everyone to come together regularly. So we meet every fifth day, and join for the fellowship meal on the first day evening.”⁹⁹

Saul stopped in surprise, “You have changed from the Sabbath to the first day?”

Ananias was ready to pour water for Saul to wash his hands. He looked up and said, “The brethren in many places find it hard to break with tradition and when their families are not believers they do not want to destroy the Sabbath peace by arguments. Then we remembered that in fact Jesus rose on the first day and so we come to celebrate his resurrection,” he put the jug down and held the towel out for Saul, and then shrugged, “Somehow it seemed right.”

Saul said nothing and poured the water for Ananias. He was filled with sadness that the Way of Life should bring such schism into the Jewish community for surely God meant Salvation to come to the Jews. Yet the old traditions seemed to be driving the followers of Jesus further away. He remembered his own prejudice and indeed conviction that there was no way Jesus could be the long-awaited Messiah. Perhaps God wanted him to reach these people in particular.

The next evening Ananias, Saul and Dinah went round to Laban’s house where the fifth day meeting was being held. Saul was surprised to see how many men and women were gathering outside Laban’s door. They moved quickly through the shop, with its crowded contents out into the courtyard then up some wooden stairs into a large upper room. Most of the people there recognized Saul and greeted him warmly.

Saul noticed that Laban’s daughter-in-law Miriam, was once more pregnant, she had a small boy with thick curls who was resting in her arms, already nearly asleep.

There were several older children who had accompanied their parents. Saul rejoiced at the feeling of family which permeated the whole group. Women embraced and talked quietly together and men stood exchanging news.

Finally an older man that Saul did not know, spoke, “It gives me great pleasure to welcome back brother Saul. I did not meet you during your previous visit, and I look forward to your address later this evening. I now call on brother Laban to open with prayer.”

⁹⁹ *Didache* 32:1

Laban began, “Behold, bless ye the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord, who stand in the house of the Lord in the night seasons. Lift up your hands towards the sanctuary, and bless ye the Lord. The Lord bless thee out of Zion: even he that made heaven and earth.

“The Lord of hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our stronghold.”¹⁰⁰ Then the whole group answered “Blessed is the Lord who is to be blessed for ever and ever.”¹⁰¹

The old man then said, “Let us join in the Lord’s Prayer.”

The whole group said, “Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, as in Heaven so also upon earth: give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our debt as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into trial, but deliver us from the Evil One, for thine is the power and the glory for ever.”¹⁰²

Then they sang a hymn after which the old man beckoned to Saul to come forward and speak. Saul wondered how to approach the subject closest to his heart. He stood quietly for a while. At first the brethren looked at him expectantly, but gradually a deep peace settled on the room and a listening quiet stilled even the children.

Finally Saul stirred and began, “When God promised Abraham and his descendants that the world would belong to him, he did so, not because Abraham obeyed the Law but because he believed in God’s promise. For if what God promises is to be given to those who obey the Law, then man’s faith means nothing and God’s promise is worthless. The Law brings down God’s anger but where there is no law, there is no disobeying of the law.”

Saul longed to share that incandescent moment when he encountered the Risen Lord Jesus and became born of the spirit. But he knew he had to begin where his audience could follow him. Also, as he spoke he found himself working out a long line of reasoning that had been slowly growing in his mind over the months. He developed his theme and saw his audience was listening attentively.

He felt filled with spiritual power and his message took wings.

“Now that we have been put right with God through faith, let us have peace with God through our Lord Jesus. He has brought us by faith into this experience of God’s grace, in which we now live. And so let us boast of the hope we have of sharing God’s glory! Let us also boast of our troubles, because we know that trouble produces endurance, endurance brings God’s approval, and his approval creates hope. This hope does not disappoint us,

¹⁰⁰ *Psalms 134*

¹⁰¹ *Jewish Prayer Book P116*

¹⁰² *Didache 321*

for God has poured out his love into our hearts by means of the Holy Spirit, who is God's gift to us."¹⁰³

His words reached a climax. His audience was filled with joy and as Saul stopped the whole group broke spontaneously into a song of praise.

"I was sold into slavery,
and the Lord of all made me free:
"I was taken into captivity,
and his strong hand succoured me.
"I was beset with hunger,
and the Lord himself nourished me.
"I was alone,
and the Lord comforted me:
"I was sick,
and the Lord visited me:
"I was in prison,
and the Lord showed favour to me:
"In bonds,
and he relieves me.
"They who have died in grief,
shall arise in joy:
"They who were poor for the Lord's sake,
shall be made rich:

The singing voices dropped to a quiet, gentle harmony and the hymn ended,

"And they who are put to death for the Lord's sake,
shall awake to life."¹⁰⁴

Later walking home with Ananias and Dinah, Ananias said, "Thank you for your words they carried such power and grace. I know many of the brethren felt the same. You will be called on to speak on the Sabbath."

Ananias proved to be right. Saul was handed the scroll for the reading from the prophets. Stimulated by the reading from Jeremiah Saul launched into an inspired interpretation of the passage, but he could see that his listeners were divided by his teaching. The brethren were hanging on his every word. The president of the synagogue was listening attentively, but many of the leaders were becoming increasingly restless and angry. He felt an overwhelming sadness at their blindness to the message of salvation given to them and rejected.

¹⁰³ *Romans 5:1-5*

¹⁰⁴ *From the Testament of Joseph 1:5-6*

The service concluded but afterwards a group of angry men surrounded Saul and argued fiercely with him. One man said, “That passage you quoted from Ezekiel was written for the idolaters of his time. We obey the Law. We do not make sacrifices to heathen idols. Abraham is our Father and we are the Holy people of God.”

“Then why don’t you believe in his child Jesus?” Saul challenged.

More angry rebuttals came. Ananias touched Saul on the arm and the brethren led him away.

Saul, Ananias, Reuben, and some of the other brethren spent the rest of the day discussing Saul’s concern that the message of salvation was not only for the Jews. There was no agreement on how to go about preaching to the Gentiles.

Reuben said, “The Gentiles will be reached through the diaspora. There are synagogues in all the major cities of the Empire, if they want to hear the Good News of Salvation, we will reach them through the synagogues...”

Ananias was not so sure. He remembered the message God had given him for Saul’s mission. The more he thought about the order of the words, the more he saw their importance. Ananias was no rabbi, but he often heard the rabbis giving judgement. He lent forward to indicate he had something to say. Reuben broke off and looked at him.

Ananias began, “When the Lord sent me to heal brother Saul after his arrival here three years ago. I was very frightened and protested. Then the Lord said, ‘Go, because I have chosen him to serve me, to make my name known to Gentiles and Kings and to the people of Israel.’” Ananias paused a moment and looked at Saul, and then concluded the prophecy, “ ‘And I myself will show him all that he must suffer for my sake.’”

Ananias looked round at the brethren and then explained, “I think the order of the words are significant. The Lord did not say ‘To the people of Israel and Kings and Gentiles,’ he said brother Saul would preach to ‘Gentiles and Kings,’ as if they were to be his special province.” He fell silent.

Raphael said, “I don’t think that is the only explanation of the prophecy you received. Although it may very well be that Kings and Gentiles will be drawn to listen to the Good News of Salvation. As the prophet Jeremiah has said,

‘Unfaithful people, come back; you belong to me. I will take one of you from each town and two from each clan, and I will bring you back to Mount Zion. I will give you rulers who obey me, and they will rule you with wisdom and understanding.... When that time comes, Jerusalem will be called ‘The Throne of the Lord,’ and all nations will gather there to worship me.’”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Jeremiah 3:14, 15 & 17

They were all listening attentively as Raphael continued, “I am sure that the Dispersion of our people amongst the nations of the world, is God’s way of preparing for the Salvation of the world. The Good News of salvation must go first to the Jews and through them to the Gentiles. God will reveal how His purpose will be accomplished.”

Raphael’s words pleased everyone. Even Ananias felt the logic in what he had said, and yet there was a lingering doubt and after a moment he asked, “Is it not time for brother Saul to see brother Simon Peter and the apostles in Jerusalem?”

There was an outburst of surprised consternation. Reuben said, “Would it be safe for him to return?”

A middled-aged man Saul did not know said, “Things are quiet in Jerusalem. The brethren have come together again and no one troubles them.” He gave a quick sideways smile at Saul.

Saul suddenly decided it would be exactly what he needed and he said, “I thank brother Ananias for his suggestion. It is indeed time for me to return to Jerusalem.”

Reuben was not convinced and said, “If you decide to go, it should be as secretly as possible and you should not stay for long.”

Saul looked at him in surprise. Reuben had spoken with conviction. As he reflected on it, he began to see the wisdom in what he had said.

Raphael said, “Well, there is no need for Saul to rush away from Damascus. There are many who want to hear you speak and even those who disagree with what you say, want a chance to argue and prove you wrong.”

Another brother said, “Yes, I want to take you with me to the synagogue in Potter’s street tonight. I know our president will be pleased to let you address the congregation.”

Saul was taken to preach to each of the synagogues. Not a night went by that he did not provide convincing proofs that Jesus was the Messiah. But his success did not please many of the Jewish leaders and it was learnt with dismay that some of them had met together and sent a delegation to the King Aretas’ city governor asking that Saul should be arrested as a trouble-maker.¹⁰⁶

It was not entirely Saul’s success that prompted this approach. The current war between King Aretas and Herod Antipas had made the authorities suspicious of the Jewish section in Damascus and it was felt a gesture of loyalty to the Nabatean rulers that would also rid them of the disturbing

¹⁰⁶ *Damascus: Jewish opposition – 2 Corinthians 11:32*

activities of Saul¹⁰⁷. The fact they could show he had previously carried letters from the High Priest in Jerusalem strengthened their case that he was a trouble-maker with the backing of the authorities. They felt the one issue served two causes.

The brethren discovered that the guards on the gates of the city had been ordered to kill Saul on sight. When it became obvious it would not be long before Saul's whereabouts would be discovered, the brethren devised a plan to help Saul escape.

One brother had his home in a small room on the city wall. It was decided to let Saul down from his window one night and send him on his way. Saul was anything but pleased with this idea. He felt it was undignified and cowardly to escape in such a manner, but the brethren were afraid if he was caught and killed, it might be the beginning of persecution against them. In the end he had to agree to their plan.

They chose a night with no moon. A collection was made for Saul. Dinah made up some rations for his journey and with as little fuss as possible, the brethren arranged for his departure.¹⁰⁸

The window was small and Saul struggled to climb through it. The walls were high at this point and there was some discussion as to how they would tie the rope round Saul to lower him. Samuel suggested they tied the rope to a donkey's pannier and after some trial and error they made a fairly substantial mechanism for Saul to stand in while he was lowered.

Saul never remembered the dark descent in that swinging basket without a shudder.¹⁰⁹ The fact he could not see anything, did nothing to reassure him. Rather the reverse, he had a picture of the basket upending and tipping him head first onto the rocks below. When he finally reached the ground, he was shaking and as it tipped over, he fell out. However the thought of his companions and what they risked for him, pulled him to his feet and he gave three tugs to the rope to let them know all was well. The basket was pulled up and sent down again with his bundle. Then he turned and scrambled over the rocky ground towards the road that led from the east gate. He needed to be far away from Damascus when the gates opened at dawn and travellers were once more on the road. He thought he would hide up during the first day or two until he felt confident there was no search for him. And so Saul started for Jerusalem.

¹⁰⁷ John the Baptist was not the only one upset by Herod taking his brother Philip's wife, who refused to marry him unless he divorced King Aretas's daughter. This lady suspected something and ran home to her father, who was furious and declared war on Antipas. Antipas's troops laid siege to Damascus but Aretas's forces soundly defeated those of Herod. The war continued in a desultory manner for several more years. – Josephus. *Complete Works*

¹⁰⁸ 2 Corinthians 11:32,33

¹⁰⁹ Saul: *Escapes from Damascus* – Acts 9:25

CHAPTER 5: RETURN TO JERUSALEM

CE 33

ACTS 9:23-32

ACTS 10:1-48

GAL. 1:18,19

Saul arrived in Jerusalem two weeks later.¹¹⁰ He went straight to his sister's house, wondering what his reception would be. He knocked at the door, the wait seemed interminable. Finally the door was opened by a servant girl he did not recognize.

She stood looking at Saul, who finally said, "Is your mistress in?" The girl nodded.

"Please tell her, her brother has returned." He watched to see the girl's reaction. She just looked blankly at him, and with sinking heart, Saul realised she was unaware Hannah even had a brother.

The girl said, "If you will come in, I will tell my mistress."

Saul stepped inside. The room looked the same. He could hear a childish voice coming from the courtyard and realised with a shock that Jonathon was now nearly six years old and in all probability Hannah had another child.

Suddenly Hannah came into the room, "Saul!" Her face was filled with pleasure. She flung her arms round him and kissed him warmly. "Where have you been? Are you well? Yes, I can see you are." The words poured out.

Saul said, "Greetings, dear sister. Are you and Abiel in health? Is that Jonathon's voice. He must be a big boy now." They were both talking to cover up the awkward gap created by Saul's long absence.

Without answering, Hannah exclaimed, "Look at me! You must be tired and hungry." She called, "Hagar, bring water for my brother and wash his hands and feet. Then fetch him some food."

"No," replied Saul, "Let me wait for the evening meal and eat with you."

Hannah led him into the courtyard and young Jonathon looked up from playing with two clay oxen and a toy cart loaded with pebbles.

"Come and greet your uncle Saul."

He rose cautiously and Saul said, "You must be a scholar now."

Suddenly the boy smiled. He remembered Saul teaching him his ancestors. This was no stranger. "I can now recite all the animals that may be eaten and the ones that are unclean. Do you want to hear?"

¹¹⁰ Saul: Jerusalem CE 33 – Acts 9:26

Saul laughed and said, “Of course I shall want to hear, but now your mother and I need to talk.”

A nurse maid came downstairs carrying a cheerful-looking child of about one and a half years. Saul asked Jonathon, “Who is this little one?”

Jonathon was off-hand, “Oh, that’s my sister, Merab.” Saul smiled at the child, who gurgled happily at him.

Hannah was amazed at the change she sensed in Saul. There was no anger, no tension. She tried to identify the difference. ‘He’s at peace,’ she thought.

Hagar washed Saul’s feet and Hannah said, “Come brother, Abiel will soon be home. Come upstairs and tell me what you have been doing.”

Saul sat on a couch and asked, “How are our father and mother? Are they in health?”

Hannah said, “Yes, they seem well. Father’s business prospers and he works too hard. Mother never tells me much about herself.” She paused as if uncertain how to proceed.

“Did my father ever forgive me for leaving Jerusalem and my studies.”

Hannah looked grave. “He was very angry. In fact none of us really understood what happened to you in Damascus.” Just then the sound of Abiel coming home made Hannah jump up saying, “You wait here. I will tell him of your arrival.”

Saul realised she was nervous about Abiel’s response to the news. He waited and listened for an outburst. But Hannah must have warned him because Saul only heard the murmur of voices. Finally he heard them climbing the stairs.

Abiel’s face was far from pleased as he greeted his brother-in-law. He grunted, “So you’ve come back,” and then added, “I hope you don’t intend to make trouble.”

Saul realised he was not welcome. He wondered where he could stay if Abiel refused to accept him. It was late now to look for lodgings. He should have gone to an inn and come early in the morning.

Abiel turned to his wife and said, “Well, come on, tell the servants to bring the evening meal. We will listen to Saul after we have eaten.”

Later when the table had been cleared and young Jonathon sent off to bed Abiel settled back in his chair. Hannah stood quietly spinning.

Abiel said, “I cannot pretend I am pleased to see you. Your departure from Jerusalem was not favourably viewed by many and your failure to return antagonized the rest. We heard a very garbled story which seemed so unlikely, I dismissed it. Your letter to Hannah did nothing to clarify matters. So now you have finally turned up, perhaps we can hear what really happened.”

Abiel's manner was dry and pedantic, but Saul knew him for a fair-minded man. What Saul was not so sure about, was the effect on Abiel of Saul's new faith. He decided to keep it as brief as possible and let them ask what questions they would.

"You remember the zeal with which I persecuted the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth, and you know it was because they had fled from Jerusalem that I decided to ask for letters to follow them to Damascus to bring them back here for trial."

His listeners nodded but did not interrupt. Once more he told of his amazing encounter with the Risen Lord. Sadly he saw their incredulity and disbelief. It was going to be difficult to convince them.

"I was blinded and the men with me led me by the hand to Damascus. Here they took me to a doctor, where I stayed for three days. On the third day, a man called Ananias came to me. He had had a vision in which the Lord told him to come to me and heal me of my blindness."

Abiel gave an irritated jerk. Hannah had stopped spinning.

"You can imagine Ananias, who is a disciple of Jesus, was reluctant to come to the one who had letters to arrest all such followers. But in obedience he came and laid his hands on me and I received my sight again. I received more than my sight. I am completely convinced that the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth are right. He is risen from the dead, and lives! And I believe he is who they said he is, the Saviour, the Holy One of God, for whom our people have been waiting."

"I hope you will keep such thoughts to yourself," Abiel said stiffly. "Things have been quiet here and business is good in spite of the dispute between King Aretas and Herod Antipas. I'll not have you going about stirring up trouble while you live under my roof."

Saul said nothing for a moment and then continued, "After I was in Damascus for a few days, it was obvious I could not return to Jerusalem, and anyhow I needed time to think. My whole life was turned upside-down. The brethren suggested I joined the group of former disciples of John the Baptist, who had accepted Jesus as Messiah and were still living in the desert. So I went to be with them."

"Oh," said Hannah, "Is that why we have heard nothing from you for so long?"

Saul smiled at her, "I'm afraid so. They call themselves, 'The Poor Brethren.' They depend on what people give them and the work of their hands. It is a hard life, but they truly love each other. However after two years with them, I felt it was time to move on, so I returned to see the brethren in Damascus and then decided to come back to Jerusalem to talk to the one they call Simon Peter."

"I forbid you to have anything to do with them," Abiel was angry, "I do not want any more trouble because of your activities. It took long enough for the previous scandal you caused to die down and if people know you are back in Jerusalem, there will be plenty of trouble."

Hannah looked sadly at her husband. She understood his fears, but she was so pleased to see Saul and knew if he intended to see the leaders of the Nazarenes, nothing would dissuade him. She remained quiet but both men knew she was unhappy.

Saul felt a good deal of sympathy with Abiel's position. He remembered with embarrassment the furious outbursts he had made himself against the followers of the Lord. He said slowly, "My brother, I do not want to cause you trouble, but I do need to see Simon Peter. I do not intend to make my presence known to those in authority...."

Abiel interrupted angrily, "Your presence will become known the first time you put your face outside. In fact I suspect our servants are already entertaining their friends with the news of your presence."

"I will move out at first light."

Abiel was not appeased, "Moving out is not going to save the scandal, and Hannah will be hurt and embarrassed all over again. To say nothing of my own friends and the members of the synagogue."

Saul looked at Abiel and knew he had given him deep offence and that anything he might say would only make matters worse. Saul sighed and wondered sadly, why the Good News of eternal salvation should bring such anger and division.

Abiel repeated, "I forbid you to have anything to do with that cursed sect of trouble-makers."

Saul said sadly, "I am sorry that I cannot accept this stricture, my brother. To do so would be to deny God's plan of salvation for the world." He got up, "I will not embarrass you by staying longer."

Hannah came forward and said, "Of course you must stay the night. Perhaps at first light you will see things differently. Abiel is right you know. When the authorities learn you have returned they will try to arrest you. The High Priest was furious when you failed to return from Damascus and he does not forgive people who offend him."

"There is no way my mind can be changed. You know how unreasonable I was before when I only thought I was doing God's will. I now live by faith in his son, Jesus, whose death on the Cross is the means by which God wants to re-unite all sinners to himself."

Abiel was not listening. He interrupted Saul to say, “Yes, yes, leave all that rubbish. Let us go to bed and maybe the morning will enlighten us all,” with that he walked out.

Saul’s departure from his brother-in-law’s home took place early in the morning. It was a painful occasion for them all. Abiel was still angry. Hannah was crying quietly. She pressed a small pouch into Saul’s hand. He felt coins and knew the depth of her concern for him. They hugged and he kissed Jonathon and Merab, who appeared tousled and sleepy. Then he left.

He had not slept well and had given some thought to where he might begin his search for Simon Peter. He had decided to start at the Synagogue of the Freedmen, which had been a favourite meeting place before his persecution of Stephen and the other disciples.

He arrived at the front door of the synagogue carrying his travelling bag, and found men just entering for morning service. He put on his tefillin and prayer shawl and joined in the morning service. It gave him a chance to look round for any familiar faces. Three years had changed the composition of the congregation, but he thought there was one man he remembered as having taken Stephen’s body for burial. At the end of the service he followed the man and his companion into the crowded streets.

Saul caught up with them as they were about to enter a house, “My brothers, can you help me?” They turned to look at him.¹¹¹

“I am looking for the one they call Simon Peter, will you tell me where I can find him?”

“Who wants to know?” Asked the man Saul thought he recognized.

“I am Saul of Tarsus, the one who formally persecuted the Brethren, but now I am a believer in the Lord Jesus.” Sadly Saul saw the fear in their faces and knew they did not believe him.

“You are no friend to any of the disciples of the Lord Jesus,” the other man declared, “Go on leave us. We will tell you nothing.”

Saul turned away and the men quickly shut the door on him. He wondered where he could go next. Perhaps some of those he remembered having arrested had returned to their homes, and not knowing how else to proceed, he reluctantly decided he must try them.

Wherever he went the response was the same. The brethren looked at him with fear and horror and turned him away. Some he remembered having arrested and he knew their memories of his actions were still painful. It did not help him that he said he was one of them and knew their claims about Jesus were true. No one believed him.

¹¹¹ *Saul : Seeks Jesus’s disciples CE 33 : Acts 9:26*

The day wore on and became hot. He wandered down into the lower city and came to the long flight of steps leading down to the Pool of Siloam with its bath-house. He asked one of the attendants for a drink of water and sat thankfully with his travelling bag at his feet. Women coming to draw water looked at him curiously.

In the meantime Saul's inquiries amongst the brethren had caused considerable stir. Finally someone thought to take the disturbing news to Simon Peter, Saul of Tarsus was back in Jerusalem and asking for him.

Peter was staying at the home of Mary, mother of John Mark. Her nephew Joseph of Cyprus was also staying there. He was doing his week of Levitical duties in the Temple administration, having come to take over the family responsibility for the Temple after Mary's husband had died. John Mark was still under age and would only be able to take over when he turned twenty in another two years.

Joseph had received the teachings of Jesus with deep conviction and had become one of the most loved of the disciples. He was a big man with a boisterous curly beard. Nothing depressed him or got him down and Peter had nicknamed him 'Barnabas' – meaning 'One who encourages' and the name had stuck.¹¹²

When the messenger brought the news to Peter, Joseph had just arrived home. It was thus Barnabas who asked, "Why does he want Brother Peter?"

The messenger said in tones that dripped disbelief, "He says he is now a believer. But you can be sure it is but a trap to start his persecutions again."

Peter asked, "How did he speak about The Master?"

"I did not hear him, my master only sent me with the message."

Barnabas looked at Peter and said, "I think this needs looking into. It is nearly three years since Saul of Tarsus left Jerusalem and I remember after his departure to Damascus, the police escort who went with him came back with an astonishing report that Saul had seen a vision of the Lord Jesus just outside Damascus and had joined the believers there."

Peter nodded, "I agree we should see what he wants. I don't think he is any threat after three years."

Yes," agreed Barnabas, "He is completely discredited with the Temple authorities."

Barnabas accompanied the messenger back to his master. He was a baker and not well-known to Barnabas. A baker's work was never done and he had little time to attend meetings.

¹¹² Acts 5:6

Barnabas asked him if he had spoken to Saul himself. The man replied, “No, he spoke to Eliphele.” He called through to the bake house at the back and a man stripped to the waist came through at his shout.

Barnabas greeted him and asked, “Did you speak to Saul of Tarsus?”

Eliphele said, “Yes, he stopped me as I was unloading the donkeys and asked where he could find the one called Simon Peter.”

“What did you reply?”

“I asked him why he wanted to know.”

Barnabas lent forward expectantly, “And what did he say?”

“Oh, he said something about being a believer.”

“Then what did you do?”

“I told him that was a likely tale and bade him be off.”

“Where did he go?”

Eliphele said irritably, “Look man, I have work to do. I wasn’t interested where he went, so long as he did not bother me.”

Barnabas turned to go.

Eliphele said, “He went the other way.”

Barnabas smiled and turned down the street. It was getting late, as he walked down the narrow street, he stopped to ask if any had seen Saul. He remembered him from glimpses in the Temple precincts as a little, energetic man, with rather a short skimpy beard. Most people shrugged at his queries and Barnabas wondered how he was to find him amongst the crowded streets of the lower city. He prayed for guidance and suddenly the Pool of Siloam was in front of him. It struck him that Saul might be thirsty and he walked over and looked down at the pool and baths below. At first he saw only the crowd of women carrying their pitchers up and down the steps and the attendants preparing for the evening rush to the public baths. Then he saw a man sitting dejectedly near the pool. Quickly he walked round and down the steep steps.

The man appeared to be praying and Barnabas smiled to himself. It delighted him to know how the Almighty, blessed be he forever, answered prayers.

“Brother Saul,” said Barnabas, “I believe you are looking for Brother Peter.”¹¹³

For a moment Saul did not move. He knew no one in Jerusalem who would address him as ‘brother Saul’ and for a moment he thought he might be dreaming. Then the sounds, heat and smells convinced him he was indeed

¹¹³ Barnabas: Helps Saul in Jerusalem – Acts 9:27

in Jerusalem and he looked up to see a very large man standing before him with a warm smile on his face.

"I am Joseph of Cyprus, but I live here in Jerusalem and the brethren call me 'Barnabas'." As Saul rose in amazement, he found himself enveloped in a bear-like hug.

"Welcome brother, I see you are one of us."

"How can you be sure?" Asked Saul, remembering his rejection by everyone else.

"Because I can see you have changed and I heard something miraculous happened to you on the way to Damascus. I know Esau of the Temple guard and heard his account when he returned from Damascus."

"God has indeed heard me; he has listened to my prayer. I praise God!"¹¹⁴ Saul said joyously.

Barnabas said, "Amen. Come follow me, I will take you to my aunt's house and there you shall meet the one you seek. Then you can tell us your story."

Barnabas introduced Saul to the people of Mary's household. John, (called John Mark to distinguish him from James' brother John,) was a lanky young man, shy and withdrawn. His mother Mary was a strong, generous woman. Her lined face was calm and welcoming. Then he met Simon Peter, the big Galilean fisherman whom Saul had seen before the Sanhedrin on two occasions. Also Simon's wife, Anna a woman worn with hard work but with a quiet smile.¹¹⁵

The articulate, educated pharisee and the big, uneducated man with the rough fisherman's accent looked at each other and liked what they saw. Once more Saul found himself enveloped in a bear hug.

"Welcome, little brother," growled Peter.

Saul looked up at him and said, "I have come to learn from you about the Lord Jesus."

The irony of the situation was not lost and everyone laughed.

Later as they sat round the low table. Barnabas said the grace.

During the meal the talk was general and Saul heard how the word of God had continued to spread, including a large number of priests.¹¹⁶

Saul was astonished. He longed to discuss the implications of this, but the conversation turned to Philip's recent experience with the Ethiopian official. Again Saul was amazed and wondered if these men fully understood the implications.

¹¹⁴ Psalm 66:19

¹¹⁵ Saul: Meets Peter in CE 33 – Galatians 1:18

¹¹⁶ Acts 6:7

When the meal was cleared away and the men had returned from washing their hands, the women joined them and Mary said, “We all want to hear how you came to know the Lord Jesus, but before you start I will call the servants so they may listen too.”

It was a considerable time before everyone was settled down. The room was large and while Peter, Barnabas and John Mark sat on stools or couches, the servants sat on mats on the floor. Some of the women, including Mary and Anna stood spinning. A woman’s work was never completed and in a large household there was always need for clothes, blankets, cushions and all the other requisites of living. Evening was a good time for spinning since the light did not need to be bright and the fingers worked, while ears listened.

When the moment came Saul said, “My brothers and sisters, may God our Father and the Lord Jesus give you grace and peace. I can now testify that Jesus died for all and was raised to life for our sake.”¹¹⁷

His listeners said quietly, “Praise the Lord!”

Saul went on, “You will all know how bitterly I opposed you and persecuted you here in Jerusalem and how I then asked for letters from the High Priest to follow those brethren who had escaped to Damascus.”

Saul then recounted once more his meeting with the Risen Lord near Damascus: his blindness and the prayer of Ananias which restored his sight. He told how he had left Damascus to join with the community of John the Baptist’s disciples in Arabia and how he had finally felt the Lord had laid a burden on his heart concerning Jesus’s words to go throughout the whole world and preach the good news of salvation to all mankind. He stopped talking. He was not sure how to share the burden of his heart.

His listeners were quiet. The miracle of the change in Saul had filled them with wonder. What other miracles did God have in store?

Finally Peter said, “You particularly wanted to see me?”

Saul looked at him and said slowly, “When the Lord told Ananias to lay his hands on me to restore my sight, he also gave him a prophecy concerning me. He was told, ‘I have chosen him to serve me, to make my name know to Gentiles and Kings and to the people of Israel.’ When I was with the brethren in Arabia, I wondered how this would be accomplished. Then I discussed it again with the brethren in Damascus. There was considerable disagreement, but most felt it was God’s plan to use the Jews of the Diaspora to reach the Gentiles and bring them into the Covenant of Abraham. I am not sure they are right because from my own experience I know obedience to the Law never brought the gift of salvation which I received through the Lord Jesus.”

He broke off because Peter and Barnabas were grinning at him.

¹¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 5:15. Saul preaches in Jerusalem CE 33 – Acts 9:28

“Something has happened?” he asked in surprise.

Peter answered, “Yes, something has happened! After you left for Damascus and the persecution against the brethren died down, I went preaching to people in the coastal region of Sharon. When I came to Joppa I stayed with Simon the leatherworker. It was about midday and I was hungry. While Simon’s wife prepared the food, I went onto the roof to pray.”¹¹⁸

Peter had a direct, unembellished way of speaking, which together with his guttural accent made for compulsive listening.

“Suddenly I saw Heaven open and something like a large sheet lowered by its four corners to the earth. In it were all kinds of animals, reptiles and wild birds. A voice said to me, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat!’

“I said, ‘Certainly not, Lord! I have never eaten anything ritually unclean or defiled.’ Then the voice spoke to me again and said, ‘Do not consider anything unclean that God has declared clean.’ This happened three times. Then the thing was taken back up into heaven.”

Peter looked at Saul, “While I was wondering what this vision could mean, two Phoenician slaves with a Roman soldier arrived. They had travelled from Caesarea with orders from a Captain Cornelius¹¹⁹ to come and fetch me. I heard them arrive and heard them call out, ‘Is there a guest here by the name of Simon Peter?’ You can imagine my surprise when I looked and saw three Gentiles asking for me. Then I realised the vision had something to do with their arrival and the Spirit said to me, ‘Go down and do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.’ So I went down and said to the three men, ‘I am the man you are looking for. Why have you come?’”

Saul was listening in amazement. If Ananias had been surprised when the Spirit had instructed him to go to heal him (Saul) how much more shocking it must have been for Peter to be told to accompany these Gentiles?

Peter continued, “Then the servants told me, ‘Our master, Captain Cornelius sent us. He is a good man who worships God and is highly respected by all the Jewish people. An angel of God told him to invite you to his house, so that he could hear what you have to say.’ It was obviously too late to start out for Caesarea, so I invited them in and persuaded them to stay the night.

“The next day we set out early and six of the believers from Joppa¹²⁰ came along as well. We arrived in Caesarea the next day. Captain Cornelius was waiting for me. When he saw me, he fell to the ground and bowed to me.”

¹¹⁸ This story of Peter and Cornelius follows the account of Saul’s return to Jerusalem. It does not necessarily mean that the events happened after Saul’s return. In giving historical accounts, it was the custom of that time to complete the action concerning one person, before starting on the next. Josephus’s *Complete Works* has many such examples.

¹¹⁹ Cornelius: Conversion by Peter – Acts 10-

¹²⁰ Joppa: Peter’s visit and vision – Acts 10:1-; Acts 11:12

The astonishment of such an event could still affect Peter. “I was embarrassed and said, ‘Stand up, I am only a man.’ Then we entered his house and I saw the crowd of people he had collected together. They all seemed to think it was like one of their theatre shows. I was not sure if they understood about us Jews being made unclean by association with Gentiles such as themselves. So I said, ‘You know very well that a Jew is not allowed by our religion to visit or associate with Gentiles. But God has shown me that I must not consider any person ritually unclean or defiled. And so when you sent for me, I came without any objection. I ask you then, why did you send for me?’”

Peter paused. Saul was astounded at the implications of Peter’s vision and the events which followed it. It ran completely counter to everything the Poor Brethren believed and Raphael’s supposition in Damascus. In fact it confirmed his own feelings that God had broken the Old Covenant with its strict interpretation of the Law and replaced it with a different kind of bonding to Himself.

Peter went on. “Then Cornelius told me that three days before, he had been praying in his house about the ninth hour. Suddenly he saw a man dressed in shining clothes standing in front of him, who said, ‘Cornelius! God has heard your prayer and taken notice of your works of charity. Send to Joppa for a man whose full name is Simon Peter. He is guest in the house of Simon the leatherworker, who lives by the sea.’ So he sent for me at once. Then he said, ‘Now we are all here in the presence of God, waiting to hear anything that the Lord has instructed you to say.’”

Peter broke off. “I was impressed by his faith and it reminded me of the day when we were with Lord Jesus in Capernaum and a Roman officer came to him and begged for the Lord to heal his servant who was paralysed and in great pain. The Lord made to go with him, but the officer said, ‘Oh no, I do not desire to have you come into my house. Just give the order and my servant will get well.’ Then he explained, ‘I, too am a man under the authority of superior officers, and I have soldiers under me. I order this one, ‘Go!’ And he goes, and I order that ‘Come,’ and he comes; and I order my slave, ‘Do this!’ And he does it.’ I remember how surprised Lord Jesus was at the faith of that Roman Gentile. And I felt the same with Captain Cornelius in Caesarea. Here was a Gentile who had more faith in God than many Jews.”¹²¹

Peter paused and then continued, “You can imagine how inadequate I felt – me – Peter the Fisherman from Galilee, talking to all those smart Roman ladies and gentlemen. Then I remembered how our Lord told us we would have to speak before rulers and kings and we were not to worry what to say, for the words we will speak will not be ours; they will come from the Holy

¹²¹ *Matthew 8:5-13*

Spirit speaking through us.¹²² And so I told them about the good things Jesus did and his power over the devil. I told them how he had been put to death, but was raised to life three days later and how all who believe in him will have his sins forgiven through the power of his name.

“While I was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came upon those Gentiles. The believers who had come with me from Joppa were as amazed as I was. They were speaking in strange tongues just as we did at the Feast of Pentecost four years ago. Then I understood why God had sent me that strange vision of the unclean beasts in the sheet. I said to my companions, ‘These people have received the Holy Spirit just as we did. Can anyone stop them from being baptised?’ So I ordered them all to be baptised in the name of Jesus.”

Saul could imagine the chaotic scene and wondered what the elegant Roman and Phoenician ladies thought of having their expensive dresses.... He stopped himself.

Peter ended, “Then they asked us to stay with them for a few days.”

The room was quiet and Saul looked at Barnabas, who smiled at him. They both knew that the implications of this event must have shaken the more conservative Jewish believers.

Finally Saul asked quietly, “And then what happened?”

Peter gave a great burst of laughter. “There was trouble! When I went back to Jerusalem many of the brethren criticised me for staying with uncircumcised Gentiles. Even worse! I ate with them! Then they called a meeting and I told them exactly what had happened. Starting with my vision and then the way Cornelius came to send for me. I told them how even while I was speaking the Gentiles began speaking in strange tongues and praising God. I said, ‘Who was I, then, to try to stop God!’ And they agreed.”

Saul asked, “Then it is agreed that Gentiles can be baptized into the Gospel of the Lord Jesus without having to be circumcised and brought into the Old Covenant?”

Barnabas said soberly, “No, I do not think it will be as easy as that. Not everyone was happy at the decision taken by the brethren who heard Brother Peter that day. There are some who say ‘Salvation is from the Jews’ and it is God’s plan to bring the whole world under the Covenant and the Law of Moses.”

Peter nodded. “Barnabas is right. Not everyone is pleased, but outwardly there is unity.” Then he brightened and turned to Barnabas, “Why not have Saul, here talk to the brethren? That should reassure them!”

Saul’s face was filled with joy, “I would greatly like to testify on behalf of the One I persecuted so savagely.”

¹²² Mark 13:11

It was agreed that Barnabas and Simon Peter would take Saul round the groups of believers in Jerusalem to give his testimony.

The next few days were some of the most exciting of Saul's life. He preached with such conviction and power that the brethren were astonished. However he encountered opposition, strangely enough not from those believers who served in the Temple, but from Greek-speaking proselytes. At first no one thought anything of it.

One day, Simon Peter took Saul to meet James the brother of the Lord.¹²³ Saul had been looking forward to meeting him, but the rapport he and Peter had felt at their first meeting was lacking. James was a serious and devout man, who had taken a long time to believe his brother was someone special.

When Jesus had begun his ministry, James, as the second eldest had taken over the family carpentry shop. His other brothers assisting. They had been embarrassed by the crowds of people who flocked to hear Jesus preach. At one stage they had tried to persuade him to come home because they could see he would get into trouble. He was already upsetting the religious leaders and the elders in their own synagogue.

As the months went by and more and more people in Galilee began to follow him, his brothers began to think he might indeed become a national leader. The whole family were preparing to go up to the Festival of Shelters in Jerusalem. When they saw Jesus was making no attempt to get ready to go, they mocked him. They suggested if he really wanted to be well-known, he should go up to Jerusalem.

It did not please them either, when he suddenly appeared half way through the festival. Although huge crowds came to listen to him, his brothers could see the authorities were looking for ways to arrest him. Then they wished he would keep quiet.

It was only the following spring when the whole family went up to Passover in Jerusalem that the trial and death of his brother became a turning point for James. The sentencing of his strong, gentle brother on a trumped-up charge, finally convinced James that Jesus was indeed someone unique as their mother, Mary had always claimed.

After the resurrection, the other brothers also found their understanding of Jesus had changed radically. Joseph, Simon and Jude returned to Galilee after the Resurrection but James stayed on to be with their mother, who was taken in by John, the son of Zebedee. James became part of the group of believers in Jerusalem and gradually won the respect of the other disciples for his piety and wisdom.

¹²³ James – Brother of Jesus: Meets Saul in CE 33 – Galatians 1:19

He was a quiet man and perhaps he found Saul's enthusiasm a little abrasive. Certainly no close friendship developed between them, although later Saul came to value James' innate wisdom and humility.

It was the following Sabbath that the real trouble began. The brethren had taken Saul to the Synagogue of the Freedmen. Perhaps it was Saul's growing conviction that Gentiles were to be included into God's plan of salvation, not by circumcision but by faith in God's son that prompted him to speak more freely of his vision.

When the time came for Saul to speak¹²⁴ he began, "I come to you today to declare the wonderful news of salvation which God planned from the time of his Covenant with Abraham in which God made his promises to Abraham and to his descendant. The scripture does not use the plural, 'descendants' meaning many people, but the singular, 'descendant'; meaning one person only, namely, the Messiah, the one we know as Jesus of Nazareth.

"What I mean is that God made a covenant with Abraham and promised to keep it. The Law, which was given four hundred and thirty years later, cannot break that covenant and cancel God's promise. However, it was because of his promise that God gave his gift to Abraham.

"What, then, was the purpose of the Law? It was added in order to show what wrongdoing is, and it was meant to last until the coming of Abraham's descendant, to whom the promise was made."

Saul could see he had the congregation hanging on every word. Only Barnabas had a suspicion of where his argument was going to lead him and began to feel uneasy.

"Does this mean that the Law is against God's promises? No, not at all! For if mankind had received a law that could bring life, then everyone could be put right with God by obeying it. But the scripture says that the whole world is under the power of sin; and so the gift which is promised on the basis of faith in Jesus the Messiah, is given to those who believe in him."

Barnabas was now not the only one who began to catch the drift of Saul's argument. For many of the proselytes present – mostly Greeks – the decision to become a Jew was a traumatic one. By accepting the Law, they became cut off from family and friends. The final key moment was accepting the rite of circumcision. Not only was the cut painful for an adult man, but for a Greek it was a disfigurement and one which was public every time he went to the gymnasium or the public baths. He suffered ridicule and ostracism. Many preferred to hold back from the final commitment to a faith which attracted them for its purity and righteousness, along with a code of Law which guaranteed them a right relationship with God. Those who came to the

¹²⁴ Saul: *Preaches in Jerusalem in CE 33 – Acts 9:26*

synagogues and listened to the teachings were called ‘God-fearers,’ and there were many.

Saul was now in full flight of his inspired message, “Before the time for faith came, the Law kept us all locked up as prisoners until this coming faith should be revealed. And so the Law was in charge of us until the Messiah came, in order that we might then be put right with God through faith. It is through faith that all can become God’s sons in union with Jesus, the Chosen One. You who were baptised into union with Jesus, are now clothed, so to speak, with the life of Jesus himself.”

The disciples were overwhelmed at the power of Saul’s conviction. Up until now there had been no one to give such a fundamental exposition of the nature and relationship of Jesus to the Law and the prophets. They recognized that Saul, coming with his rabbinical training, brought a new dimension to the message they had been preaching.

However the traditionalists were shocked at what they were hearing. The Greek-speaking converts from other areas, who knew how difficult it was to obey the requirements of the Law in a Gentile world were furious that he could belittle the sacrifices they had made for becoming Jews and keeping the Law.

Saul was unaware of the gathering storm¹²⁵ as he concluded, “So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles. If you belong to the Lord Jesus, then you are the descendant of Abraham and will receive what God has promised.”¹²⁶

The fury of some of his listeners could be held in no longer. With a roar they sprang from their seats and made to grab Saul. Barnabas put his great bulk in their way and called to the other believers to rally round. With great difficulty they surrounded Saul and got him out of the synagogue. Once outside, some people picked up stones with every intention of stoning him, but for once Saul’s shortness stood him in good stead. They could not see him and the brethren got him safely away.

When Barnabas was recounting the incident to Simon Peter and later still to James and the other Apostles at John’s house, there was a strong feeling that Saul had gone too far. Later still, someone came to say there was a plot to kill Saul.

It was then decided that he should be got out of Jerusalem as soon as possible. When the matter was put to Saul, he was far from agreeable. In some strange way, the man who had so opposed and persecuted them was unable

¹²⁵ Saul: Upsets Greek-speaking Jews – Acts 9:29

¹²⁶ Gal 3:16-29

to appreciate just how angry his revolutionary teaching was making those who did not agree. Saul felt all he said was self-evident.¹²⁷

Finally he agreed that perhaps it was time for him to return home to Tarsus. He thought of his parents and suddenly knew he needed to make peace with his father.

With a sense of relief, the brethren arranged a group to accompany him to Caesarea where ships regularly sailed north to Tarsus. Saul managed to get a message through to Hannah to tell her he was returning home and asking if he could carry a letter for her. She sent one of the slaves with a sealed letter to their mother and a jar of perfume. For her father she sent a new woollen coat she had woven for him.

To Saul she sent a brief verbal message, “Go with God.” Saul’s eyes filled with tears. Although he was the elder, during his years in Jerusalem, he realised she had been like a mother to him. He knew he had given her little indication of his appreciation of her care and concern. Now he regretted it.

¹²⁷ *Believers in Jerusalem – Send Saul to Tarsus CE 33 – Acts 9:30*

CHAPTER 6: HOME TO TARBUS

CE 33-42

ACTS 9:30

The brethren who had accompanied Saul from Jerusalem found him a Phoenician trading vessel out of Alexandria and travelling north along the coast. He paid the fare and took his leave of them, suddenly feeling more alone and vulnerable than at any time in his life. He had to wait his turn to climb the gang plank, sharing it with slaves loading skins of local wine, jars of olive oil and some bales of dried figs.¹²⁸

Saul went to find the place in the hold reserved for slaves and poor passengers like himself. He thought back to his arrival in Caesarea with his father eighteen years previously. Then they had travelled in style on the upper deck, waited on by his father's slave who brought them cooked meals. Now he would have to live on what food he had brought with him or what he could buy at the various ports they visited. Then as a young man of fifteen, he had been the pride of his father, and he had been excited at the thought of becoming a student of the famous Rabbi Gamaliel. Now he could imagine the anger on his father's face when he discovered his only son was no longer a respected younger rabbi but hunted and discredited.

The journey seemed interminable with the ship calling at every port along the coast but after leaving Seleucia, the port for Syrian Antioch, Saul began to watch for sight of the rugged Taurus mountains which gave the first indication they were nearing Tarsus. Finally the low coastline appeared and the ship sailed briskly towards the mouth of the river Cnidus, which widened out in a lagoon formed by lake Rhegam. Saul's heart began to beat faster when he saw the colonnades lining the banks of the river. The channel had been deepened over the years and the harbour of Tarsus was exceptionally fine. Its docks contained great arsenals and warehouses. Saul saw the familiar landmarks and suddenly realised how long it was since he had left his father's workshop. He wondered as the ship tied up at the wharf if his parents would recognize him.

The day was stiflingly hot. He had forgotten how humid Tarsus was in the late summer. He waited for the first rush of officials and merchants to leave. The merchants in particular were hurrying to find a prime spot from which to sell their wares or to contact agents who had ordered goods from the

¹²⁸ Saul: Returns to Tarsus CE33– Acts 9:30; Galatians 1:21, 2:1;

south. Finally, Saul shouldered his travelling bag and walked down the gang plank along the shaded colonnades into the city.

His father's house and business premises faced onto one of the great squares. Behind were workshops and a warehouse. There slaves and overseers were constantly coming and going, for much work was given out under contract. Saul's father, Jonathon, was a rich and successful business man. He had built on his own father's cautious beginnings.

In Saul's grandfather's day a great scandal had rocked Tarsus. A corrupt politician, named Boethus, had taken over the city. Athenodorus, the famous philosopher and teacher of the Emperor Augustus Caesar, was sent back to his home town to try and rectify matters. At first he tried to control the racketeers by milder measures, but finally he had to exile the culprits. In order to stabilise the city's government he reviewed the citizen rolls and only permitted those of wealth and standing to retain their Tarsian citizenship.¹²⁹ Saul's grandfather was one of these.¹³⁰

Saul was not thinking of his family's privileged status as he turned into the square and saw his father's house. He saw the usual bustle of activity around the business premises, but the door of the house was shut. He wondered where his father would be at this time of day and decided he would rather not meet him in front of the curious eyes of the slaves and overseers. So he walked up to the door of the house and knocked.

The wait seemed endless, but in reality it was only a short while before the door opened and his father's old and devoted servant stood looking at him. Deep emotion flooded Saul. He remembered the old man with affection.

He put down his travelling bag as he said, "Sebastian!" The old man looked surprised and Saul said, "It's me, Saul!" And he reached out to embrace the friend and mentor of his childhood.

The old man's face lit up, "My master's son! You have come home! How wise and wonderful are the ways of the Lord!" He returned Saul's embrace with joy.

"My parents, how are they? Are they in health?"

"Come in, come in. Don't stand in the street." Sebastian drew Saul into the cool hallway, which in turn led out into a porticoed courtyard. On top of the portico ran a wide veranda which gave access to all the upstairs rooms where the family lived. The stairs were in the corner. On the opposite side was a private washroom.

Sebastian said, "Leave your bag and come let me help you wash. Then I will take you to your mother and father."

¹²⁹ Acts 21:39 'An important city' Acts 22:25 'Roman citizen'

¹³⁰ "In the steps of St Paul" H.V.Morton

Something in the way he spoke alarmed Saul. But he followed Sebastian across the courtyard with its mosaic pavement and marble-lined pool in the middle. Saul allowed the old man to complete the courtesies of washing the traveller's hands and feet, although he could see Sebastian moved stiffly and with signs of pain. In truth he was glad to wash. The days on shipboard had left him feeling sticky with salt.

When they had finished, Sebastian looked at Saul and said, "About six weeks ago your father was taken ill. He has made a remarkable recovery, but the doctor says he must rest. He rests much and finds the stairs a great trial. He worries about the business. Your sister does what she can with the help of your father's three overseers, but you know your father can never believe anyone but himself can do the job properly."

Saul's heart sank. He could imagine his father's impatience. His mind jumped. Edna running the business? She was only a child. Then he smiled, she had been nearly twelve when he left. She must be nearly thirty now.

Sebastian followed Saul's thoughts and said, "Yes, little Edna is a very capable woman." He would have liked to have said more, but stopped.

"And my mother?"

"The same as ever," replied the old servant. "Come let me take you to them."

They re-crossed the courtyard and Sebastian led him up the stairs with their carved wooden balustrade, along the veranda to a room with windows overlooking the workshops, another window looking into the courtyard let whatever breeze there was to sweep through the room giving the illusion of coolness.

Sebastian formally announced, "Your son, Saul, Master."

Saul stepped forward and saw with a shock how ill his father must have been. Although not a tall man, he had always been sturdy and robust. Now he looked frail. His dark hair and beard had turned white. Then he saw his mother's worn face and knew she still bore the brunt of his father's irascible nature.

At Sebastian's announcement, both parents looked up in surprise. Saul saw the pleasure and relief flood his mother's face.

If his father was pleased to see him, he disguised it well and all he said was, "So you've come back." It was a statement.

Saul went forward to embrace the old man and then he hugged and kissed his mother, whose eyes were filled with tears of joy.

Replying to his father's comment, Saul said, "Yes, sir, I am home and I am here to do whatever you want of me."

Saul was thinking, six weeks! How wonderful are the ways of the Lord. It was just about the time the brethren insisted he left Jerusalem.

His mother wiped her eyes and asked, "Are you well, my son?"

The greetings and exchange of news continued while Sebastian went downstairs and sent up a young slave with wine and sweet fig biscuits.

Not once did his father indicate he was pleased to see his only son. Nor did he ask where Saul had been for the past two and a half years. But gradually Saul perceived that in fact the old man was greatly relieved to have him home to take over the burden of a business that was now too great for him. Saul saw how blue his father's lips were and how tired and breathless he became.

Finally his mother said, "My husband, you rest for a while. I must get the room ready for Saul. Come my son, you will be in your old room."

Old Jonathon made a token protest, but Saul saw him close his eyes and appear to sleep before they left the room.

Once outside, his mother embraced him and said, "Thanks be to God for your return. Your father would never have admitted it, but I know he longed for you to come."

She led him across the veranda and opened the door to the room Saul had slept in as a child. Now there was another bed in it with a richly woven cover. Saul could not remember ever having slept in such a bed. Certainly not as a child. There was also a beautifully inlaid chest for clothes. Business must be prospering.

He asked, "And you, my mother, are you well?"

She smiled, "When have I ever had time to be ill? Yes, praise God, I am in health."

"And Edna? How is her leg?"

"It is still shorter than the other, but the shoemaker made her a special shoe and she gets about with little trouble. She is like your father, strong and determined. He doesn't believe it, but she could run the business as well as he!"

This startling admission made Saul look at her in surprise. She caught his look and said gently, "You have been away a long time. It is hard for a man with only one son and a business to run."

"Has she not married then?" Saul asked in surprise.

"If she has remained unwed," replied his mother, "It is not for lack of offers, but your sister would never settle to housekeeping, and she has refused all her suitors."

Later that evening, Edna returned from the workshops and after washing she came up to report to her father. At her first sight of Saul, she stopped

abruptly and said in a harsh tone, “You! You’ve come back!” There was no pleasure in her voice.

Saul rose to embrace her and while not actually pushing him away, she quickly disengaged herself and turned to her father.

She started right in with her report, “The order for the sails for the Greek merchant ship was finished, delivered and paid for. Two more ships ordered spare sails, one to be finished in time for its return in a month’s time. The other can wait until after winter. A wagon-load of canvas was delivered from the weavers. We must order more rope. We will need more black goat’s hair cloth for tents. The consignment of leather did not come and I will send Demetrius to the tanners tomorrow to find out about the delay.”

She concluded her report. Saul was amazed at the control she showed over the business. He was also dismayed at the relationship to their father that her tone of voice revealed. There was no affection. It was as if she was defying him to find fault with her.

His father’s response showed the feelings were mutual. He grunted and then said, “Did you tell Oblius that the women are not to chatter as they sew? I can hear them from here. They even laugh. It means their eyes are not on their work.”

Edna said, “Yes, father.”

Saul wondered how he was going to be able to work with this hard efficient woman. She, who had been his laughing little sister when he left home. He wondered why she had not married...

Saul was grateful to retire to his room after the evening meal. He spent a long time in prayer for his parents and sister. Then he sought guidance for himself. He had thought God had other plans for him and the thought of running a business under the critical eyes of his father and sister seemed such a far cry from his dynamic preaching in Damascus and Jerusalem. He wondered if there were any believers amongst the members of the synagogues in Tarsus. He finally got into bed and in spite of the uncertainties, slept well.

The days which followed proved every bit as difficult as he had expected. He met with the three workshop foremen. Demetrius was in charge of the stock room. Oblius saw to the running of the workshops and Nicogenes dealt with the public, kept the accounts and oversaw the general working of the business. Saul realised these three men could well have managed the business between them, except it was not his father’s way to let other people run his affairs. Edna had obviously been helping him in many ways over the years and with his illness had assumed control with an ease which Saul soon realised, infuriated his father.

The business employed slaves, both men and women. Four of the men, cut and fitted the material, both for the sails, which needed great skill, and the

tents. The women, ten of them, did the sewing with four other men to do the heavy sewing of the leather patches for strengthening and attaching the ropes.

Two old slaves, whom Saul remembered from his childhood, cleaned and tidied the workshop. Saul realised Edna's 'woman's hand' had been at work in the store-rooms. They were far tidier than he remembered. Also she kept meticulous records of every item in stock, on order, or sold. Saul was impressed by her efficiency. She was also good with the workers and did not shout and bully them as their father had.

Saul knew she resented his return and the favoured status she expected him to assume. It surprised her when he deferred to her and sought her out to have her explain what was going on. After a few days, he asked in what ways he could help her. For the first time she dropped the barrier of her resentment and really looked at him.

She said in surprise, "You've changed!" Saul smiled but said nothing.

She thought and said, "We have been so busy there has been no time to check up on our suppliers. I would like Nicogenes to find out about the canvas deliveries. There was a hold up and they told us canvas was in short supply and the price went up. It is no longer in short supply and the price has not come down. I think they are cheating us. If you could take over from Nicogenes, it would also give you a chance to meet some of our customers."

Saul was pleased by her change in attitude. "That sounds a good plan, have you discussed it with father?" Immediately he saw he had angered her. He also realised she made decisions with only minimal reference to him. He wondered what would happen if the old man came downstairs and took over the business again.

This was not the only worry that kept Saul's mind in turmoil. He attended the synagogue services, but if there were believers he was unable to find them. The local Jewish community was indifferent to some dead rebel leader called Jesus. Furthermore his family never once referred to the years he had disappeared from Jerusalem and lived in Arabia. So the winter came and went.

One afternoon in early spring when Saul was climbing the stairs to visit his father, he met his father's old friend, Nathanael, coming down from a visit. Nathanael had just been made president of the synagogue for the ensuing year. Which probably, Saul thought later, prompted his remarks.

"Saul, how is it we've not had the pleasure of hearing you share something of your scholarship? After all you spent long enough under the rabbis in Jerusalem. You must have something worth listening to." Nathanael was a big man, whose loud bluff manner could be overpowering to lesser mortals.

Saul had been longing to share something of his ‘experiences’ and this unexpected invitation was too good an opportunity to miss. Without thinking he answered, “It would be an honour, sir, to address the congregation.”

“That’s all right then,” boomed Nathanael, “We’ll give you a chance this Sabbath,” without waiting for a reply, he went on downstairs and left the house.

Saul suddenly realised he was unprepared to address the men who ‘attended his father’s synagogue.’ They were mostly rich traders and businessmen with a good addition of Greek proselytes and God-fearers and some students from the university. When he thought about it, he realised they were not people who would be likely to take kindly to the message he longed to share. They were traditionalists, who liked their religion in easily assimilated and reassuring doses.

He prayed long and earnestly for guidance, but heaven seemed silent and empty. He might never have met the Risen Lord outside Damascus. He began to feel he had made a mistake to accept the invitation to speak. How he longed for the fellowship of the brethren and the warmth of their love and acceptance of him.

The day of preparation for the Sabbath arrived and he was no clearer in his mind as to what he would say. Never before had he been at a loss for either words or a teaching. That night he could not sleep and it was only towards dawn that he fell into an uneasy and restless doze. When he finally rose he felt tired and unrested.

The synagogue that Saul’s family attended reflected the wealth of its members. Everything was the best that money could buy. Fine mosaics decorated the floor. Marble pillars supported the women’s gallery. The Holy Ark containing the sacred scrolls was set in an alcove, hidden by a deep red curtain embroidered with gold designs. The reading desk was carved and inlaid with rare woods and ivory. On either side the chairs for the president and elders were also of the finest workmanship. The lamp stand was of bronze but the candelabra was of silver. Everything proclaimed the people who came to worship God in this place were men of substance.

Saul sat in his usual place on the stone bench which faced the Ark on the long side of the building near the door. His mother and sister were in the gallery, a fact which he found strangely disturbing. This was not the way he had planned to tell them of his new faith.

When it was time for the reading, the hazzan went to the Ark and drew back the curtain. He selected the scroll from the Law. Took it out of its cloth covering, opened it at the correct place and put it on the reading table.

The reading was taken from the book of Exodus from the passage entitled, ‘Shekels’, which concerned the instructions to make the altar for burning the

incense and also the tax imposed on all males from the age of twenty for the upkeep of the Tent of God's presence.¹³¹

The first three verses were read, by a priest, 'a descendant of Aaron,' followed by a Levite and then five ordinary members of the congregation. When the reading was finished the last reader said the benediction and the hazzan rolled the scroll and put it back into its cloth covering and returned it to the Ark.

Nathanael then beckoned the hazzan over and whispered to him, nodding his head in the direction of Saul. The hazzan looked at Saul and crossed the floor of the synagogue to invite him to read from the prophets.

His moment had come. The one word that had penetrated the confusion of his mind was 'ransom'. The verse from the Law actually said, 'When you take a census of the people of Israel, each man is to pay me a price (ransom) for his life, so that no disaster will come on him.' And ended, 'This tax will be the payment for their lives, and I will remember to protect them.'¹³²

He asked for the scroll of Isaiah, and the hazzan fetched it from the Ark. He took it out of its covering and laid it on the reading desk. Saul unrolled it and found the passage which began,

‘Israel, the Lord who created you says,
“Do not be afraid – I will save you.
I have called you by name – you are mine.
When you pass through deep waters, I will be with you
your troubles will not overwhelm you.
When you pass through the fire, you will not be burnt:
the hard trials that come will not hurt you.
For I am the Lord your God,
the holy God of Israel, who saves you.
I will give up Egypt to set you free;
I will give up Sudan and Seba.
I will give up whole nations to save your life,
because you are precious to me and because I love you
and give you honour.
Do not be afraid – I am with you!”

As Saul waited for the translation suddenly he knew that whatever happened, this promise was for him. His voice strengthened and he read on;
From the distant east and the farthest west,
I will bring you home.

¹³¹ Exodus; 30:1-

¹³² Exodus 30:11-16

I will tell the north to let them go
and the south not to hold them back.
Let my people return from distant lands,
from every part of the world.
They are my own people,
and I created them to bring me glory.”¹³³

Saul rolled the scroll up and handed it back to the hazzan. Then he sat down in the chair provided for the speaker. He raised his hand and turning to the president of the synagogue and elders sitting on either side of him, he began, “Fathers, fellow Israelites and all Gentiles here who worship God, the reading from the Law tells us how the Lord directed Moses to take a census of the people and then each male from the age of twenty years was to pay a half shekel a year as a ransom for their lives. And with this order came God’s promise that he would protect them. We pay this tax even to this day.

“The prophet Isaiah tells how deeply God cared for our people and how the Lord is willing to give up whole nations to ransom and save us. It tells how he will gather us from all nations and bring us home. We are to be a people, created to bring him glory.

“And now I declare to you that the time foreseen by Moses and Isaiah has come. God, who wants everyone to be saved and come to know the truth, has sent us a saviour, one Jesus of Nazareth, who gave himself up to death, even the death on a cross, to redeem all mankind.”¹³⁴

There was a mutter of shock amongst his listeners. This was no traditional teaching, explaining and edifying. This was blasphemy!

Saul noted the anger of the congregation, but he had to declare to them the good news of salvation which came to those who believed in Jesus.

“Our people have long looked for the coming of the Messiah. And now I tell you that this Jesus is he!” The muttering grew. Saul raised his voice, “It is through Jesus that the message about forgiveness of sins is preached...”

What had been a growing mutter, now became an uproar. Nathanael, looked at Saul in dismay. This son of his old friend had brought disgrace upon himself and his father. Sadly he ordered him to be seized and removed from the synagogue.

Two of the elders, with the assistance of two younger Levites took Saul into a room in the back courtyard of the synagogue and locked him in. When they returned and order had been restored, the service was concluded.

Nathanael rose to his feet and said, “This matter will be dealt with at the next sitting of the Court, three days from now.”

¹³³ *Isaiah 43:1-7*

¹³⁴ *1 Timothy 2:5,6*

Immediately groups of people gathered to discuss the incident. Edna helped her mother down from the gallery and they went to Nathanael to ask what would happen to Saul.

Nathanael looked sadly at the two women. "You will have to wait for the decision of the Court. I will be sending messages to the other synagogues and the matter will be discussed this evening."

Filled with dismay Martha was torn between concern for her son and fear of what this news would do to her husband. She turned to Edna and said, "Come, let us go home."

The small room where Saul was held had no window, only a barred door which let in a little light. There was no furniture, no bed or stool. The floor was dirty and Saul lent against the wall. His mind was full of confused thoughts. What should he have said? Had he been wrong to try to share the message of salvation? What would they do to him? And then lastly with a feeling of acute shame and discomfort, what would his father think?

It was already growing dark, when footsteps sounded outside the cell and the hazzan, who had charge of Saul until the sitting of the Court, opened the door to admit Sebastian.

Saul greeted him with relief, "What about my father?"

Sebastian, who knew and understood the relationship between father and son, said, "He refuses to discuss your arrest and pretends nothing has happened."

Saul well remembered how his father could shut out anything that displeased him. It had always made it impossible to discuss things with him. If he disagreed with you, he would simply ignore you. As a child Saul had suffered deeply by what he felt as his father's rejection. As a man, he began to see that perhaps it was his father's method of dealing with emotional issues. Saul found it did not make it any less painful.

Sebastian said, "Here are some things for tonight. Is there anything else you need?" Saul looked at the basket containing food, the rolled sleeping mat, and his cloak which Sebastian handed to him.

"Thank you my friend, as always you anticipate all my needs, bless you." Then he looked at the hazzan and asked, "May I use the latrine and wash?"

The hazzan, a tall thin man, with a thin beard and pointed nose, sniffed and said in an unfriendly voice, "Be quick about it then."

Saul, watched by the hazzan, walked across the yard to the latrine and then to the place where the men washed their hands. Sebastian assisted him by pouring the water.

Refreshed, Saul walked back to his cell and was once more locked in. It was too dark to see what was in the basket, and anyhow he did not feel

hungry. He drank some water from the small jug and then unrolled the mat and wrapping himself in his cloak lay down thankfully on the floor. Surprisingly he fell asleep almost immediately.

On the second day of the week, a court of three convened to hear Saul's case. Nathanael, as friend to the family recused himself, and three judges were chosen, one by the congregation of the synagogue, one by Saul. The third was appointed by the other two.

The congregation had appointed a much respected elderly rabbi, by the name of Johanan. Saul prevailed on Nathanael to accept his nomination. These two appointed a scribe, learned in the Law, a man of about fifty, called Shimei.

The court was convened after morning prayers. The three judges sat in the chairs in front of the Ark. Saul was brought in by the hazzan and stood in front of them. Two secretaries stood, one on each side of the judges to record the evidence. Those members of the congregation who wanted to hear the judgement in the case sat round the walls of the synagogue.

Two men who could be relied on to give accurate testimony had been chosen from amongst all those who had heard Saul speak.

The witnesses were called in and charged by Shimei on their responsibilities and the danger of bearing false witness. The younger of the two witnesses was dismissed and told to wait outside. The court then began the cross examination of the elder witness.¹³⁵

Shimei after checking the time and date of the offence, asked, "What is your testimony concerning the offence of this man?"

The witness, a man of learning, was poor, he began, "My masters, this man spoke of one named Jesus, who he named as God's appointed Messiah. He said he has power to forgive sins. Yet he said this same man had been sentenced to death as a criminal, and we know the scriptures say, 'All who hang on a tree, are accursed of God.' Furthermore we know that no one can forgive sins, except God himself."

Zechariah finished his testimony and was given leave to sit down.

The second witness was the son of a wealthy merchant. Like Saul, he had spent several years studying in Jerusalem before returning to his father's house.

Shimei asked, as before, "What is your testimony concerning this man?"

"My masters, this man tried to subvert the scriptures to press the claims of one, Jesus, to be the promised Messiah. He tried to show that by his death

¹³⁵ See the chapter on Jurisprudence in *Everyman's Talmud* by Rev A.Cohen. Published Dent and Dutton 1932 This gives a full account of court procedures including the punishment of 39 stripes

he became a ransom for our sins, but the scripture says that anyone who dies on the cross is accursed of God.” He paused.

Johanan asked, “Did he make any other claims concerning this man?”

“Yes, he claimed that this Jesus had the power to forgive sins.”

Shimei dismissed the witness and said to Saul, “Have you anything to say in your defence?”

Saul began, “Fathers and brothers, you know how I left Tarsus and spent many years in Jerusalem, as a student of Gamaliel. I received strict instruction in the Law of our ancestors and was just as dedicated to God as are all of you here today. While I was in Jerusalem this man of whom I spoke, Jesus of Nazareth was condemned to death and crucified by the Roman authorities under pressure from the High Priest and Council. After his death, his followers began to claim that he had risen from death and was alive.”

Saul suddenly realised that he was being given far more opportunity to preach about Jesus, than he had on the Sabbath.

“I persecuted to the death the people who followed this man. I arrested men and women and threw them into prison, finally I obtained letters from the High Priest written to fellow-Jews in Damascus, so I could follow those who had escaped from Jerusalem to bring them back in chains to be punished.” He retold his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus.

There was no doubt that everyone was paying attention to Saul’s account. He stopped a moment before he concluded, “And so I stand here giving my witness. What I say is the very same thing which the prophets and Moses said was going to happen; that the Messiah must suffer and be the first one to rise from death, to announce the light of salvation to the Jews and to the Gentiles.”¹³⁶

The three judges looked at one another. This was certainly an unusual case. In fact they had never heard one like it.

Shimei cleared his throat. “It is my opinion that the accused has been led astray by a sect of our people. His teaching is both unorthodox and misleading and in my opinion he should not be allowed to teach again in the synagogue.”

Shimei looked at Nathanael, who had been profoundly shocked by Saul’s behaviour the previous Sabbath, but was torn for his concern for Jonathon, who would be deeply wounded by any censure on a member of his family. “I find his teaching on the Law contrary to our traditions,” he stopped abruptly.

Johanan waited for him to continue, but when he remained silent he gave his judgement. “The prisoner not only misrepresented the Law of Moses by inferring that by payment of the half shekel anyone can ransom his life from his Creator. This passage clearly states that the annual payment of the tax was

¹³⁶ Acts 26:22-23

for the upkeep of the Tent of the Lord's Presence. It is this sanctuary which gives protection, not the actions of a man.

"He then took the passage from the prophet Isaiah to introduce a semblance of authority for his outrageous contention that the Messiah, the Holy One of God, has actually come! No matter that the whole world remains unaware of this so-called fact! Furthermore he cites the blasphemous suggestion that such a one has died the death of a criminal in a manner the Law clearly states, is accursed, nevertheless by so dying this criminal has paid a ransom acceptable to the Most High for the sins of us all."

The outrage which Johanan felt made his voice rise and his face flood red with anger. "Merely to ban him from teaching in the synagogue is not enough, I contend he deserves stoning..."

Shimei interrupted, "We will gather together tomorrow morning for declaring a sentence on Saul, son of Jonathon." Then turning to the hazzan, he said, "You may return the prisoner to the cell."

A buzz of animated conversation broke out amongst the onlookers. It was obvious people were divided over the conclusions of the judges. Tarsus was a tolerant city and stoning for blasphemy did not please many of those present. Several of whom had left Judaea to escape this kind of intolerance. Others had experienced the pogroms of Alexandria, and knew how catching religious bigotry could become. So the synagogue emptied with groups of men arguing hotly with each other.

The next morning after the service, the court re-convened. It had given all the judges a period of reflection. Johanan had had his feelings of outrage intensified by talking to those who felt as he did.

Shimei had spoken to most of the elders in the congregation and found them divided over the issue. Several felt that Saul might have been granted a special vision from God and if this was so, then to punish him would be bringing the whole congregation in conflict with the Most High, himself.

There were others who thought he was wrong, but were reluctant to have the issue divide the congregation when there were more important things which needed their attention.

The result of these various conversations had left Shimei feeling moderation was called for.

Nathanael on the other hand, while not feeling so strongly on the religious issue as Johanan, shared his sense of outrage that Saul had misused scripture to make his point. What angered him was that Saul had done this as a result of his, Nathanael's, invitation. Against his feeling of betrayal by his friend's son, he worried over the effect of any extreme sentence imposed by the court on Jonathon. Especially since he largely owed his present prosperity and position in the synagogue to a substantial loan Jonathon had made him when

his own business was teetering on the brink of financial disaster. He had a sense of obligation to the father, even while he felt anger for the son.

The synagogue was packed. A great deal of interest had been created by the case, especially as it involved the son of one of their leading members. When the crowd had quietened down, Shimei called for the prisoner.

Saul had spent the night in prayer and fasting. He, of all people realised the seriousness of the charges against him. In spite of this, he had a feeling of confidence that he had yet to fulfil the charge God had placed on him.

When Saul was brought in his hands were tied in front of him. Shimei turned to Johanan and invited him to proclaim sentence.¹³⁷

With no hesitation Johanan said in a loud voice, "This man is worthy of death. I pronounce death by stoning."

There was a muted gasp from the onlookers, but the other judges remained impassive and Shimei invited Nathanael to give his verdict and sentence.

Nathanael suddenly found his mind clear. Johanan's call for the death sentence seemed out of all proportion. He cleared his throat and began, "I do not approve of the way Saul used the opportunity given to him to expound the scriptures for our edification for trying to put across some personal theory. This is against our tradition. However, I do not feel extreme measures are called for. It is enough that he has been brought before this court and I would sentence him to forty lashes, save the one. This is both to discourage him from pursuing false doctrines and to discourage others who may be led astray in the future."

The crowd hummed and it was clear this sentence was more favourably received. They quickly hushed and looked expectantly at Shimei. His decision was now crucial.

The reactions of the crowd had not been lost on Shimei. It did not change his own decision, but it made it easier for him to deliver it.

"It is my opinion that Saul is misled in his teaching, but there is no doubt as to his sincerity. It grieves me to see someone with the scholarship of Saul, espousing false doctrines, and using the scriptures to support his arguments. However, it has long been our custom to have various and varied interpretations of the scriptures and while I believe him to be mistaken, I do not favour extreme forms of punishment as the best means of changing a man's mind and showing him his error. It is my contention that he should be warned and released."

The congregation was now gripped by the division amongst the judges. For the Greek members present it was taking on all the drama and excitement of a poetry contest.

¹³⁷ Saul: Receives 39 lashes – 2 Corinthians 11:24

According to court procedures, the judge who argued for acquittal could not now change his mind. Those who argued for conviction could modify their opinions.

Shimei looked once more at Johanan, who said with a stony face, "I see my brothers feel leniently towards this man. We are told that the Lord, blessed be his name for ever, is merciful, so I concur with my brother here that he be sentenced to forty lashes save the one and be prevented from addressing the congregation of the faithful in future."

For Saul, this last restriction was far worse than the physical punishment. He tried to keep an impassive expression, but his heart felt it was breaking. It was not he, they were rejecting, but the Lord Jesus, the bringer of hope and salvation to all. His thoughts were interrupted as the hazzan moved forward to take Saul outside to implement the sentence.

With the judges and the rest of the court following, the hazzan led Saul into the courtyard where he tied his hands one either side of the whipping post. Saul's back was to the post. The hazzan then ripped his robe from the neck to the waist, exposing his chest. He fetched the whip, which was made from calf's leather, doubled into two and then redoubled into four. The straps were bound to the handle by two thin thongs of leather made from a donkey hide.

There was a rock alongside the whipping post, and removing his outer garment, the hazzan stood on it. He held the whip in one hand and brought down the lash down on Saul's exposed chest with all the force he could muster. The shock and pain of that first blow brought an involuntary cry from Saul.

While one of the judges counted, Shimei began reading, "If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; then the Lord will make thy plagues wonderful and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses and of long continuance."¹³⁸

The pain was like fire across his chest. Saul groaned in agony. After the first thirteen lashes were complete, the hazzan stopped and Saul was turned to receive the final twenty-six on his back. This time he was tied in a bending position.

As the hazzan applied the whip, Shimei intoned, "Keep therefore the words of this covenant and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do."¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Deut., 28:58-59. Source of information. Page 321 Everyman's Talmud by Rev. Dr A.Cohen published Dent Dutton 1932

¹³⁹ Deut. 29:9

It was no comfort to Saul that the beating was designed to punish the guilty not to maim them. Long before the sentence was complete, he felt he would collapse and suffer the additional agony of the judges deciding to postpone the balance of the sentence when he had recovered sufficiently.¹⁴⁰

Shimei was still intoning, “But he, being full of compassion, forgave them their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath.”¹⁴¹

He struggled to hold on to consciousness and to repress the groans and cries that came unbidden to his lips. Finally it was done and the thongs binding him to the post were undone. Saul fell to the ground. Their work done the judges turned to leave. The hazzan, hot and with sweat pouring off him, picked up his garments and the crowd began to disperse.

Saul’s family had not attended the trial, but Sebastian, together with Demetrius had watched, and now they both went over to attend to the barely conscious son of their master. Sebastian had brought oil to pour onto the bruised and cut flesh. He then wrapped him in a linen sheet and together they helped him out of the side door into the street. Demetrius had brought the wagon and they lifted Saul up onto a mattress, which his mother had insisted they use rather than straw.

Sebastian and Demetrius climbed up and the driver urged the two horses, who lent forward into their traces and began the short journey back to Saul’s home. On their arrival, Martha mobilised the household, while Sebastian and Demetrius helped Saul up the stairs to his room, a maid brought warm water in which Martha had infused all the herbs which she thought might relieve the pain, including thyme, calendula flowers and rosemary. Another maid brought a draft of wine in which powdered latex from the seed head of the poppy had been stirred.

Martha herself bathed Saul’s bruised and lacerated skin. With the marks of the lash on both his chest and back, there was no comfortable way for Saul to lie. The concern and care of his mother and the rest of the household, together with the opium-laced wine took effect, he relaxed and finally slept.

In the months that followed Saul wandered in a spiritual desert. There seemed to be no one with whom he could share the good news of the Messiah. Typically, his father never mentioned the indignity of a son of his being sentenced to an official beating. His mother knew Saul had suffered far more than just the physical pain. His body soon healed under her ministrations, but she sensed his spirit carried the pain of his rejection by his own people and she thought he was often near to despair.

¹⁴⁰ *Everyman’s Talmud* by Rev A.Cohen published Dent and Dutton 1932

¹⁴¹ Psalm 78:38

Edna had little sympathy for the results of his ill-advised dissertation. Perhaps her practical concern for the business and her driving of Saul to take some of the responsibility helped him because it made both mental and physical demands on him.

Sebastian who knew and understood Saul perhaps better than anyone, was the most concerned for him. He had heard his talk at the synagogue and had been deeply moved by it. In his quiet way he shared what he had heard with some of his fellow-servants and found Demetrius mildly interested, if not for the message, then at least in the reason the elders of the synagogue had for beating the messenger.

Sebastian was not the only one who had heard ‘The Word’ on that Sabbath and in whom it had begun to take root and grow. It was some months later Saul was surprised to be approached by Sebastian with a request for him to tell a small group of his friends and others, more about the man Jesus and his teachings.

From this small beginning a few people began to meet with Saul.

The years passed. During this period, Saul’s confidence and longing to share the message with a wider group, prompted him to speak in the other synagogues of Tarsus, with the same disastrous results. Three times he suffered the punishment of thirty-nine lashes. On the last occasion he was desperately ill and lay so near to death that his mother despaired for him.¹⁴²

A week after the beating he was weaker and lost consciousness. Sebastian, who hardly left his side during that time, sent down to Demetrius and together they prayed for Saul. For a time they thought he had gone, and then they saw a slight movement from the figure on the bed. Saul’s eyes opened, puzzled he looked slowly round the room as if he was a stranger to it.

Sebastian sent the young servant girl who fetched and carried for him, to call for Martha. She feared the worst came running only stopping when she saw Sebastian’s smile.

Quietly he murmured, “He’s awake,” at his voice Saul’s eyes turned towards the speaker and then towards his mother.

With a great effort he said, “I’ve been sent back.” Puzzled Martha looked at Sebastian, who shrugged. Then gently he gave Saul water to drink. Saul then fell into a deep and healing sleep.

After this his recovery was swift. It soon became obvious that Saul was changed. No one could quite pin-point what it was, but he was at peace, both with himself and those around him. More remarkably, he was filled with an

¹⁴² See 2 Corinthians 12:1-4. Although Paul says ‘A certain Christian man’ it is almost certain he was writing about his own experiences. He dates it to ‘14 years ago’, so if he wrote 2 Corinthians around CE 56, the vision would have occurred while Paul was still in Tarsus.

unaccountable joy. The depression that had gripped him over the previous years was gone.

When the small group of believers encouraged him to speak, he shared nothing which would account for these changes. He had a new decisiveness about him, but he did nothing to provoke the authorities rather he threw himself into the family business with renewed energy.

CHAPTER 7: WITH BARNABAS TO ANTIOCH

CE 42 July

ACTS 11:25-30

One day a Phoenician merchant was choosing new sails for his fleet of ships. He wanted a distinctive design. Saul was listening to him change his mind for the fourth time. Demetrius was fetching bolts of different coloured canvas and having to take them back to get yet another one. Saul looked up as a shadow dimmed the sunlight. There in the doorway stood a large and bearded man. It took a moment for Saul to think who the visitor could be. Then with joyous incredulity he exclaimed, “Barnabas!”¹⁴³

Barnabas grinned and the two hugged and thumped each other on the back. Demetrius had never seen Saul so animated. The merchant coughed and said, “I’ll take the red canvas with the black and white design.”

But Saul was not listening. Demetrius saw that Saul had lost all interest in the order and quietly took over while Saul took the stranger through the door that led from the workshops into the household courtyard. He sent a maid to bring wine and something to eat.

They sat down under the tree in the courtyard and Saul turned and asked, “What brought you here?”

Barnabas said shortly, “You!”

Saul echoed in surprise, “Me?”

“Yes, my friend, I have been all over Tarsus looking for one ‘Saul, son of Jonathon.’ It was only when I thought to add ‘tentmaker’ I got some directions!”

Suddenly the reaction of seeing this old friend from the past filled Saul’s eyes with tears. “Can it be that the Lord has heard my prayers and has a job for me to do?”

Barnabas gave a laugh, “You have guessed right.” He was just about to embark on an account of what brought him in search of Saul, when Martha came down from Jonathon’s room.

Saul rose and said, “Mother, I want you to meet a good friend of mine from Jerusalem. This is Joseph of Cyprus, known to everyone as Barnabas.”

His mother smiled and translated, “One-who-encourages, I am pleased to meet a good friend of Saul’s. He has been longing for someone to call him back to the Lord’s service.”

¹⁴³ Barnabas: Finds Saul in Tarsus CE 42 – Acts 11:25

Saul and Barnabas both looked at the old lady in surprise. She smiled at Saul and said, “Don’t think I have not seen how you have been chafed by the harness you wear. I have told your father you would not stay here for ever. You are a teacher, not a business man. Now I will tell Sebastian there will be an extra visitor for supper and to get the guest’s room ready. You will want to talk in peace,” with that she left them and went across the courtyard to the kitchen, before returning upstairs.

The two friends looked at each other for a long moment and then Barnabas said, “She is right you know. I have come because we need you.” Then Barnabas told him all that had happened since Saul left Jerusalem almost ten years before.

“You know how the brethren were scattered after Stephen’s death. Brothers went to Cyrene, Phoenicia and Antioch. Most of us preached the good news to our local synagogues, but those who came to Antioch proclaimed the message to the Greeks and the Greek-speaking Gentiles there. The power of the Lord came upon these people and a great number have believed and turned to the Lord. When news of these Gentile believers reached the brethren in Jerusalem, there was great consternation and I was sent to find out what was going on.”

Saul’s eyes were alight, “And what did you find?”

“I found that God had blessed these Gentile believers, so I encouraged them to be faithful and true to the Lord with all their hearts. But I could see they needed teaching. Also, I know there will be much opposition from some of the brethren in Jerusalem. As I prayed for guidance —” He broke off and grinned at Saul, “I suddenly saw you and heard you asking Simon Peter how God planned to bring all people under his rule.”

Barnabas fell silent. Saul took a great shuddering breath. The shut door was opening at last.

Barnabas asked, “Have you had any more ideas since I last saw you?”

Saul shook himself, “No, not really, but I am ready and willing to be of any service to which the Lord may call me.”

Suddenly Barnabas was deadly serious, “You know the implications if this issue is not resolved? The robe of Jesus will be rent in two. There are those who hold that all must come into the Covenant of Abraham before they can come into the baptism of Jesus, and those who testify that the Holy Spirit has fallen on Gentiles in exactly the same manner as it fell on the Lord’s disciples at the beginning.”

Saul nodded. He knew only too well the implications of this issue. He himself had seen how bitterly Greek converts fought against any relaxing of the Law which demanded circumcision and how the conservatives of his own people resisted any innovative teaching. Then he remembered the time he

was caught up to heaven. He saw the love of God pouring down on the whole of his creation, to be renewed and set free from the decay of death and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. How could he find words for the transforming power of God through Jesus? He knew without any doubt that the Old Covenant had given way to the New Life in Jesus.

He looked at Barnabas and said, “The Lord God will show us how his plan will be brought into being.”

The sun had gone and it was time for the evening meal. Edna came through from the workshop and stopped short when she saw the visitor.

Saul introduced them and said, “My sister is a better business person than I am.”

Edna grunted and said sourly, “I saw you just left that Phoenician merchant in the middle of his order. Demetruis tells me he has ordered six sails, and they are to be ready when he returns.”

Saul looked guilty and said, “I’m sure Demetruis served him well.”

Three days later Saul left with Barnabas.¹⁴⁴ Saul knew Edna was glad to see him go. His father gave him his grumbling blessing and ten silver coins. His mother blessed him with tears streaming down her face and pressed two gold coins in his hand.

They found a ship sailing south and when they had found a quiet place away from the other passengers Saul found himself wondering about his companion, and finally asked, “Were you a disciple of the Lord Jesus when he preached in Jerusalem?”

“No, I had just arrived from Cyprus. Our family are Levites and my father’s brother had become ill and was too weak to undertake the strenuous duties over the festivals. His son, John Mark, was too young, and so they sent for me to take over the Temple duties on behalf of the family. It was at the Passover twelve years ago that I heard Jesus speak in the Temple. I was deeply impressed at this uneducated Galilean’s spiritual perceptions. However, when he turned over the tables of the money-changers and drove out the cattle and sheep, I was appalled at the havoc he created.”

Saul remarked, “Yes, I remember the row that caused.”

Barnabas chuckled reminiscently, “Of course Annas was furious. His family controls the trade in sacrifices and as you know most of his family have stalls on the Mount of Olives. Over the big festivals, Annas sees to it his family have prime places in the Court of Gentiles. They lost a lot of revenue that year, I can tell you!”

“And Jesus lost a lot of public sympathy from the leading Pharisees, they felt he had no right to upset the traders who render a service to those coming

¹⁴⁴ Saul: Barnabas takes him to Antioch – Acts 11:25

to sacrifice at the Temple” Saul remarked sourly as he glanced at Barnabas. “So when did you become a disciple?”

Barnabas smiled down at Saul, “It was that action which finally convinced me he was who people claimed him to be!”

Saul was shocked, “How could such an unlawful act have convinced you?”

“You know the scandals surrounding the money-changers and the exorbitant rates of exchange they demand, especially at festival times. This however is not the only thing wrong with the Temple administration as you must know. There is a great deal of dissatisfaction amongst the Levites concerning the corrupt practices of the priests.”

Saul looked dubiously at Barnabas. He knew all who worked in the Temple were pledged to secrecy concerning its financial affairs, but Barnabas was not about to break any oaths concerning his Temple service.

What he now said was common knowledge, “You know that the tithes set aside for Levites as mentioned in the Torah are not the same as those designated for the priests, yet the priests, who have vastly greater offerings reserved for them, also claim a portion of the Levitical tithes on the premise that they too are descended from Levi, since Aaron was Levi’s grandson.; Some of their number even altered the text in Nehemiah where they have added a phrase asserting their rights. We have fought this extension of the priests, but they continue to take what is not theirs.”^{145,146}

Barnabas paused and continued slowly, “It was when the Lord came to purify the Temple and proclaimed, ‘My Temple will be called a house of prayer, but you have made it into a hide-out for thieves.’ I could see he cared deeply for the inner truth of things. The outward sacrifices were worthless if they involved lying and cheating and, yes, stealing by the very people set aside for the service of God in his holy Temple.”

He looked at Saul, “That day made me determined to pay more attention to his teaching. Sadly, I was too late. He came for the Passover meal to my uncle’s house and later that same evening he was arrested.”

“So how did you come to serve the Lord?” Saul asked after a pause.

Barnabas spoke softly, “When Jesus was crucified, I was convinced it was the end of him. His followers were all scattered and in hiding. We were amongst the first to hear that the body of Jesus was missing from the grave, because my aunt Mary was one of those who went to finish the burial rites after the Sabbath. Of course like many others, we assumed his disciples had

¹⁴⁵ *Nehemiah 10:38a*

¹⁴⁶ *Numbers 18:21*

stolen his body. My aunt Mary was convinced we were wrong. Then Peter and the others left for Galilee and everything seemed to be over.”

Saul was engrossed by this account. He had been in Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion and remembered the subsequent wild rumours of Jesus’s resurrection, but he had not heard this side of the story.

Barnabas went on, “It was some time later the eleven returned¹⁴⁷. I have never seen such a change as I saw in Simon Peter. He had left Jerusalem, broken and in despair. He returned at peace, both with himself and the other brethren. In fact his relationship to them had changed. Simon’s brother, Andrew had always been the spokesman and John was a fiery hothead, but now they all looked to Simon for strength and leadership.”

“When did you recognize Jesus as the Holy One of God?”

Barnabas did not immediately reply. He thought back to that incredible morning when all the believers were gathered in Mary’s house.

“It was Pentecost and the brethren had once more gathered in Mary’s upper room.¹⁴⁸ I had been out and Mary told me about the events later, however, as I came home I could see an excited crowd of people milling around in the street. Then I saw Peter, James, John, Thomas, in fact all of them talking and shouting excitedly. At first I thought they were drunk, as did many of the rest of the crowd, yet the amazing thing was they were speaking in the languages of the people in the crowd – men and women from Parthia, Media, Cappadocia, Pontus even Egypt and a lot more places as well. The whole crowd was threatening to get out of hand. Suddenly Peter jumped on a stone where everyone could see and hear him.”

Barnabas smiled at Saul, “I was utterly astounded at what he said. I had known Simon Peter as a big bluff man, who found it difficult to express himself. He had practically no education, yet here he was speaking with power and authority. Somehow his Galilean accent gave added power to the message he proclaimed. He preached as one inspired, giving proofs from the scriptures that Jesus was the One that God had promised to our ancestors. When he had finished the crowd asked, ‘What must we do, brothers?’ Peter then said, ‘Each of you must turn away from his sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven; and you will receive God’s gift, the Holy Spirit. For God’s promise was made to you and your children, and to all who are far away – all whom the Lord our God calls to himself.’”¹⁴⁹

Saul asked softly, “And then what happened.”

¹⁴⁷ John 21:1-19

¹⁴⁸ Pentecost: The coming of the Holy Spirit – Acts 2:11

¹⁴⁹ Acts 2:1-40

Barnabas turned to Saul, “The crowd was divided in its response to Simon Peter’s appeal. Then he said something that reached right into my own heart, ‘Save yourself from the punishment coming on this wicked people!’ And I knew I had to break from the sterile worship of the Temple and accept that the Lord Jesus indeed had the answer for me. I didn’t know what he meant about the ‘Holy Spirit’, but along with about three thousand other people, I was baptized that day and received that most precious gift of God’s own Spirit. I did not need anyone to tell me that Jesus was alive, because I knew he lived in me!”

Saul’s heart was filled with renewed wonder because that was exactly how it had been for him. The dead Nazarene leader had suddenly become the Living Messiah perceived and known right to the depths of his being.

The next day their ship sailed round a point and turned north towards the harbour of Seleucia. Mount Casius towered over the harbour which was concentrated at the foot of the mountain, where huge caverns had been excavated for storerooms and warehouses. It was an inconvenient place because the town itself was perched on top of the mountain.

Their ship slowly moved towards an empty berth, with the sailors rowing between the crush of other vessels. It was late in the day when it finally tied up. The hills were stony and grey in the heat of summer. Saul and Barnabas had to wait before they could disembark, and then pushed their way through the slaves taking off cargo and merchants watching anxiously to see nothing was damaged.

Barnabas took Saul up the hill to an acquaintance who gladly gave them a place to wash off the grime of the voyage and a place to sleep. They could then start in the cool of the early morning to walk to Antioch.¹⁵⁰

Early the next day they joined the crowd making for the third biggest city of the empire. The foot travellers were hustled off the road by Roman soldiers clearing a passage for a Senator being driven in his chariot. His driver struggled to control two high-spirited bay horses. In the crush, Saul was grateful for Barnabas’s bulk. By the time they had climbed still further and the sea had disappeared from view, the day had become hot. They stopped about midday to eat some bread they had with them and drink from a stream. Barnabas was wanting to press on, but he noticed Saul was tired and suggested they rest for a while through the heat of the day. Thankfully Saul agreed and he fell asleep in the shade of the tree under which they were resting.

Presently he woke refreshed and the two friends then made good time in spite of the heat. It was late afternoon when they topped the last rise and Saul

¹⁵⁰ 32 kilometres inland

saw lying before him the fabled city of Antioch in Syria rivalling even Rome and Alexandria in the beauty of its public buildings and the wealth of its inhabitants.

Paul pointed to a huge head carved on Mount Silpius which towered over the city. Barnabas explained it had been done on the orders of the emperor hoping to avert a plague from the city. This hideous head was crowned with gold. To Saul it seemed a grotesque symbol of death over the vibrantly alive pagan city he saw spread before him.

The crowded road became even more choked with country people leaving to go home after bringing their produce to the city's markets. People going in both directions shoved and pushed their way for the bridge which crossed the Orontes and entered the gates in the south western section of the old city. Again there was a long delay as customs officials took taxes from traders and travellers alike. Finally they passed through the gates.

The richness and luxury of the city impressed Paul, especially when they came to the main street which ran straight through the centre and was lost in the distance¹⁵¹, Barnabas told Saul that Herod the Great had contributed to building part of this magnificent thoroughfare. It was wide and had a central passage for chariots and horses. On either side of this were colonnades for pedestrians. The street was paved with marble and the public buildings on each side spoke of the wealth and luxury in which many citizens lived.

Barnabas was making for the Epiphania district of the city, just below Mount Silpius and its horrible head. They turned off the main thoroughfare and finally came to Singon street, near the Pantheon. Barnabas stopped in front of a small house and knocked. The door was opened by a young Syrian maid, who spoke quaintly accented Greek. She recognized Barnabas and before he could speak she said, "Come in, I will tell my mistress you have returned." She darted off without waiting for an answer.

It was now late, both travellers were hot, dusty and thirsty. In a moment a short, fat woman came bustling from the back. She was dressed in a rather stained linen dress with her hair crawling out in untidy strands from her brightly coloured head covering.

At the sight of Barnabas, her face broke into a smile and she exclaimed, "You're back much sooner than we expected," and then added unnecessarily, "You found him!" Her smile included Saul.

Barnabas said, "This is Mary, wife of Stephen."

Saul greeted her, but she was already shouting through the doorway, "Abbie, Barnabas is here."

¹⁵¹ It was 8 kilometres long

A tall, strongly built woman came through from the back. Her hair was bound up round her head with an embroidered head scarf holding it in place.

Barnabas turned to Saul and said, "My wife, Abigail."

She smiled, "So you are the one Barnabas kept saying would know the answers!"

Barnabas looked embarrassed, Saul laughed, "I'm sure he was talking about someone else."

Mary said, "Come on through to the courtyard and wash, while Abbie and I finish preparing the evening meal."

Barnabas led the way, and although the house was not large, it had a fine mosaic in the courtyard and a small fountain in the middle. Saul stopped in surprise, only the very rich had fountains...

Barnabas saw him looking at it and said, "Here in Antioch every household has running water." He took Saul through to a special washroom, with black and white tiles on the floor.

When they had finished Saul saw the servant had put a low table in the shade under the balcony and stools for the family to sit on. Mary brought a dish of dried apricots and nuts, while the maid brought a jug of water and another of wine. Bronze cups were set on the table and fine red pottery plates. Abigail brought a large platter of chick peas, bread and cheese was also set on the table. Stephen came in and Saul was introduced to him.

While they were eating Barnabas explained there were a number of synagogues in that section of Antioch and the brethren attended the services regularly. When believers first arrived with the account of the Resurrection numbers of Greeks and even Syrians began to come to listen to the teaching concerning Jesus.

"There is a good relationship between the Jewish community and the Gentiles, but it has become a problem for the synagogue authorities to have large numbers of Gentiles attending the services." Saul thought of his own experiences in Tarsus and wondered what made the authorities here different from those in Tarsus.

Barnabas continued, "It was Manaen, who was brought up with Herod Antipas, he offered his house as a meeting place. The brethren meet there on first day evenings to teach and share the fellowship meal."

Saul listened with attention, "Have you had no opposition to the preaching of salvation through Jesus?"

Barnabas replied, "There are conservative congregations who will hear of no new thing, but the whole atmosphere of Antioch is one of live and let live, so most of us have congregated round the synagogue here in Singon street." He paused a moment, "All the same, the local Sanhedrin is alarmed at the

growing number of Gentiles associated with us and we badly need someone who can answer their objections.”

Saul drew a deep breath. He felt his spirit rise in joy at the opening before him. This was what he had been waiting for. He gave silent thanks to God.

Barnabas was watching him. Saul had said little or nothing of his years in Tarsus, but he knew they had been difficult for the little man. He had tried not to show it, but his first sight of Saul had been a shock to him. His legs were more bowed than he remembered and his face was lined with suffering.

Saul caught Barnabas’s eye and smiled. Suddenly the front door burst open and slammed shut. Two young men of about fifteen or sixteen came laughing into the courtyard. The elder was short and plump and Saul could see his mother’s cheerful round face and knew he must be Mary’s son. The other boy was built like a thinner version of Barnabas. They both stopped when they saw Barnabas and Saul sitting in the courtyard.

Then they smiled with pleasure to see Barnabas and came across to greet Saul.

Barnabas looked fondly at them and said, “This noisy one is Mary and Stephen’s son, Junius. And this is our little Joseph, who seems set to show he can outgrow me!” Joseph laughed at his father.

“Where have you two been?” Barnabas asked.

Junius answered, “Oh, a crowd of us went to the hippodrome to see the blue and green teams exercising their horses.” His eyes were filled with excitement. “A new team arrived yesterday from Rome. They must be the best.”

Barnabas said quietly, “You know we do not favour you hanging around the hippodrome. There are many bad characters.”

Joseph said, “Oh, father, we only watch. No one takes any notice of us.”

“Well,” replied his father. “Go along now and get your evening meal. I trust your good sense, but be careful.”

They raced across the courtyard to go and wash, leaving Barnabas smiling. “I well remember longing to see the wrestling matches when I was a boy and how my father worried I would come to a bad end!”

The following Sabbath brought Saul into contact with a large mixed congregation of Jews, proselytes and ‘God-fearers’. This last group included a significant number of Greeks and even Syrians, who only came to hear more about Jesus.

These people, both men and women, found that the materialism of Antiochian society and its pursuit of every kind of pleasure had left them hungry for something more stable and substantial. The Jewish certainty of an Almighty God, One and indivisible: creator: judge and king, who had given

a strict code of laws and a regime which determined every aspect of life; was attractive and meaningful. However, the liabilities which total commitment to the Law in a Greek educational and cultural system, made many waver between two incompatible value systems.

Saul himself, brought up in the liberal atmosphere of Tarsus, had experienced some of the attraction of the inquisitive Greek intellect, but had rejected it totally when he embraced the strictest branch of the pharisees. Now he had to re-examine the whole problem in the light of the Gospel of Jesus.

Barnabas had warned Saul that he would be asked to address the congregation and he was waiting nervously for the moment he would be invited to speak.¹⁵²

When the time came, he rose and stood in front of the Ark. Waiting a few moments he raised his hand and began, "My brothers, both you who are Jews by birth and those called 'Gentile sinners'. I bring to all a message of salvation which has been given to us through Jesus the Christ."

There was a stir amongst his listeners.

"Consider the experience of Abraham, the scripture says, 'he believed God, and because of his faith, God accepted him as righteous.' It was not because Abraham kept the Law, but because of his faith in the promise of God." Saul worked through his teaching on Abraham's relationship with God and the promises God made to him because of his faith.

There was a sort of collective sigh as Saul finished his argument and came out at the end. He knew it was time to conclude his sermon.

"Those who believe that Jesus is the Christ are promised the new covenant which consists not of a written law but of the Spirit. The Spirit gives us life and he must control our lives."

Saul stopped. There was so much more he wanted to say, but there would be time later. He walked down the steps and returned to his seat next to Barnabas, who reached out and hugged him warmly.

The service was concluded and as the congregation spilled out into the street there was a rush of people round Saul. The overwhelming desire expressed by everyone was to hear more. Barnabas used his height and the power of his considerable bass voice to call for silence.

Then he used it again to say, "I take it you all wish to have our brother Saul preach some more?"

There was a united shout of "Yes!"

¹⁵² Saul: Begins teaching in Antioch – Acts 11:25

“I would suggest those who want to, should gather tomorrow at brother Manean’s home.” He looked across to where Manean was standing with his friends and received a nod.

Saul’s address had received widespread publicity amongst the Jewish community and to the surprise of Barnabas, they received an invitation to address the most conservative of the synagogues the following Sabbath. In the weeks that followed more and more people flocked to hear Barnabas and Saul. Many were baptised and even those Jews who did not accept Jesus as Messiah, did not contend with the believers, most of whom still attended the synagogue services although a growing number of Gentile believers came only to the first day services and fellowship meals.

Among the Greeks who came to listen to Saul, was a young Macedonian couple, Luke¹⁵³ and his wife Agariste. Luke was a doctor in attendance on one of the Roman officers. After coming a few times they both asked for baptism. Luke’s quiet strength was welcomed amongst the believers.

It was almost a year later that a brother called Agabus¹⁵⁴ and three companions arrived from Jerusalem. They came partly to see what had happened to Barnabas and to check how well the Gentiles had been incorporated into the Hebrew community. Barnabas was delighted to discover that Rufus was one of the men travelling with Agabus. He explained to Saul that Rufus’s father, Simon of Cyrene had carried the Lord’s cross on the day of his crucifixion.¹⁵⁵ Saul found Rufus a cheerful young man with a clear appreciation of the problems of living in a Gentile city.

Even so, at first they did not know what to make of the mixed group of Jews and Gentiles who were meeting twice a week. The believers had hired a public hall to accommodate the crowds who came to listen and to seek healing and sometimes to make trouble.

A young Greek, named Titus,¹⁵⁶ who had become a devoted follower of the brethren overheard some rowdies planning to bate ‘those Christians’. Soon everyone who was identified with the group became labelled ‘Christian’. It was not a complimentary epithet, but the brethren took it up and soon it became commonplace for a believer to say to a friend, ‘I am a Christian.’¹⁵⁷

It was obvious to Agabus and his companions that far from becoming members of the Jewish synagogues, the Gentile brethren were not even expected to become converts. The brethren had found it suited everyone to

¹⁵³ Luke: In Syrian Antioch – Tradition. Some scholars think that Luke must have been resident in Antioch since he knew so many of the believers by name. See Acts 13.1

¹⁵⁴ Agabus: In Syrian Antioch – Acts 11:28

¹⁵⁵ Luke 23:26

¹⁵⁶ Titus: In Syrian Antioch – Galatians 2:1

¹⁵⁷ Christian: First used in Syrian Antioch – Acts 11:26

come together for praise and worship and join in the fellowship meal on the first day of the week. The Jewish believers were then free to attend Sabbath worship in the synagogue.

When Agabus and his companions joined the Christian brethren on the first day worship, they were surprised at the devout and spiritual behaviour of the Gentile believers.

The worship began with sacred songs accompanied by musicians on harp, lute and tambourine. On this occasion, Barnabas read a passage from Scripture and gave a teaching on it. There was another period of praise and worship, and then to his own and everyone else's surprise, Agabus stood up and spoke a message of prophecy in an unknown tongue.

The interpretation came through Titus. As Agabus spoke, Titus gave the interpretation, "I declare to you a severe famine will come over all the earth. There will be much suffering and death."¹⁵⁸

There was a shocked silence after this prophecy. No one doubted its truth. One of the brothers who had come with Agabus from Jerusalem said, "Even now in some parts of Judaea the crops have been lighter than usual and I have heard it said the price of wheat in particular is set to rise this season."

Lucius of Cyrene, who had been one of the first to preach in Antioch, said, "Why don't we take a collection and send it to the brethren in Jerusalem?"

A smile of pleasure lightened Barnabas' face. "That, my brothers," he declared "Would greatly please the Lord."

Manean was delegated to organise the collection and to keep careful record of the donations.¹⁵⁹

While the women set up the tables and brought in the food for the communion meal which always ended these First Day periods of worship, the brothers discussed who should send the gift.

They all knew that the leaders in Jerusalem were deeply divided over the large number of Gentiles who had become followers of The Way. Over the year in which Saul had been teaching in Antioch, his testimony that all, Jews and Gentiles alike were saved from sin, not by the works of the Law, but by faith in Jesus Christ, had become more and more convincing to all who heard him.

Agabus said, "The brethren in Jerusalem would expect a report back from brother Barnabas. You were sent here over a year ago to find out what was happening, and my visit is to find out what had become of you!" There was general laughter.

¹⁵⁸ Agabus: Prophecy of Famine – Acts 11:28

¹⁵⁹ Collection: For famine in Judaea – Acts 11:29

Lucius said, “Don’t you think it would be good to send one of the Gentile believers also?”

There was a moment of stunned silence. Manean thought this would really be a provocative action. One of the Greek believers asked, “Might they not want to circumcise such a person?”

The Jews laughed and Saul said, “No one would be circumcised by force.”

Simeon stood up and said, “Let us begin our fellowship meal. Maybe the Holy Spirit will reveal his will for us.”

After the food was served, Simeon took a cup of wine, and said, “We give thanks to thee, our Father, for the Holy Vine of David thy child, which, thou didst make known to us through Jesus thy child; to thee be glory for ever.”

He then handed the cup to the brother next to him, who drank and handed it on, when all had drunk from it. Simeon took the bread and broke it and said, “We give thee thanks, our Father, for the life and knowledge which thou didst make known to us through Jesus thy child. To thee be glory for ever.”¹⁶⁰ The bread was then handed round the seated brothers.

When the meal was finished they sang a hymn of thanksgiving. Usually this would have concluded the evening and everyone would have gone home. But tonight a silence fell on the whole group as they waited for the Holy Spirit to reveal who else might accompany the gift they planned to send to Jerusalem.

Finally Barnabas spoke, “It feels right to me that ¹⁶¹Saul and I should take this offering to the brothers in Jerusalem and I have a strong sense that we should take young Titus with us.”^{162,163}

For a moment no one spoke. Titus was a very young man, of good family, but surely there were more impressive Greek members whose presence would carry more weight? Then one of the brothers who had accompanied Agabus, smiled at Titus and said, “That feels good to me.”

At that there was general agreement and everyone rejoiced as they felt united in the Lord Jesus. Spontaneously they broke into another hymn of praise.

Later, as Barnabas and Saul walked home, Barnabas said, “I think we should try to be in Jerusalem in time for the Passover.” Saul agreed. It would give them the winter months to complete the collection and they could take a ship sailing in early spring.

¹⁶⁰ This version of the Eucharist is from *The Didache IX.1*

¹⁶¹ Saul: Takes collection to Jerusalem – Acts 11:30

¹⁶² Barnabas: Takes collection to Jerusalem – Acts 11:30

¹⁶³ Titus: To Jerusalem with Saul – Galatians 2:1

CHAPTER 8: THE FAMINE- VISIT TO JERUSALEM

CE 44

Acts 11:27 to Acts 12:25

Galatians 2:1

Barnabas, Saul and Titus joined the great crowd of pilgrims converging on Jerusalem for Passover.¹⁶⁴ As they made their way up from Caesarea, they could see the country was dry and the crops were poor.

This prompted Titus to exclaim, “How wonderful are the ways of the Lord. He has sent us with help for our brethren in Jerusalem even before the poor crops have been gathered and the people have to go hungry.” In their different ways, Saul and Barnabas had also been contemplating this amazing fact.

The nearer they came to Jerusalem the bigger the crowds grew . It was 10th day of Nisan in the Jewish calendar, four days before the Passover itself.

Barnabas took his companions straight to the house of his cousin John Mark. When the maid opened the door, she burst into tears and leaving the door open, she ran to call her mistress. Surprised, Barnabas ushered them into the entrance hall and closed the door.

Shortly Mark’s mother, Mary, came quickly from the courtyard at the back. She embraced Barnabas and also with tears in her eyes, exclaimed, “Oh, Joseph, God is good to have sent you at this time.”

“Whatever is wrong?” Asked Barnabas.

His question provoked more tears, but finally Mary said, “They killed James the son of Zebedee, and we buried him yesterday.”

“They’ve killed James! Whatever for?” Barnabas was deeply shocked.

“It was so sudden, we had no idea anything was wrong.” Mary was overcome by sobs.

“There must have been a charge. He could not have been executed without a trial.” Saul spoke for the first time.

“They just took him away, there was no charge. Nothing.”

“But how did he die, if they arrested him and there was no charge?” Barnabas asked.

Mary’s voice broke, “It has been put about that brother James resisted arrest and one of the soldiers ran him through with a sword.”¹⁶⁵ Of course it

¹⁶⁴ Passover: CE 44 – Galatians 2:1

¹⁶⁵ James brother of John: Killed by Herod – Acts 12:2

was a lie. When the soldiers came he went with them without argument and it was only later we heard he was dead. We think he was killed in the guard room at Herod's palace. The brethren who fetched his body for burial found it had a single sword thrust."

Mary was weeping softly. The men were silent. Finally she said, "John Mark heard talk in the Temple that the king is wanting to strengthen his standing with the priestly party."

Barnabas looked dismayed, "But why pick on the brethren?"

Mary shook her head in distress, "We don't know. Things have been going so well." The tears flowed and she cried quietly while the men looked at one another in dismay.

Saul felt something of the horror that must have filled the brethren in Jerusalem when he had hunted down Jesus's followers fourteen years before. The people were innocent of any crime. In fact the reverse, they were filled with love and compassion for one another and lived in harmony with their neighbours.

Barnabas said, "We are here with a gift for the brethren in Jerusalem and we wanted to celebrate Passover with them."

Mary wiped her eyes and said, "Truly the Lord has blessed us that you could be with us at this time. With James' death, we have hardly thought of Passover, although Simon of Cyrene will be bringing home a lamb today."

Mary saw Barnabas's companions and said, "Forgive me, we are all deeply dismayed. I am forgetting myself." She then turned and called, "Rhodda, send Cushi with water for our guests to wash."

When they finished Barnabas led a very subdued party upstairs to a small family room where cushions were scattered for sitting. Shortly after they were settled, Rhodda came in with two low tables and Mary brought jugs of wine and water, another maid brought bread and soft cheese.

Mary poured the wine while the men helped themselves to the food. Barnabas asked, "Are you not eating with us, my sister?"

Mary's eyes filled with tears and she shook her head.

Barnabas said the blessing and turned to Mary, "It seems the harvest will be poor this year. How is the water supply in Jerusalem?"

Mary wiped her eyes, "The Temple is well-supplied as you know, but the household cisterns are low, and if we do not have rain soon, we are afraid there will be no water by the end of summer."

"Are Simon and his family your only visitors this year?" Barnabas asked.

Mary sighed, "No, we are already sleeping more than usual. Apart from Simon of Cyrene and his wife, Tamar..." She broke off, "Did you see Rufus? Tamar told me he was in Antioch."

Saul smiled, “Yes, he has done good work amongst the Gentiles, but the reason we are here is because brother Agabus arrived and the Holy Spirit spoke through him to give a prophecy. “

Mary looked surprised.

“Then young Titus here interpreted, and Agabus confirmed there is going to be a severe drought throughout the world and many will starve. So we made a collection amongst the brethren in Antioch and decided to bring it this Passover.”

Mary looked at Titus almost as if she had not noticed him before. He was dressed as a young Greek man of fashion. Her emotion which had overcome her when she had seen Barnabas, had prevented her seeing the significance of his young companion. A question came into her face, but politeness prevented her speaking it. The two men read her thought and smiled reassuringly at Titus who was looking uncomfortable.

Barnabas came to her rescue, “He is a believer and was baptised with many others in Antioch. No,” he added, “None of them were circumcised and we have had confirmation from the Holy Spirit and the scriptures that this is God’s plan for his people.”

Mary looked troubled, “There are many amongst the brethren, especially those who teach and work in the Temple, who are insisting that Gentile believers must be circumcised. They sent you to Antioch, Joseph, to find out whether the rumour was true that there were many Gentiles joining the brethren and not being circumcised.”

“It is true we were worried by these reports and yes, I was chosen to check them out. When I arrived in Antioch I could see the Lord’s power was with them. I remembered brother Simon Peter’s experience with the household of Captain Cornelius in Caesarea and how all the brethren accepted his report when he returned to Jerusalem, even those who were critical. However, I knew we needed someone to interpret the Law and give sound teaching, and I remembered brother Saul here and his questioning of Simon Peter when he visited us at that time. I knew he had returned to Tarsus, so I went there to look for him and brought him back to Antioch.”

He smiled at Mary, “Brother Saul can give convincing proof from the Torah and the prophets that Jesus has brought us the New Covenant, sealed with his own blood and confirmed by the Holy Spirit of God. He has called us to be a New People, and the Lord himself said, ‘You do not put new wine into old bottles.’”

Mary said, “Praise be to Him who knows all and sees all. How weak is my faith.” She got up and said, “I must prepare the evening meal for our guests.”

Barnabas rose as well, “But you have not told us who all are staying here.”

Mary gave him a smile, and Saul realised that normally she was of bright and humorous disposition. “You will soon find out dear nephew,” and left the room.

It was now almost the ninth hour.¹⁶⁶ Barnabas and Saul decided there was time to take Titus up to the Temple to see the beginning of the preparation for Passover. When they left the house, they could hear the trumpets sounding from the Temple telling the city it was the time of evening sacrifice.

The street was full of people and conversation was difficult, but Barnabas explained to Titus that every day in the morning and afternoon a lamb in its first year was sacrificed and burnt on the altar as an offering. On the Sabbath this offering is increased to two lambs each in the morning and afternoon.

After the broad streets of Antioch, Titus noted the narrow streets which rose up in wide steps towards the Temple mount. This morning when they had approached the city from the plains, the Temple had seemed to float above the city, glistening white in the sun which broke through the clouds as if to enhance the mystical wonder of this Temple dedicated to the great unseen God of the Jews, but now the walls above them seemed golden in the late afternoon sun.

The crowds that surrounded him seemed much like the festival crowds in Antioch, except.... there was a difference. There was obviously a great deal of commercial enterprise involved in the festival, but the drunken boisterousness with the blatant sexuality of the women associated with the rites of Daphne at Antioch was missing. The women were modest, all wore head-coverings and walked with downcast eyes. The men were sober and intent on their business. There were many beggars especially on the steps of the Temple, blind, crippled men and poor hungry children. Titus noted that most pilgrims gave them coins, even Barnabas and Saul.

Saul said, “It is considered a particular blessing to give to the poor.

They came to the steps on the south side of the Temple complex. The crowds thickened and the three companions had difficulty keeping together.

Levite guards stood at the gates, one of whom recognized Barnabas and greeted him. The gates were huge and opened into cloisters, with three rows of enormous pillars, so thick that Barnabas, Saul and Titus would only just have been able to join hands around each one. They towered up and Titus saw they had finely carved Corinthian capitals.¹⁶⁷ He stood gaping. The magnificence and fine workmanship amazed him. Saul and Barnabas smiled

¹⁶⁶ 3 p.m.

¹⁶⁷ For reference see Ground plan Page 2 of Good News Bible: also the International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia Vol 6.45 for plan of Jerusalem and Temple: and Vol 11.1 for ground plan and side projection of Temple: also Josephus's description chapter 5.10ff

at each other and let him gaze his fill. The cloisters stretched over a hundred paces in each direction. While he stood and looked something struck him.

His surprise made him exclaim, "But there are no statues!"

Both Barnabas and Saul looked scandalised, "Surely you know the scripture which says, 'Do not make for yourselves images of anything in heaven or on earth or in the water under the earth. Do not bow down to any idol or worship it, because I am the Lord your God and I tolerate no rivals.'¹⁶⁸" Saul declared.

Titus nodded, but could not refrain from saying, "But there is nothing to show what your God is like."

In a gentler tone Barnabas said, "Because, my son, he is unknowable and cannot be comprehended by such imperfect creatures as ourselves. We can only worship and give him thanks as our Creator and the source of all life, blessed be his name for ever. How can the pot know the potter?" He added as an afterthought.

Titus looked up and saw a carved wooden ceiling. Everything was done with the finest materials and meticulous attention to detail, even if you could not see it properly, thought Titus. He began to understand the enormous difference between the Greek concept of heaven and its occupants and the Jewish unknowable God.

They walked between the rows of pillars and Titus saw there were 3 pavements. The middle one was wider than the two on each side. Everything was finished with finely polished stone.

They pushed through the crowds into the open courtyard, Titus saw there were cloisters running down the length of the other walls. Under the shelter of the cloisters were tables and stools belonging to the money-changers. Barnabas explained pagan money, as he called it, was not acceptable either for the purchase of animals for sacrifice, nor for monetary gifts to the Temple, so foreign coins had to be changed into local currency

Saul and Barnabas joined a queue round one of the tables. Titus stood looking around him at the busy scene. There were raised voices as customers disputed the exchange rate they were charged. The bleating of the lambs in the holding pens vied with the voices of the teachers raised to reach the people gathered round to listen. The sale of lambs was brisk and Titus noticed more animals being driven in through a gate in the eastern wall. Then there were cages stacked full of doves, which the poorer people would buy for various sacrifices. The whole courtyard was filled with noise, bustle and colour.

Barnabas and Saul finished their transactions and joined Titus to stroll towards the next courtyard. Barnabas told Titus that the Temple had been

¹⁶⁸ Exodus 20:4

started by Herod in the eighteenth year of his reign. It took forty years to complete, and even now work was still being done. They paused to let a string of donkeys loaded with wood to cross the courtyard into a gate near the inner courtyard .

When they came to a balustrade the three men stopped. Barnabas pointed to a notice which forbade Gentiles proceeding further. Titus read the inscription which said in Greek, “No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.”¹⁶⁹

Titus looked in surprise at Saul, who nodded and said, “Yes, we Jews allow only the faithful and ritually pure to enter the temple area. Through that gate, women may accompany their husbands, provided they are not menstruating and have been purified from childbirth.”

He pointed up the steps and through the open gate it was possible to see yet another wall surrounding the temple itself. Saul continued, “Inside the Court of Women is another gate leading into the inner courtyard where the altars for sacrifice stand before the temple itself. Only ritually pure men may enter here. Within this courtyard of Israel, as it is called stands the temple itself. Only priests may enter its sanctuary to perform their duties, which include daily incense burning and weekly changing of the special loaves dedicated to the Almighty. Only the High Priest may enter the Holy of Holies which is screened by a curtain, and he only enters once a year on the Day of Atonement.”

Titus felt a shiver of awe. Each wall seemed like a ring to let through increasingly pure men dedicated to the service of a God no one had ever seen. The Greek festivals were quite different and for the first time he realised how much more there was to the Jewish faith than just a matter of circumcision with a moral and legal code which demanded such high standards from everyone.

Both Saul and Barnabas wanted to enter the Court of Women to put an offering in one of the boxes. Barnabas also hoped to catch a glimpse of John Mark to tell him they were home for Passover. Titus was only too happy to join a group round one of the teachers.

Later the three friends were re-united. Barnabas had not found John Mark, so they joined the growing crowd of people leaving the Temple area. Many men were carrying lambs ready for the Passover Festival, still four days away. It was cheaper to buy the lambs early and feed them, than wait to the last minute and catch the highest prices.

¹⁶⁹ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia Vol II*

They arrived back at Mary's house to meet Simon of Cyrene carrying a good-sized lamb, followed by his wife, Tamar. Simon gave a great shout of pleasure at seeing Barnabas.

He said, "The Lord knew we'd need a large lamb seeing you are here." Barnabas laughed and they all entered Mary's home. It was now late and preparations for the evening meal were well advanced. The smell of fresh barley bread, chopped herbs mixed with other warm smells greeted them.

Mary came through from the kitchen and called for one of the servants to take the lamb and see it fed. The grief that had filled her with James's senseless death was replaced by the pleasure of Barnabas's return and the presence of so many good friends.

She said to Barnabas, "Go upstairs and your question over who else is here will be answered."

Barnabas looked up and gave a great shout of joy, "Mnason and Judith!"

Mary explained to Saul, "Mnason is also from Cyprus and he was an early follower of the Lord Jesus."¹⁷⁰

There was a joyful reunion between the friends. Saul and Titus were introduced. Two young boys of about nine and twelve were looking shyly over the balustrade at the adults below.

Barnabas caught sight of them and asked Judith, "Are those your two boys?"

She nodded and smiled, "It's their first visit to Jerusalem. They feel a bit overwhelmed." Titus thought wryly they were not the only ones. He felt peculiarly excluded from these people in a way he had never experienced in Antioch.

The men went off to wash in preparation for the evening meal taking Titus with them. Tamar and Judith went to help Mary, who protested there were servants enough and she could manage.

The evening meal was a happy affair with everyone talking and catching up on the news. Mnason, who traded in copper and brass-work had set up a stall with the others of his trade in the market square. Business had been brisk and he was regretting he had not brought more stock with him.

Judith chided him, "But you made a handsome profit and have already more than paid for our journey."

He looked at her with mock sternness, "I could have made a lot more, no merchant likes to underestimate his market!"

Barnabas said, "The trouble with you Mnason, is your work is not shoddy enough." Everyone laughed.

¹⁷⁰ Acts 21:16

The next day was the day before the Sabbath and great preparations were made for all the guests. During the morning Simon Peter accompanied by Anna, arrived back from Caesarea. They had been visiting the brethren there when the news came of James' death. Peter's return brought reassurance to the disciples. He was delighted to welcome Barnabas back.

He greeted Saul and Titus warmly saying, "Brother Titus from Antioch, you are particularly welcome," which gave Titus some much needed reassurance.

John Mark's reaction when he arrived home that evening to find Simon Peter had returned, was of shock and dismay. He was a quiet young man in his late-twenties. His mother's home had been the centre for the believers ever since Jesus had eaten his last Passover there fifteen years before. Mark had been fourteen at the time.

Joseph had heard rumours during the day circulating round the temple that the leaders were determined to put Jesus to death. The chief priests had devised a plan for his secret arrest. Mary had woken John Mark and sent him to follow after the Lord to warn him. It was already late and Mark had simply wrapped his linen sheet around himself and ran out of the house.

John Mark could never forget the fear, disgrace and embarrassment of that night. He had followed Jesus down the Bethany road, across the brook of Kidron and up into the Garden of Gethsemane. At the time it had seemed rather an adventure, stalking his mother's friends through the night without being seen. He was just approaching the garden when he saw a party of men with torches leave the temple. They came quietly down the road. Quickly he hid himself amongst the trees. This was no longer an adventure. He felt desperately afraid. His white sheet was too conspicuous as he cowered in the shadows. He knew he should shout the alarm to Jesus, but he was afraid the Temple police would see him.

By the light of the torches he saw Jesus's friend, Judas from Kerioth, arrive with the crowd and go up to kiss him. This must have been some kind of signal because the men with him grabbed Jesus. Mark saw Simon Peter pull out his sword and give a vicious swing which cut off the ear of one of the High Priest's slaves. To his amazement Mark saw Jesus touch the man's ear and heal him.

He heard Jesus say sadly, "Did you have to come with swords and clubs to capture me as though I were an outlaw? Day after day I was with you teaching in the temple and you did not arrest me," then with a sigh to himself, "But the scriptures must come true."

There were shouts from the crowd as they made to arrest the other disciples and Mark saw them run in all directions. He himself made a dash for the road back to Jerusalem. He would have been all right if he had kept

hidden, but his white sheet and sudden movement caught the light and two men made a grab at him. They caught his sheet and in his terror, Mark left it in their hands and ran away naked.¹⁷¹

Fear lent wings to his feet and soon the crowd was far behind. His next anxiety was how to get home in his naked state without being arrested for shameless behaviour. By this time the hour was late and although the city gates would normally have been shut, the gate from Solomon's porch was still open to let the temple guard return with their captive. Mark found it unguarded and was able to slip through the shadows and make his way out into the sleeping city. He finally arrived home distraught and incoherent.

That night left deep and lasting scars on Mark's spirit. He hid his anxieties as best he could under a quiet and retiring front, but any hint of trouble and his fears would return. He was never comfortable with the attention which was constantly focused on his home. He loved his mother and found comfort in Joseph's presence, but he found Simon Peter's strength and conviction frightening.

James's arrest and sudden death renewed all his worst fears. The years of peace had lulled him into a sense of false security. He had been able to bury his inner conflicts but had never come to terms with them. The arrival of Joseph and Saul with a Greek Gentile had made him deeply angry. As if he did not suffer enough without the presence of an unclean Gentile in his own home. He felt betrayed by Joseph, who knew the importance of maintaining ritual purity.

He had avoided touching Titus because it would have rendered him unfit for temple service over the feast. The joy of his mother in their visitors, especially Mnason, Judith and their boys, who were old friends, was not shared by Mark. And now Simon Peter had to arrive.

This very day he had heard the high priest's steward tell the head of the temple police that the king intended arresting another leader of the troublesome Nazarene sect. Mark's stomach had contracted with fear. No name had been mentioned. It could be any of Jesus's closest associates.

It was small wonder he looked horror-struck when he saw Peter. After the briefest of greetings he burst out, "They are going to arrest another leader of the brethren. I don't know who, but I heard it in the temple today."

Peter looked with love and pity on John Mark. He knew this man had never encountered the Risen Lord. He understood, as did few of the other brethren, the nature of John Mark's fears, but not even he seemed able to reach out to him and bring the Lord's healing and peace.

¹⁷¹ Mark: Flees when Jesus arrested – Mark 14:51

Peter said, “Since the night I ran away and left our Lord, I have longed for a chance to be counted worthy to suffer for him,” then seeing the fear in Mark’s eyes, he added. “Don’t be afraid, we are all in God’s hands.”

The women completed the preparations for the Sabbath and most of the household went to the nearest synagogue, taking Titus along with them.

It was the evening of the next day, when the Sabbath was over that the dreaded pounding came on the door. Barnabas opened it to find Herod’s soldiers outside. They pushed their way into the house and began a systematic search. Mark made an ineffectual protest, which was ignored.

Barnabas went to stand next to Mark because he could see his cousin was terrified. Saul once more felt how dreadful his own arrests of the brethren had been and grieved at the pain he had caused.

The soldiers’ search ended when Simon Peter came out of his room and looked calmly at the intruders. “Are you looking for me?”

The officer of the guard said, “That’s him, take him.”¹⁷²

Saul stepped forward and said, “On what charge is he being arrested?” As answer, he received a spear butt in his stomach and doubled up in agony.

The troop left with Peter in their midst.

When morning arrived Barnabas hurried to the temple to see what he could find out. Saul had wanted to go with him, but common sense prevailed. No one had recognized Saul, but there were many who had been offended by his traitorous behaviour and even though so many years had passed, it was felt by everyone that he would be unwise to attract attention to himself.

At first this argument left him unmoved, since he felt arrest would be a just reward for his earlier actions, especially as it would take attention away from the leadership. Mary finally persuaded him that far from taking the attention of the authorities away from the leadership, it might lose a general persecution on the brethren. At that, Saul conceded he might serve best by remaining unseen.

Barnabas came back later with extremely dismal news. He had found Peter imprisoned in the temple cells. He was chained between two soldiers and there was a guard at the gate. Mary had packed food for Peter and Barnabas had handed it over but he had not been allowed to speak to him. The soldiers were uncommunicative, but Barnabas had later seen an old friend amongst the temple guards who had told him there were rumours that King Agrippa intended to put him on public trial after Passover.

At this there was general dismay. It could only mean one thing. There would be false charges and the crowd would be incited to demand Peter’s death.

¹⁷² Peter: Arrested in CE 44 – Acts 12:6

Anna wept when she heard the news. Mary and Judith comforted her as best they could. Suddenly Mary said, “Go, tell all the brethren. They must come tomorrow night and we will pray for him.”

The crowds that daily flocked to the Temple and the excited preparations for Passover, contrasted with the pain and fear felt by the brethren. It was forbidden to fast over a festival, or they would have fasted and prayed. As it was the preparation in the various homes went on. Visitors had to be fed. The ingredients for the feast had to be purchased and prepared. The last of the previous season’s wheat must be used and the first of the new season’s barley purchased in preparation for the Feast of Unleavened Bread which followed on for the week after Passover.

On the thirteenth day of Nisan, which Saul explained to Titus was the same as the month called Xanthicus by the Greeks and March/April by the Romans, the most important event was the seeking out and destroying of all the leaven in each household. The children especially enjoyed the excitement of looking in every pot to make sure no fermenting dough was hidden. Most mother’s made sure to hide at least one pot at the back of a shelf for some lucky child to discover in triumph. When darkness fell, lamps were lit and the search began.¹⁷³

Tamar’s two boys accompanied Barnabas, who solemnly waited while Nicias and Cimon searched. It was Cimon who found the hidden pot with its fermenting yeast. It would be taken to the Temple the next morning to be burnt on the altar.

The morning of the Day of Preparation dawned clear. The women and servants cleaned the house from top to bottom. All the best raiment was laid out ready. The men would leave in the afternoon for the Temple, taking the lamb for ceremonial slaughter. Nicias and Cimon would accompany their elders to see the wonder of all the pilgrims at this great feast.

After the house was cleaned, the first barley of the new harvest was ground into meal for baking the special unleavened bread.

Anna offered to make the haroseth which symbolized the mortar the Hebrew slaves used in building the Egyptian pyramids.

After a light midday meal, the men changed into their festive dress to accompany Simon of Cyrene, who as the eldest man was carrying the lamb he had purchased. He was followed by Barnabas, Saul, Alexander, Mnason, Titus walked with Nicias and Cimon, who were laughing and excited by their first Passover visit to the Temple. John Mark had left early for the Temple and would only arrive home late that evening in time for the Passover meal.

¹⁷³ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*

Saul, who had been withdrawn and pre-occupied, suddenly became aware of Titus and moved next to him. Titus had been feeling left out and isolated by all the preparations. Everyone but he seemed to know what was happening.

He was particularly grateful when Saul asked, “You’ve heard of the miraculous deliverance of the Children of Israel from slavery to the Egyptians?”

“Yes, I’ve heard it read, but it just seemed a story of old times. I had no idea people attached so much importance to it today.”

“For us Jews, we cannot forget that when Moses led the descendants of Jacob out of slavery, he took an oppressed people and under God’s guidance, turned them into a people dedicated to His service. Everything that happens today is to help us remember that event. For those of us of the New Covenant the event is doubly significant, because Our Lord Jesus made himself like that lamb.”

He paused as Alexander took the lamb from his father as they climbed the steep street to the Temple gates.

“Jesus shed his own blood,” continued Saul, “to seal this New Covenant and deliver us from the bondage of sin.”

The street was packed with other parties climbing to the Temple mount each with their lamb. They found it hard to keep together when they reached the steps leading into the Court of Gentiles. The money-changers had gone, as had the pens for the animals, but there was a crush of people and a babble of sound, punctuated by the bleating of the lambs.

The heat was slightly dissipated by the breeze which blew across the court. Curious stares made Titus feel uncomfortable. Mary had offered him one of Mark’s robes, but he had kept on his Greek tunic. Now he wished he had accepted Mary’s offer so he would not look so conspicuous. His shaven face and short garment contrasted with the long robes and beards of those around him. Levites were controlling the crowds and Titus saw John Mark was also one of those helping keep order.

They were some way from the great Corinthian bronze gates, leading into the Court of Women and they joined the back of the queue. The trumpets sounded the time of the afternoon sacrifice. The crowd surged forward and quietened. They could just hear the instruments of the Levites who were standing on the steps leading up from the Court of Women to the Court of Israel. From where they were standing they could not see into the gate and could not hear the words of the singers.

Saul said, “The Levite singers sing the Hallel during the killing of lambs.”¹⁷⁴

Titus asked, “You said everything that happens today helps you to remember the exodus from Egypt. What is the significance of the searching out and burning of the leaven?”

Saul answered, “You know that Moses ordered the children of Israel to eat only unleavened bread. I think that the children of Israel had learnt to make leavened bread while they were in Egypt and Moses wanted the people purified from all foreign influences. This is why he gave the warning that anyone who did eat leavened bread would no longer be considered one of the Lord’s people. So the act of destroying the old yeast is symbolic of beginning a new life.”¹⁷⁵

Saul continued, “Jesus told us that when we eat the bread of Passover we share in his body, so we need to throw out the old yeast of sin and wickedness and eat the unleavened bread of purity and truth.”¹⁷⁶

Suddenly there was a great forward movement and they could look into the Court of Women. Titus could see a great number of people coming out of the inner court of the Temple and separating into parties. Each party had one man carrying a whole lamb wrapped up in its own skin.

Simon had taken the lamb back from Alexander when they had climbed the steps into the Court of Gentiles. Their party was now nearly at the balustrade, beyond which Titus might not go. More parties carrying lambs had filled up behind them.

Barnabas turned round to Titus and said, “Before the great altar there are two rows of priests, one row holds gold basins and the other silver. The head of each household cuts the throat of his lamb or kid and the blood is drained into a bowl, this is then thrown on the base of the altar. A Levite takes the dead lamb and skins it. The fat and kidneys are removed and burnt on the altar. Since all twenty-four divisions of priests and Levites work today, these activities take little time. When one lot of sacrifices are completed, the parties leave the Court of Israel by the side door. Then the gates of the Court of Women are opened to let the next group in. When the court is filled, the gates are shut until the sacrifices are completed and so it goes on until everyone has slaughtered his own lamb and gone home.”

Simon shifted the lamb onto his other shoulder and said, “When we go up the steps, you will be able to see into the Court of Women and also the choir on the steps leading up to the Court of Israel.”

¹⁷⁴ *Psalms 113-118*

¹⁷⁵ *Exodus 12:5*

¹⁷⁶ *1 Corinthians 5: 7-14*

Titus asked rather nervously, “Won’t people mind if I look inside?”

Barnabas answered, “Not so long as you stay outside the balustrade. After that you can meet us by the water-gate where you see all those other parties coming out.”

Titus felt overwhelmed by the strangeness of the whole ceremony. Here was no light-hearted sacrificing to some sensual god or goddess. The absence of any statues honouring the gods made the whole place seem empty of religious objects, and yet here was a whole people dedicated to their Creator and Law-giver. There was a sense of joy. It was, thought Titus, a family festival. Nicias and Cimon were solemnly part of it all.

The long afternoon wore on. Simon’s party had long since left Titus and made their slow way across the Court of Women. Finally he saw them go up the steps into the Court of Israel. After another wait, he rejoined them when they emerged from the side door. They hurried back to Mary’s house with the lamb ready for roasting.

Once home Simon handed the whole lamb over to the women, who had a pit filled with hot wood coals. A long skewer of pomegranate wood was pushed through the length of the carcass. Olive oil and bitter herbs were rubbed over it. Then they lifted the spit carefully onto the wooden stand and soon the smell of roasting lamb filled the house.

Later that evening the whole household were seated round low tables which had been placed together. Cushions were arranged for the diners to recline on. The tables were laden with many dishes. There were hard boiled eggs with a salt dip. There was Tamar’s salad of bitter herbs, to which she had added some ground horseradish from Mary’s store. Unleavened barley bread and a dish of endive mixed with olives and raisins.

Simon of Cyrene was the Master of the Feast. He looked round at the guests. His own son, Alexander, John Mark and Barnabas, Saul and Titus, Mnason with his two sons, Nicias and Cimon. Cimon was fidgeting with nervousness because as the youngest, he had to ask the key question at the right moment. Then there were the women, Mary, whose warm hospitality made her home a centre for the brethren, her face was flushed and she looked tired from all the preparations. Anna, whose troubled face reminded him of Peter’s likely execution in the next few days. Mnason’s wife, Judith and his own dear wife, Tamar. Briefly he thought of his other son, Rufus, travelling with Agabus and wondered where he would be celebrating Passover.

Mary had lit the lamps earlier and said the prayer. Now Simon said the Grace, “Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe who bringest forth bread from the earth and who createst various kinds of food. Make us rejoice on this Feast of Unleavened Bread.”

During the meal each of the men was assigned a part of the Hallel to read.¹⁷⁷ What was different was the moment Barnabas handed Simon the plate of unleavened barley bread. He took a piece and said, “On the night the Lord Jesus was betrayed, he took a piece of bread, gave thanks to God, broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in memory of me.” Simon broke the bread and the platter was handed round.

Then came the moment for which young Cimon had been both dreading and longing. Nicias whispered to him, “Do you remember the question?” Cimon looked indignant. He would like to have hit his brother, but everyone was looking at him.

Cimon swallowed and began in a voice which gave no sound, so he started again, “Father, why is this night different from other nights?”

Mnason then told the story of the miraculous deliverance of the Israelites from slavery. Titus listened entranced. The flickering lamps; the food; the kindly faces; and above all the compelling story of God’s mighty power in bringing a subject people to an uncertain freedom so they could be wholly dedicated to His worship and service. He had always been stirred by the great sagas of his own people in the Odyssey and Iliad. He began to realise that the Jews had indeed been given a special place, one which often caused them grief and pain.

The first two cups of wine had been drunk and the meal was almost over. Now Simon said, “This is the cup of redemption which we drink to commemorate God’s promise to the Israelites when he said, ‘I will rescue you and set you free from your slavery to the Egyptians,’ we also remember it was this cup that the Lord Jesus took and said, ‘This is my blood which is poured out for many, my blood which seals God’s covenant. I tell you, I will never again drink this wine until the day I drink the new wine in the Kingdom of God.’”

The cup was handed round the table for all to drink.

Simon then continued, “Brother Joseph here tells me that in refusing to drink the fourth and final cup of the Passover meal, Our Lord was giving us a pledge that redemption would be consummated when he returns in glory to take his people into the Kingdom of God. We will therefore end our meal here, knowing that soon we will be drinking the new wine with Jesus in God’s Kingdom.”

Barnabas’s strong deep voice began the final hymn, “When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion,”¹⁷⁸ The others joined in,

“We were like unto them that dream.

¹⁷⁷ *Psalms 113-118*

¹⁷⁸ *Psalms 26: Jewish Prayer Book p.376*

Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
and our tongue with exaltation.”

The great hymn filled the house with joyful sound and closed with a great shout of joy, “Praise ye the Lord. Amen”

Then Simon said, “Let us say grace.”

The others responded, “Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and for ever.”

Simon said, “With the sanction of those present,”

The others responded, “We will bless our God, him of whose bounty we have partaken.”

Barnabas looked across at Anna’s sad face, “My sister, tomorrow we will gather to pray for our dear brother Simon Peter. In the meantime let us commit him and all believers into the care of our Lord.” The women hugged Anna who was quietly weeping. The rest of the party turned to go to bed, tired and subdued.

CHAPTER 9: PETER'S RELEASE

Spring 44

Acts 11:27 to Acts 12:25 and Gal 2:1

The following evening the brethren began to gather early at Mary's home¹⁷⁹ to pray and intercede for Peter.¹⁸⁰ John Mark had heard through the Temple grape-vine that the king intended to bring Peter out for public trial the next day. There was a deep sense of foreboding amongst those arriving at Mary's house.

John, son of Zebedee arrived with the Lord's mother, Mary. James was not able to be present, nor was Nicodemus, but many of the humbler brethren, who lived and worked in Jerusalem came. Soon the upper room was filled and prayers for Peter were offered. Slowly despair and fear was replaced by a sense of peace. Someone began a hymn and everyone joined in, softly singing.

There was a knock on the door which went unnoticed at first, and then Mary said to Rhoda,¹⁸¹ "Go, see who is knocking at this time."

Rhoda ran downstairs and called through the door, "Who is it?"

A voice she instantly recognized said, "Open the door, it's me."

Rhoda turned and rushed up the stairs calling, "He's here! He's here!"

Mary, very put out, told her to hush, but Barnabas asked, "What is it, girl? Who is here?"

Rhoda caught her breath and said, "It's brother Peter! He's at the door!"

John Mark said angrily, "You are mad. He's chained and guarded in the king's own jail."

His mother said, "Hush a moment."

And they all listened. Sure enough the knocks continued on the outside door. At this, Mary, John Mark and Barnabas hurried down to unbar the door. There, to their amazement stood Simon Peter. He raised his hand for them to be quiet and quickly came into the house.

"You were a long time coming," Peter remarked.

Barnabas looked embarrassed. "We were praying for your deliverance from jail and when Rhoda told us you were at the door, we didn't believe her!"

¹⁷⁹ Mary, mother of John Mark: Prayer meeting Peter's release – Acts 12:12

¹⁸⁰ Peter: Miraculous prison release – Acts 12:7

¹⁸¹ Rhoda: Mary's Maid, John Mark's Mom – Acts 12:13

Peter gave a soft laugh and they all went upstairs to tell the good news to the brethren. Anna, who had heard his voice ran down to greet him. Returning to the upper room Peter motioned them not to make a noise, as his unexpected appearance had prompted people to give exclamations of praise and thanksgiving.

Simon of Cyrene asked, "Has King Agrippa released you after all?"

Peter looked at his friends and said, "No, I think he will be looking for me when he knows I'm no longer attached to my two guards!"

Several people asked, "What do you mean? How did you get out then?" There was a great babble of surprise.

Simon of Cyrene said, "Sit down and tell us what happened. It seems as if there had been a miracle."

Peter laughed, "Indeed you are right!"

Mary motioned Rhoda to fetch something for Peter to eat and drink. Reluctantly she went downstairs to obey.

Peter said, "I must not stay long. This is the first house they will search when they begin to look for me. King Agrippa had made sure I would not escape! He had not only two guards outside the locked gate of my cell, but I was chained between two more. It was dark and I had been sleeping when I felt someone shake my shoulder. My guards were fast asleep. I looked in puzzlement at the one who had woken me, to my surprise it was not one of the guards. Suddenly he spoke softly, 'Hurry! Get up!' As he spoke the chains fell off my hands.

"I thought I must be dreaming, but again he spoke, 'Fasten your belt and put on your sandals,' I did as he said, but still as if it were a dream. Then he said, 'Put your cloak round you and come with me.' Then I thought I was seeing a vision. We passed the guards at the door of my cell and then went through the guard room. They were all asleep. At last we came to the gate leading into the city. As we reached it, it opened of itself and we went out. We walked down the street and when I turned to thank my guide." Peter paused.

"He had gone! There was not a person to be seen up or down the street. Then I knew it was not a dream. The Lord had sent his angel to rescue me from Herod's power."

His listeners expelled their breath. What an unbelievable story! But there was no doubt of its truth, because here was the evidence, Peter himself telling it.

Simon said, "I think you must leave here quickly. When your absence is discovered, King Herod will turn the whole of Jerusalem upside-down to find you."

Peter nodded, "Tell James and the rest of the believers." Then he embraced Anna before following John Mark downstairs. Mark opened the outside door and looked up and down the street. All was quiet. Peter embraced him and quickly left.

In the meantime Mary said, "I think it would be good if everyone went home quickly and quietly. Brother Peter is right, this will be the first house which will be searched." She turned to Barnabas, "Do you think it wise for Brother Saul to be here if the guards come to search?"

Barnabas looked at Saul and then smiled, "It was fourteen years ago that Brother Saul left Jerusalem. No, I don't think anyone will bother with him, even if there is a guard that recognizes him."

The brethren left quietly, filled with happy astonishment at the miraculous events of the evening. After the last visitor had gone the door was barred and Barnabas said a quiet prayer for protection over the household. Then they all went to bed. No one slept much. Each one was listening for the expected pounding on the door. When it finally came in before daybreak, there was a feeling of relief.

Peter's wife, Anna, said quietly, "Let me go. They know me." She went to the door while the rest of the household pretended to be newly woken from sleep.

Six angry and frightened guards pushed past Anna and said roughly, "Where is he? What have you done with him?"

Anna said quietly, "Whom do you seek?"

The captain of the guard snarled, "Don't pretend you don't know, the one called Simon Peter. He escaped last night. Where have you hidden him?"

Calmly she confronted the captain and said, "He is not here."

The captain pushed past her and ordered his men, "Search the house." Roughly and in pairs they searched the house from the roof to the storerooms. They even stuck a spear in the wood-pile. Finally convinced Peter was not to be found there, the captain swung round on Anna and hitting her with the back of his hand demanded, "Where is he hidden?"

Anna's calm dignity gave total conviction to her words, "I do not know. He is not here."

With that the guards left.

The brethren heard later that in spite of a prolonged and intense search, Peter was not found. King Agrippa had the guards questioned under torture, but they could give no explanation as to how a prisoner, shackled to two guards could pass through two locked and guarded gates and escape.¹⁸² The

¹⁸² *Agrippa I: Ordered guards to death – Acts 12:19*

king was certain it must have been with the help of the guards themselves. He had them put to death. Then he left Jerusalem for his palace at Caesarea.¹⁸³

With Herod's departure the brethren relaxed somewhat, Peter came out of hiding and returned to Mary's home. It was only then that a formal presentation of the collection by the believers in Antioch was made.

The brethren in Jerusalem had noted Titus staying at the home of Mary and once Peter was released and the wonder of his deliverance from jail had been talked out, the brethren began to discuss Titus's status. It was all too apparent he was no Jewish convert and his free association with the brethren began to generate dissension.

The arguments divided households and tempers became heated. "Gentiles," went the one side, "must be circumcised and brought into proper ritual purity before they could be considered part of the followers of The Way of the Lord Jesus." The other side had less Law to back up their arguments, but they recalled how the Holy Spirit had fallen on the Roman household of Cornelius in Caesarea all those years ago. No one had suggested they should be circumcised and made ritually pure, and the church in their home had grown over the years...

When Peter heard the heated discussions going around amongst the brethren, he called James, brother to the Lord and John to a meeting at Mary's house.

Saul had met James on his previous visit.¹⁸⁴ They greeted each other warmly. It was, however, his first meeting with John, son of Zebedee.¹⁸⁵ John was now in his mid-thirties. The first thing that struck Saul was John's dark glowing eyes. He said little but he radiated such a spirit of love and peace that without a word he influenced the way people behaved by his presence alone.

Barnabas introduced Titus to them and it was Titus who handed over the bag containing the collection from Antioch. Shyly he told them how brother Agabus had given a prophecy when he visited their group in Antioch, and since he had been speaking in tongues, Titus had found himself giving the interpretation.

Titus said, "Brother Agabus was shown by the Lord that there is to be a severe famine in the whole world in a short while. It was laid on our hearts to make this collection to bring to our brethren here in Jerusalem to tell you of our love and concern for you." He then handed the bag to Peter.

¹⁸³ Agrippa I: *Departs for Caesarea CE 44 – Acts 12:19*

¹⁸⁴ Saul: *James, Peter, John CE 44 – Galatians 2:9*

¹⁸⁵ John, son of Zebedee: *Saul in Jerusalem CE 44 – Galatians 2:9*

The three leaders each embraced him and he was given a message to take back to Antioch. Before Titus could resume his seat, Barnabas said, "Come we must leave our brothers to talk."

They left Saul to talk with the three leaders. He came straight to the point, "I hear that some of your number are insisting that Titus must be circumcised."¹⁸⁶

James nodded. "Yes, it is causing great division amongst the brethren."

Saul demanded with some heat, "What do you think?"

Peter smiled. He saw Saul's anger and remembered his concern for spreading the Good News of salvation throughout the world. He also had heard from Barnabas of Saul's long, dry period in Tarsus waiting for the call to begin his service to the Lord. Barnabas had told him of Saul's masterly teaching in Antioch on the New Covenant.

So he said mildly, "Why don't you tell us what you have been teaching?"

Saul's anger left him. He looked at the three men and suddenly smiled. Peter, who had had more time with Saul was not surprised, but the other two men were amazed at the transformation that came into the little man's face. From the dark fierce predatory look, his face was filled with light and after a moment he began speaking.

"As you may know, this matter has concerned me almost from the beginning, ever since my encounter with the Lord on the road to Damascus, and when Barnabas fetched me from Tarsus just over a year ago, it was to deal with this very problem of Gentiles. In Antioch there are many Gentiles who have been filled with the Holy Spirit and then been baptized. They number almost as many as the Jewish followers of our Lord Jesus."

James was listening attentively.¹⁸⁷ He recognized that Saul combined a great intellectual mind and a rare spiritual perception. He sensed the suffering and discipline this man had already undergone.

James remembered his unbelief in his own brother, someone who had gone off and left him to support the family and carry on the family business. He remembered the profound moment when he perceived that Jesus was indeed far more than his brother after the flesh. He was, James now knew, the Son of God, the Messiah. His own conversion was as sudden as Saul's and he regretted the wasted years he had spent being critical of Jesus and his mission. Yet he knew without any doubt that Jesus had understood and forgiven him.

James's strong practical turn of mind and simple teachings had made him one of the key leaders of the group. Now that John's brother, James was

¹⁸⁶ Titus: Titus's circumcision – Galatians 2:3

¹⁸⁷ James, Brother of Jesus: Leader in Jerusalem CE 44 – Galatians 2:9

executed by Herod, he found himself drawn ever closer to John, and the presence of his own mother in John's home reinforced this sense of a physical as well as spiritual family.

Saul was saying, "I prayed for guidance and received the promise God made to Abraham, that through him God would bless all mankind. Then I saw that God accepted Abraham as righteous, not because he had kept the Law, which only came four hundred and thirty years later, but because he believed in God's promise. I saw that the gift promised to mankind was our Lord Jesus."

James asked, "Then of what purpose is the Law?"

Saul smiled and his eyes twinkled, "I saw that the whole world is under the power of sin, and God in his goodness gave the Law to our people to show them what is wrong. The scripture says, 'Whoever does not always obey everything that is written in the book of the Law is under God's curse,'¹⁸⁸ 'so it is clear that no one is put right with God by means of the Law, because the scripture says, 'Only the person who is put right with God through faith shall live.'¹⁸⁹ But the Law has nothing to do with faith."

His listeners were impressed. Here was the kind of argument the rabbis amongst their number would understand. Saul went on to provide more testimony that it is faith not the works of the Law which saves.

Peter asked, "What about circumcision? Didn't God order Abraham to circumcise his whole household as a sign of the covenant?"

Saul said, "That is true. But we now have a New Covenant in Jesus, the Holy One. This New Covenant was signed by him with his own blood that anyone who believed in him should have everlasting life."

John's quiet face suddenly blazed with joy. He lent forward and grasped Saul's hand saying, "And there you have said it all brother!"

There was a moment of quiet and then Saul said, "I believe that we must preach this gospel of salvation, but I also believe that if we insist that Gentiles are circumcised we are binding them to the Old Covenant and imposing on them the whole burden of the Law."¹⁹⁰ Jesus, himself innocent of sin, became the sacrifice to redeem us once and for all from the sentence of death which awaits us under the Law, for we all fall short, but by his death he has become the means by which people's sins are forgiven through their faith in him."¹⁹¹

Peter nodded his head. He found Saul's arguments a little too fine to follow, but he caught the gist and knew he had the heart of the matter. "Yes, brother Saul, you are right. We too have preached that it is in baptism in the

¹⁸⁸ Deuteronomy 27:26

¹⁸⁹ Habakkuk 2:4

¹⁹⁰ Galatians 2:15

¹⁹¹ Romans 3:25-26

name of Jesus the Messiah that sins are forgiven and I have seen how even before baptism, people receive the Holy Spirit.”

Saul said, “I think in baptism we die to sin, and in a sense we are buried with the Lord. At the same time through baptism we are raised to a new life in Jesus. This is a circumcision, not of the body, but of the spirit.”

The three men listening to him laughed, “You have lost us there,” said James. “I’m sure no one will accept that as a conclusive argument against circumcision.”

Peter nodded his agreement. He was a practical man of action and long discourses bored him. Give him a good parable and he could see the point!

John was quietly glowing. His own thoughts ran deep and when he shared them people did not always understand him. The Jesus he had known and loved had grown over the years into an inextinguishable Light. He recognized that Saul, in spite of his different mind-set and idiom, had met this Light and it shone through him. There was one thing he felt Saul lacked, the quality of love which was the final test of life in the Risen Lord.

John felt he must try to say this, “I rejoice in all you have said this morning, brother. You might have been one of us when we walked with the Lord. There is just one thing we must not forget.” James and Peter both looked at John with surprise. He seldom spoke but they saw he was indeed deeply impressed with Saul and wondered what he had to tell him.

John waited, listening inwardly and then he said, “Our Lord gave us a new commandment. He said, ‘Love one another. As I have loved you; so you must love one another. If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples.’¹⁹²” He smiled at Saul and Saul felt the words burn themselves into his mind. Love was not something he knew much about. Ideas, yes; teaching others, yes; but loving them...?

His eyes filled with tears and he said, “Thank you my brother, you have seen in me a great failing. I shall try to learn what love requires of me.”

John looked intently at him and said, “You will, my brother.”

In the days that followed there was much discussion, but Peter and James took Saul, Barnabas and Titus around the various groups in Jerusalem. Barnabas described the life amongst the mixed groups of Jews and Gentiles in Antioch, and when anyone disputed the fact that Gentiles were not being circumcised, Saul spoke quietly and convincingly of his teaching on the matter. Titus too contributed to a gradual acceptance of the situation by his own demeanour. He was respectful and quiet. He gave his own testimony of salvation in Greek, when asked for it, and Barnabas translated into Aramaic for him.

¹⁹² John 13:34 & 35

Saul sensed that not all were convinced by their arguments, but on the whole he was satisfied with the general acceptance by most of the brethren in Jerusalem.

Then one day sensational news arrived from Caesarea. The reports were garbled, but one thing was clear, Herod was dead!¹⁹³ Some said Herod was dressed for a judgement against the people of Tyre and Sidon and some said he was celebrating a festival. At any rate there was a great crowd of people gathered and the king arrived wearing a robe made wholly of silver. He entered the theatre early in the morning and the rays of the rising sun reflected from the garment in such a way people were dazzled. When he rose to speak, people in different parts of the theatre began to shout, "It's not a man, but a god!"

The king, so the reports went, did nothing to stop this blasphemy and suddenly he was seen to clutch his stomach and bend over in agony. He was assisted from the theatre and carried to the palace. The reports said he lay for five days in great agony while he was eaten by worms!^{194, 195}

The brethren were convinced it was a judgment on him for the death of James, but the general population were totally cast down by his death. He was only fifty-four and had reigned for seven years. Under him the country had known peace and everyone had prospered. Herod's eldest son, also called Agrippa was only a very immature seventeen. He was living with Claudius Caesar in Rome.¹⁹⁶ There was a feeling of great uncertainty for the future.

The pilgrims who had come for Passover and the Feast of Unleaven Bread which followed it, were departing from Jerusalem. Simon, Tamar and Alexander were the first to leave. Simon had business contacts he wanted to make in Alexandria, en route home to Cyrene. Then Mnason and Judith reluctantly took their leave, but not before Mnason had made Barnabas promise to come back to Cyprus, preferably bringing Saul to preach the gospel in his home synagogue. As he explained, "I may be able to work in copper and brass, and I know I love the Lord Jesus, but don't ask me to preach!"

Judith laughed quietly and said, "What nonsense! Your whole life has changed so radically since you have become a follower of The Way, everyone wants to know what happened to you."

He gave an embarrassed smile, "Oh, that's nothing. Anyone can tell that Jesus changes a person's life, but don't ask me to explain how he does it!"

¹⁹³ Agrippa 1: Death in Caesarea in CE 44 – Acts 12:21

¹⁹⁴ Flavius Josephus; Complete Works. Book XIX.Ch VIII,para 2.

¹⁹⁵ Acts 12: 20-23

¹⁹⁶ Flavius Josephus: Complete Works Book XIX. Ch IX Para 1

Their departure made Barnabas tell Mary they too would be leaving shortly. Mary was distressed. Barnabas gave John Mark a sense of security and she was deeply troubled over her son. There was no joy in him. He was torn by what others thought of him. He disliked the presence of Peter and the other believers in his home. He was terrified it would jeopardise his position in the Temple, or worse still, end up with him being arrested as a member of the group.

Mary shared her fears for Mark with Barnabas. Barnabas too had been concerned for his cousin. He could see the young man was unsettled and torn.

Finally Mary said, "Won't you take John Mark back to Antioch with you?"

Barnabas looked thoughtfully at his aunt. "What about his duties in the Temple?"

Mary shook her head. "I don't know. Maybe they will be able to replace him."

"Then," said Barnabas, "What about your income from the tithes. It will stop."

"I have thought of that," she replied, "I could sell this house and move. There would be enough for me to live on."

"But this house is a centre for the brethren." The thought that he would no longer have a home in Jerusalem filled him with sorrow. "And what would brother Peter and Anna do if you sold this place?"

"Oh," said Mary, "Anna is always telling me to move to somewhere smaller."

"Have you spoken to Peter?"

Mary looked shocked, "Of course not. You are the one to make the decision."

Barnabas was concerned, "What about John Mark, does he not have a say?"

"Yes, he has, but I think he would be only too glad to be able to leave the intrigues of the Temple and teach. He is not a great scholar, but he is good with the younger children and perhaps he could get a post at a synagogue." She ended uncertainly.

Barnabas's expression behind his bushy beard revealed his lack of conviction in such a plan. Teachers of young children were not highly thought of in the community and his cousin enjoyed his status as a middle-level administrator in the Temple.

Barnabas said, "Let us pray over this, dear aunt. There are too many things involved to make a quick decision."

Later Barnabas discussed the problem with Saul, who thought a moment and said, "Why not take him back with us to Antioch. No one has to make a decision straight away. When is his next duty in the Temple?"

"Oh," said Barnabas, "Not until Ab in five months time."

Barnabas was pleased at the simple solution. It would give John Mark a break. It did not require Mary to make a decision. When Barnabas invited John Mark to return to Antioch with them, he jumped at the idea.¹⁹⁷

The return of Barnabas, Saul and Titus was an occasion of great spiritual revival amongst the brethren there. John Mark was assumed to be a believer, and their welcome included him. Now he was away from the social and political pressures of Jerusalem, he found reassurance being with such a warm and loving community. Titus introduced him to his own family and friends. John Mark found them cultured and civilised. Not at all part of the hedonist pagan community to which he had assumed all Greeks belonged. The fact that the rest of Titus's family were not believers, and that he, an orthodox Jew sat down to eat with them and did not feel as if he had done anything remarkable, surprised him. He supposed it was because he knew there was no one to point a finger at him and tell him he was now ritually unclean and the thought he would need purification on his return to Jerusalem was not a present problem.

Barnabas watched with pleasure as the shy and insecure Mark began to blossom. He started to laugh and even make his own jokes. The people of Antioch were both famous and notorious for their scurrilous and coarse witticisms. Titus and his non-Christian friends brought a new dimension to Mark's life and he began to thrive.

Barnabas shared with the brethren, Mnason's invitation to visit his old home town of Salamis to preach in the synagogues there. This occasioned a hot debate amongst the brethren. Many felt the time was not right to go off preaching and teaching in other areas. They felt the church in Antioch needed building up. Others, quoting the Lord asked, "In that case how is the Good News to be preached to the ends of the earth?"

This remark fired Saul, who had not taken part in the discussion. "There were some Jews from Pisidian Antioch who also wanted teaching about The Way. People are hungry for the road that leads to salvation. The time is drawing near when our Lord will return and we have done nothing to spread the gospel." Saul had spoken quietly and thoughtfully.

Lucius of Cyrene endorsed Saul's thought. "There are scattered groups of Christians in many synagogues. They need teaching. Their first enthusiasm

¹⁹⁷ John Mark: Visit Syrian Antioch & Saul – Acts 12:25

has been worn away by the rabbis who will have nothing to do with our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ."

Manean said, "I suppose most believers in any synagogue are hardly equipped to take on a rabbi in argument! They need brother Saul to speak for them."

There was laughter, but many felt the truth of what he said. They recognized how powerful were the proofs in which Saul had shown that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Holy One of God.

Luke, the young doctor from Philippi said shyly, "I think many people are ready and waiting for the Gospel to be given to them."

Simعون, called the Black, said, "Perhaps we should pray and see what the Holy Spirit reveals to us."

This felt right to those taking part in the discussion, and after a time of prayer, there was no clear guidance about how to proceed. It was Saul who said, "I think the Holy Spirit is saying 'Wait'." That settled the matter for the time being.

John Mark returned to Jerusalem in the month of Ab, which was July in the Roman calendar. Saul and Barnabas thought that was the last they would see of him, but to their surprise, he returned after the end of the month and resumed his new life in Antioch.

During the winter Barnabas broached a subject with Saul that had been weighing on his mind. He was fairly certain of Saul's reaction, so he decided to prepare the ground. "When we visit Mnason in Cyprus, do you think we should travel any further?"

Saul looked at him in surprise, they had decided to leave the issue of the missionary journey at least until after the winter. "I have not thought in any depth about it, but once we set out, it seems to me we should cover as much ground as possible." He thought quietly, "I think I mentioned the believers from Pisidian Antioch whom I met in Jerusalem. If we leave Cyprus we could cross into Asia and then travel as the Holy Spirit leads us. It might be possible to travel along the Royal Road running through the centre of Asia and then branch down to Tarsus and come back here, overland."

"Have you any idea how long this would take?" Barnabas was alarmed by the scope of Saul's suggestion.

"No, but I don't suppose we could expect to be away for less than two years."

"We would need to raise funds to support our endeavours." Barnabas spoke quietly to himself. The implications of their desire to take the Gospel further began to weigh on him. Who would look after Abigail and the boys?

He shook himself, if this was the Lord's doing, then he would surely provide. He returned to the discussion.

"You realise that many of the people we will meet will be Gentiles and most of the Jews will never have heard of Jesus of Nazareth, don't you think it would be a good plan to have copies made of that little collection of the 'Sayings of Jesus', then we could leave a copy wherever we go?"

Saul looked at him in astonishment, "Whatever would they need that for? Once they receive Baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit, they will receive all they need to teach them the Lord's Way."

Barnabas had guessed this would be Saul's reaction and sighed, "My brother, not everyone is like you. They like to hear what the Lord himself said. You know how many groups here in Antioch now read regularly from the 'Sayings'. It helps build their faith, especially among the children." Unwittingly Barnabas had found the one argument that reached Saul, who checked an angry response and sat quietly for a moment.

To Barnabas's delight he replied, "Well, yes, you have a point there. Maybe it would be right to have some copies made which we could leave. Although they are not scripture, I know how helpful it is to build on teachings that are available to everyone." His voice became decisive, "Yes, you are right, we should consult the brethren about this and get things moving."¹⁹⁸

The idea of making copies of the 'Sayings' appealed to the brethren. It was Manean who suggested they left it to him since he had a skilled scribe in his household.

For various reasons their plans to leave for Cyprus in the spring were delayed.¹⁹⁹ It was the following winter that Barnabas raised the issue as a matter of urgency at one of the meetings of the elders.

After some discussion Lucius said, "Why don't we set aside three days to fast and pray, and then see what the Lord would have us do."

This seemed good to all those present, and the church was informed of their decision. Not everyone fasted for the whole period, but many did and when the brethren came together again to share the First Day meal together, the guidance they received was clear. Both in tongues and interpretation, both in prophecy and reasoned comment, the brethren were united in seeing that it was the will of the Lord that Barnabas and Saul should take the Good News of Salvation to all who would receive it.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Over 200 verses of Matthew and Luke have similar content and diction. The two Gospel's record common teachings in basically the same order. It is postulated that these teachings formed a written source of material labelled by scholars 'Q' (meaning source). See *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia Vol IV Page I*.

¹⁹⁹ *Syrian Antioch: Church prays: Missionary work – Acts 13:2*

²⁰⁰ *Saul and Barnabas: Chosen 1st Missionary trip – Acts 13:2*

Then Manean sprang his surprise, "Last winter when brother Barnabas suggested that copies of the 'Sayings of Jesus' should be left wherever the Gospel is preached, I spoke to my scribe. He suggested that a number of scrolls are not only bulky if they are to each have a cover, but they get ragged with use. He suggested he would prepare a codex, written on parchment and bound in wood."²⁰¹

There was a murmur of surprise amongst his listeners which soon turned to astonishment when he produced a small volume which had pages of script written on both sides and was stitched down one side. Copies were handed round and cries of wonder soon became questions of whether this one or that could order a similar copy. Manean grinned with delight and turned to his steward to take down the names.

Then Simeon said, "My brothers while you exclaim over this new wonder, we need to think of providing money for our brothers' journey. I know our Lord sent his disciples out without any provision for their work, but I don't think our brothers will be able to walk to Cyprus."

There was laughter and acknowledgement of a need for making a collection.

It was at this point that John Mark, who had returned from his second week of Temple in the month of Shebat, realised he would be left alone in Antioch. While he enjoyed the company of Titus, he knew there was no way he wished to be left alone without Joseph's protective presence. Saul was shocked when he suggested he went with them.

Barnabas was also surprised and said cautiously, "We have no idea how long we shall be gone. What happens if your next Temple duty falls due?"

"I should think you would be finished by then."

Barnabas looked doubtful. In the end Mark went with them.²⁰²

²⁰¹ *The Codex as this form of the book was called, came with the rise of Christianity and was called the 'Christian book' in contrast to the pagan roll. Encyclopaedia Britannica Vol 3 page 872 published 1959*

²⁰² *Mark: Joins 1st Missionary Journey – Acts 13:5*

CHAPTER 10: THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY- TO CYPRUS

CE 46 June

Acts 13:4-5

They set sail from Seleucia in June.²⁰³ It was now full summer and the countryside was burnt brown. The three companions were relieved when they found a ship going direct to Cyprus with a mixed cargo. They paid for the cheapest accommodation and shared the deck with a flock of goats and various other travellers like themselves. The crossing was brisk and the sea breeze a balm after the heat from the land.

Early the next morning they saw the long promontory of Karpas coming up on their right and before long Salamis became visible in the bay before them. Passengers began to collect their possessions as the boat drifted slowly towards the harbour. Salamis was full of ships from all over the empire.

Barnabas explained that Cyprus was rich in silver, copper and timber. “My own family dealt in alum, laudanum and various unguents and resins.”

Mark had not realised that his cousin had left behind a thriving enterprise to come and take over the family’s Temple responsibilities. “Who runs the business now?”

“Oh, my cousin took over. He expanded his interests and has been doing very well!” Barnabas guessed that Mark was feeling awkward, a twinkle came into his eye, “Of course he hasn’t done as well as me!”

Mark, who had busied himself with gathering together their belongings looked up in surprise, “Why, cousin, how have you done better than him?”

“I’ve come into Eternal Life through our Lord Jesus Christ!” Barnabas replied.

Such talk embarrassed Mark and he returned to the luggage.

When the ship docked, the three men pushed their way through the crowded dockside, avoiding with difficulty the flock of goats being chased off their boat. They threaded their way through wagons and loaded donkeys and joined the crowd passing through the customs at the entrance to the harbour where each paid the tax levied on visitors.

Finally they passed into the city and Barnabas said, “Come, it is getting dark and Mnason’s house is still some way from here.”

Mark asked, “Do you know where he lives?”

²⁰³ *Seleucia: Saul & Barnabas depart CE46 – Acts 13:4*

“Well,” replied his cousin, “I’ve never been to his house, but he told me where it was, so I don’t expect we will have difficulty in finding it.”

They passed through the poorer section of town and then came to larger houses of the more prosperous merchants. The sun was disappearing behind the mountains and long shadows were filling the city streets when they finally came to a small square with two and three story dwellings surrounding it. Barnabas led them to a house on the far side. They knocked at the door and in a short while a servant opened it.

Barnabas asked, “Is this the home of Mnason the Master Coppersmith?”

The tall servant said gravely, “My master is out and will not be back until late.”

“Is your mistress within?” Asked Barnabas.

The man inclined his head and said, “Will you step inside. Who shall I say wants to see her?”

Barnabas said, equally gravely, “Tell her that Joseph, son of Joshua had come from Antioch with two companions.”

With a courteous bow the man left them standing in the entrance hall, which the men could see was simply furnished. There was a single wooden table exquisitely inlaid with other woods and decorated with brass knobs. Through the archway, they could see a tree in the darkening courtyard. Smells of baking bread and fish came enticingly through the doorway.

Suddenly they heard Judith’s voice coming down the stairs, “Tell Ariana to prepare extra places for supper and make the guest room ready.”

Judith came through the doorway, her eyes shining with pleasure, “Barnabas.” She hugged and kissed him, “And you’ve brought brother Saul with you.” She greeted Saul and then turned to Mark who was standing a little behind. “John Mark! How good to see you.” She embraced him warmly.

“Mnason will be so disappointed he is out tonight. It is the Master Smiths monthly guild meeting and I don’t expect him back until the early hours.”

Barnabas asked, “Is he still hoping that we would visit?”

Judith rolled her eyes, “He never stops wondering when you will arrive. Or in his less optimistic moments, whether you will arrive! But I assured him, if the Lord Jesus wants you here, you will come.” Her eyes sparkled, “And here you are! Come, you will need to wash. I will show you your room and then we will eat.”

The next morning there was no doubt of their welcome when Mnason saw them.²⁰⁴ He embraced them warmly and exclaimed, “At last! I thought you would never come.”

²⁰⁴ *Mnason: Of Cyprus – Acts 21:16*

Barnabas smiled and said, “Well, we had to make sure it was the Lord’s will and then we had to make preparations for the journey, because we are determined to travel throughout the synagogues of Asia Minor bringing the good news.”

Mnason’s face fell, “Does that mean you do not intend to stay long?”

Barnabas replied, “We thought we would preach in the local synagogues and then cross the island to catch a ship from Paphos to Pisidia. You remember there are brethren in Pisidian Antioch and we hope to spend some time there.”

“Oh,” said Mnason relieved, “Then you are not rushing away. I will send word round to the synagogues and let them know you are here.”

Mnason took them out through the courtyard to the workshops at the back. He showed them the furnace where the tin and copper was melted and they saw the whole process of production from the raw ingots of metal to it being poured into moulds and then on to the craftsmen who hammered and decorated it before it was handed to an old man and a young apprentice, who etched beautiful designs using wax and acid to produce the patterns.

Each process required skilled and knowledgeable people. Mnason’s two sons were there. Timothy already showing artistic abilities but still only allowed to work on scrap metal.

When the sun rose higher, the heat from the furnace and forges became intolerable and the men worked with just loincloths under striped tarpaulins where they could, or in the blazing sun if they had to. Mnason’s visitors admired the beauty of the end products of all this labour. An elderly slave was burnishing and polishing the finished pots, lamps, plates, jugs and other items.

Mnason told them he had fifteen slaves and five freemen working for him. He was obviously a much-loved master, having an easy manner with the men. Many of the older men were married and their wives worked under Judith’s direction, cooking and baking for the large household. Children played around the woodpile and babies lay in the shade outside the kitchen.

Barnabas asked, “Have you spoken about Jesus to people here?”

“Let us get something to eat and I will tell you what has been happening.” replied Mnason.”

Mnason led the three men upstairs to a cool room and they made themselves comfortable on low couches. Judith had made cushions from cloth she had bought in Jerusalem two years previously. Three legged bronze tables were placed before the men and the servants brought pita bread, goat’s milk cheese, fruit and wine.

When they were all served, Mnason said humorously in answer to Barnabas's earlier question, "I am not a teacher my friends. I can find no words even to begin to tell others about the Lord Jesus.

"But you have told your household." Barnabas remarked.

Mnason nodded, "It's not difficult to make those who work for you listen, but since none of them are God-fearers or attend the local synagogue services, it is a little difficult for me to explain the significance of the Messiah because they have no idea of the Torah and the prophets."

Saul nodded in understanding and asked, "So what did you tell them?"

Mnason laughed in embarrassment, "I don't go up to Passover every year, but about thirteen years ago, just after Judith and I were married, we went up to celebrate. Judith had never been and the last time I had attended had been with my own father some years before." Mnason paused while he thought back.

"As it happened, that year I heard brother John preaching in the Court of the Gentiles. I was not really much interested. There are plenty of rabbis teaching under the porches, but it was Judith's first visit and she wanted to hear and see everything. So we stopped to listen." Mnason's round face with its fringe of black beard beamed with good humoured friendliness.

"Something caught my attention. There was a considerable crowd around brother John and he had obviously been speaking for some time, but I heard him say, 'Jesus is the Light of the World. Whoever follows him will have the Light of Life and will never walk in darkness.' I can tell you that stopped me in my tracks. I'm not a religious man. I go to synagogue and pay my tithes. I've come to the festivals since I was a boy, but it did not actually mean anything more than I was a member of the Chosen People of God."

Mnason paused. He found he wanted to explain what John's teaching had meant for him. "As I heard these words, it was as if a door to another world opened to me. I felt as if I was only half alive and I had missed out on something wonderful. Judith was puzzled when I pushed to the front of the crowd and demanded to know who he was talking about!"

Saul's eyes lit up. He found these testimonies of men encountering the Risen Lord completely gripping. "As you know John is not a great speaker, but he radiates such love and warmth. I was immediately attracted to him. He asked me, 'Have you never heard of Jesus of Nazareth?'" I shook my head, and said facetiously, "We don't get all the Jerusalem scandals in Salamis."

Mnason looked at his listeners and continued, "John then began at the beginning and told me about Jesus of Nazareth. Judith was so overcome when she heard how he had been put to death, she began to cry. John told us many wonderful things that day about the Lord Jesus, but I remember his words to Judith, 'My friends, the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has

never put it out, neither could the grave hold him.²⁰⁵ He rose and we all have seen him and I can testify that all who believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, will receive everlasting life.”²⁰⁶

Mnason continued. “I knew I wanted to have this kind of life, even if I still did not understand what it really meant, I asked John. ‘So all right I want to believe in this man. How can I know he is alive. Where is he now?’”

“John laughed, ‘Whoever loves his brother, lives in union with Jesus. The command that Jesus has given us is this: whoever loves God must love his brother also.’”²⁰⁷

Mnason broke off, “I can tell you that shook me. What I understood of the Law involved obeying all the rules about ritual cleanliness, and of course paying tithes and giving to charity and helping the poor, but ‘loving my brother’? Anyhow I don’t have a brother! So I said, ‘What do you mean love my brother?’

“John looked at me. I could see the crowd was enjoying my ignorance and probably knew the answer. John said, ‘You don’t have a fraternal brother, you mean?’ I shook my head. Then he said, ‘But I suppose you have neighbours?’ ‘Yes,’ I answered, ‘and a lot of nonsense from them too.’

The crowd loved that and roared with laughter. John smiled as well and said, “God has given us eternal life, and this life has its source in his Son, Jesus the Holy One: whoever has the Son has this life: whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”²⁰⁸

“His words puzzled me. If he thought he had made anything clearer he was mistaken. John saw my face and smiled again, he said, ‘The clear difference between God’s children and the devil’s children is this, anyone who does not do what is right or does not love his brother is not God’s child.’

“I began to see a little of what he was telling me, so I asked, ‘You mean I can be ritually pure and do all that the Law requires me, but if I don’t love people I’m still not saved?’

“John’s face looked as if a light had been kindled inside. It shone with a wonderful kind of joy. He said, ‘Now you are beginning to hear. You will know you have left death and come over into life, because you love your brothers. Whoever does not love is still under the power of death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that a murderer has not got eternal life in him!’²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ John 1:5

²⁰⁶ John 20:31

²⁰⁷ 1 John 4:21

²⁰⁸ 1 John 5:11

²⁰⁹ 1 John 3:14,15

“I thought this was a little hard, but he did not stop there. He went on, ‘This is how we know what love is; Jesus gave his life for us. We too, then ought to give our lives for our brothers!’ Then he got down to practicalities. He said, ‘If a rich person sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against his brother, how can he claim that he loves God? Our love should not be just words and talk.’

“By this time it was late and the crowd was beginning to break up. So I asked, ‘Where can we hear more of this Jesus?’ John asked us where we were staying and I told him at one of the inns. Then he invited us to come with him and that is when we met Barnabas here and John Mark, because he took us to Mary’s house. Judith and Mary liked each other the moment they met. I can tell you that was the most wonderful Passover I had ever experienced.”

Saul was intrigued by the way John taught. He realised that John must have been very close to the Lord Jesus to interpret him in this way. Most of Jesus’s close friends spoke about what he did and the parables he taught, but John seemed to have been speaking from the heart of Jesus himself. Saul saw there were different ways of knowing the Lord Jesus. He thought of the Lord’s brother, James. He had been brought up alongside Jesus and only came to accept him as Messiah after he had died and risen again. He remembered James’s simple practical faith and common-sense teaching. Suddenly Saul perceived how each one of them brought something needful to the understanding of Jesus.

He looked at Mnason and realised that he might not be much good with words, yet his whole household was full of practical love, from the smallest child to the head overseer. Mnason and Judith’s lives spoke for them.

The next day was in preparation for the coming Sabbath. Mnason was planning to take them to his own synagogue nearby. The president was also a member of the Metal Worker’s guild and a close friend of Mnason’s. It had been arranged that Barnabas, who was well known in the area would be asked to speak.

Saul was surprised to find Barnabas extremely nervous at the thought. He confided in Saul, “You know I am no rabbi. Give me money to count and records to keep, but don’t ask me to preach!”

Saul looked puzzled at his large friend, “But I have heard you speak many times in Antioch and you have everyone hanging on your words.”

Then Barnabas came out with the real problem. “Yes, but many of the older men were friends of my father and knew me as a boy.” Suddenly Saul could identify his own feelings of inadequacy when he was in Tarsus. He had also felt inhibited by his father’s friends.

He said, "I'll be right there alongside you. Let us pray for the anointing of the Holy Spirit on you, that he will put the words you need into your mouth."

Later they made their way to the synagogue for Sabbath evening prayers. Mnason's obvious pride in his visitors did nothing to reassure Barnabas. In spite of Saul's praying with him, he felt more and more nervous. Finally the moment he had been dreading arrived and the president nodded to him to come and read from the prophets. Barnabas stood up and moved in front of the Ark. The hazzan handed him the scroll from the prophet Micah.

He began to read, "Listen, you rulers of Israel! You are supposed to be concerned about justice, yet you hate what is good and love what is evil. You skin my people alive and tear the flesh from off their bones. You eat my people up. You strip off their skin, break their bones, and chop them up like meat for the pot. The time is coming when you will cry out to the Lord, but he will not answer you. He will not listen to your prayers, for you have done evil."

Barnabas stopped while the translation was made into Greek. When he began to read again from this terrible prophecy of Micah, his voice took on a new note when he came to the passage, "But as for me, the Lord fills me with his spirit and power, and gives me a sense of justice and courage to tell the people of Israel what their sins are. Listen to me, you rulers of Israel, you that hate justice and turn right into wrong. You are building God's city Jerusalem, on a foundation of murder and injustice."

Barnabas read with growing confidence and he finished with the dreadful lines, "And so because of you, Zion will be ploughed like a field, Jerusalem will become a pile of ruins, and the temple hill will become a forest."²¹⁰

Barnabas handed the scroll back to the hazzan. He paused before saying, "These words of the prophet Micah were not only for his own time but also for ours. The time of God's judgment is upon us and we must turn from our evil ways and receive the hope of salvation which God has offered us in Jesus. He is the Holy One promised to our people from the time of Abraham and Moses. To those who turn from their sins and receive God's gift of his child Jesus, there is salvation. To those who turn away and despise the Gift, there is destruction."

"The time is short. The Saviour has already come and the days are numbered for this age. For soon he will return in glory to sit in judgement on this age."

²¹⁰ Micah 3:1

Saul looked at Barnabas in surprise. He had often heard him give little homilies to encourage and draw the faint-hearted and waverers into the fold, but he had never heard him preach with this sense of urgency.

Barnabas was continuing, "Each of you must turn away from your sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus, so that your sins may be forgiven and you will receive God's gift, the Holy Spirit."

Barnabas stopped and looked at the people before him. He saw they were listening intently and his expression grew gentle. "I am not a man of learning like my brother Saul, here, but I want to tell you that no one who confesses Jesus as Lord is disappointed in his promise of salvation. We know we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers and this love is God's gift to us through his child Jesus."

Barnabas returned to his seat. There was a moment of intense silence and then the concluding prayers were said with the blessing. Afterwards nearly everyone gathered round Barnabas and Saul and demanded that they tell them more at the morning service.

Barnabas said, "If you would have us back, then you must hear brother Saul. He can show you as I cannot, how Jesus is the fulfilment of the first Covenant which God made with Abraham."

One of the elders said sharply, "What do you mean the 'First Covenant'? There is only one Covenant."

Saul gave Barnabas a warning look, Barnabas nodded without replying and the moment passed.

Mnason was overjoyed at the response of the community and chattered happily all the way home, making plans for them to visit other synagogues and also Citium and other towns.

John Mark was silent. He had often heard Barnabas talk about Jesus, but he had never heard him preach in this way. He was disturbed by the implications of Barnabas's interpretation of Micah. If the temple authorities heard the way he spoke there could be trouble. Mark hoped Saul would not say anything controversial in the morning.

They returned to Mnason's home to find Judith had prepared a meal of the local speciality. Small fig-eating birds which were caught in large numbers each year when they flew over from Syria to feast on the local figs. These little birds were then salted and spiced and kept in pickle pots for special occasions. She served them with cucumbers stuffed with barley and raisins.

In the morning after the reading from the prophets, the president of the synagogue then invited Saul to address the congregation. He preached with conviction and his message was well-received.

At the end of the service when many people gathered round them asking what they should do next Barnabas said, "If you truly repent of your sins and want to live a new life. Then we will baptize you in Jesus's name."

Some of the leading members of the synagogue were amongst those who wanted baptism and it was agreed that those who wished could come back at the beginning of the new day after sunset, and be baptised in the synagogue's own mikvah. About thirty-four people, both Jews and Gentile God-fearers, men and women came that evening. Mark did not accompany them for the service.

They gathered in the courtyard of the synagogue and listened as once more Saul taught them.

As they walked home through the dark streets Barnabas and Saul discussed with Mnason the alternatives opened to them.

Barnabas said, "I think we should stay here and build these new brothers and sisters up in the Lord."

Saul replied, "It isn't as if they haven't got Mnason and Judith here to guide and lead them. If Mnason is going on to other centres where he is known, I think we should take the opportunity to go with him. What do you think Mnason?"

Their friend considered for a moment before saying, "I'm not sure. Of course we want you to stay here, but business will unfortunately take me from Citium to Tamassos and I shall be away for a week or more. Of course there are people there I could introduce you to."

He broke off a moment and then added, "Especially to the son of the priest of Appollo in Tamassos, Herakleides. He is always begging for more information about the Saviour. He reads our scriptures...."

Mnason turned to Judith. "What do you think Judith, can we teach these new brothers and sisters?"

They could hear her smile as she answered, "My husband, you have been teaching them for years and now they understand the source of what makes you different. They will be guided by the Holy Spirit working in their hearts and minds."

Saul was surprised at Judith's perception, but he did not speak.

It was Barnabas who said, "Then I think we should go with you tomorrow."

So it was decided. John Mark had not attended the baptism ceremony and was glad to be told they were moving on.

Mnason's trip down the coast to Citium was to collect an amount of money owing to him and to confirm various orders. They spent a night there

before taking the inland road to Tamassos, which was the centre of the copper-mining region.

Mnason explained to them that the incredibly rich mines at Tamassos had been leased by the Emperor Augustus to Herod the Great and as a result there was a large and thriving Jewish community there.

The day was hot and the road dusty as they crossed the plain. Groves of huge olive trees provided welcome shade and they were able to rest during the hottest part of the day in one such grove, where they ate a large watermelon Mnason had bought from a farmer's wife.

They could see and smell Tamassos long before they came to it. The furnaces which smelted the ore, burned day and night and the air was permeated by the coppery smell. Huge slag heaps covered the hills round the city. Later they found even the food tasted of copper.

Mnason always stayed with Phinehas, an old friend and business colleague who supplied him with copper ingots from the mines. Barnabas wondered aloud to Mnason if his friend would welcome three extra people. However when they came to his house, he proved to be large and friendly. He made the four unexpected visitors welcome.

Mnason explained about the presence of his three companions, but Phinehas was not at all interested and merely said, "Yes, yes, you can take them to the synagogue. I'm sure they will be welcome," then he went on to tell Mnason the problems they were having with the slaves, who seemed to sicken and die, making it difficult to keep the furnaces working fast enough to complete the orders.

Soon the two men were lost in deep discussion which continued while Phinehas took them round the smelting yards. They were not surprised the slaves did not live long. The men they saw worked in the hot sun, stripped naked. They were dirty and looked undernourished. Several stopped feeding the fires for paroxysms of coughing. The overseers shouted when they caught the men bent over gasping for breath.

Finally Phinehas and Mnason finished their discussions and gratefully the three others followed them back to town where Phinehas led them into the relative cool of his house and offered them wine. His wife was a fat and cheerful Cypriot woman called Inez. They had a family of sturdy children ranging from a son of fifteen down to the current baby, another son of some six months.

The evening meal was served in the Greek manner on individual small tables for each guest. Inez had prepared a pigeon pie containing almonds and

wine. She served it with a green salad and olives and a delicious dish of creamed spinach garnished with pine-nuts.²¹¹

The red wine was also of excellent quality and it was obvious why Phinehas for all his height was generously proportioned around his waist. The slave girls cleared away the first course and brought delicate green-coloured glass dishes filled with apricots cooked with raisins, honey and spices. It was served hot with chilled yoghurt over it.²¹²

Later when the meal was cleared away and the men sat talking, Phinehas was moved to ask Mnason, “What are your friends doing, travelling with you?”

Mnason well knew that anything religious quickly bored his host. Saul noticed he paused and guessed it was for a quick prayer for help. Mnason then asked, “Have you heard of Jesus of Nazareth?”

“No,” replied Phinehas, “Is he a copper smith?”

Barnabas grinned and asked, “Do you ever go to the festivals in Jerusalem?”

Phinehas shrugged, “What would I want with them? My wife is a Cypriot and the children go to the Greek gymnasium. If the Levites ask me for my Temple tax and tithe, I give it to them, but that stuff in the Temple is no help to me in my line of business and I leave it alone.”

Mark felt a flicker of amusement that anyone could be so blunt in his apathy to all things religious.

Barnabas, still smiling said, “Then you did not hear of the death of Jesus fifteen years ago in Jerusalem?”

“Oh,” said Phinehas, “He’s dead,” then he turned to Mnason and asked, “When will your waggons be coming for the ingots? I’ll see they are ready for them.”

Mnason was obviously put out by the abrupt and rude change of subject. “Actually we want to stay here for the Sabbath if you don’t mind. My friends have a message to share with those who would listen.” If Phinehas noticed the implied criticism in this remark, he ignored it.

In his over-riding manner he said, “Oh, so you are not leaving immediately?”

Mnason’s long business association with his host did not extend to the rudeness of being practically told to leave and he said stiffly, “No, but tomorrow we are moving to Herackliedes’s home as he particularly wants to meet these friends.”

²¹¹ *The Good Book Cook Book (Published Dodd, Mead) Page 49*

²¹² *Ibid Page 178*

Saul and Barnabas looked at Mnason in surprise but recognized Phinehas's rudeness had driven him to leave first thing in the morning.

The big man seemed impervious to what others thought and he said with bluff heartiness, "That's all right then. You are fixed up for the next few days." With that he rose and they found themselves being guided to their rooms.

Saul felt that Phinehas was not as insensitive as he appeared, but he had been determined not to let Mnason's religious companions have a chance to bore him with their talk.

When the four men were alone, Mnason was overcome by his anger at their host's bad behaviour. Barnabas reassured him, "Didn't the Lord say, 'If some home will not welcome you or listen to you, then leave that place and shake the dust off your feet?' My brother, it is not your fault that Phinehas will not receive the words of salvation."

Saul asked, "You have mentioned Herackleides before, are you sure he will welcome four of us? What about his father, the priest of Apollo?"

Mnason's depression lifted, and his face lit up, "If you will stay with a Gentile family, then you need have no fear you are not welcome. That man hungers and thirsts for the Word of Life, and I promise you that tomorrow night you will not get to bed much before dawn!"

The next morning, John Mark who was not at all happy at the way things were developing asked as they shouldered their travelling bags, "Where are we staying tonight?" It was as if he had not heard the previous evening's discussion.

Mnason looked surprised, "With Herackleides of course."

John Mark's voice betrayed his intense dismay, "You mean with Gentiles?"

Barnabas too had been considering this and while he had come to accept eating with Gentile converts, the thought of staying with someone who was not only unconverted but the son of a priest of Apollo, had also been troubling him.

"You realise that Mark becomes ritually unclean for service in the Temple?" He asked.

Saul said, "But he's been ritually unclean ever since he visited Titus's home in Antioch and it didn't worry him."

Mnason, who had lived in a Gentile community all his life, had never troubled his head about the finer points of the Law. He knew the rabbis argued endlessly over what made things ritually unclean but his work brought him into contact with so many Gentiles he had stopped thinking about it.

Barnabas, who had left Cyprus to live in Jerusalem realised that here was no idle problem for John Mark. He said gently, “Brother Saul, you must know this is a serious matter.”

Saul said, “I agree, but it depends whether you believe that a person is put right with God by doing what the Law requires or by faith in Jesus Christ.”²¹³ Saul looked at John Mark. He knew the man had not put his faith in Jesus and he hoped to force him to face up to his inner conflict.

“You cannot just sweep away the Law and traditions of our people as if they are of no account,” Mark replied indignantly.

Barnabas was troubled by the growing dissension between them. It was Mnason who temporarily resolved the issue by saying, “Why not meet Herakleides and see what kind of man he is. If you feel any hesitation about staying with his family, we can always ask the local hazzan if we can stay at the synagogue.”

By this time the four men had walked through the city and left behind the fumes of copper and entered the farm lands. The house to which Mnason guided them was set amongst a grove of olive trees. The summer heat had turned the plough lands to silver-gold. The house was not far from its neighbours. As they approached it a girl of about nine came running round the corner, laughing and looking back over her shoulder at two smaller boys chasing after her. She ran slap into John Mark, who was far from pleased at the encounter. She backed off and still smiling, dropped a curtsy and in a breathless voice said, “Forgive me, sir.”

Barnabas, who loved children smiled back and said, “Are you escaping from yon warriors?”

Recognizing a friend in spite of his bulk, beard and strange clothes, the girl gave him a brilliant smile and replied, “Oh, they are of no consequence, sir. Merely Barbarians.” Then remembering her manners she asked, “Have you come to see my father?”

Mnason stepping forward asked, “Althea, is your father at home?”

The girl recognized Mnason and answered, “He has gone up to grandfather’s house. I will call him for you if you wish. It’s not far.” Then she turned to her brothers and said, “Demosthenes tell mother we have visitors,” with that she darted away up the hill behind the house to where a grove of cypresses and laurel partially obscured a shrine.

Demosthenes, a lively-looking child of about seven, greeted the visitors and went behind the house where presently, a short woman of about thirty, dressed in a working garment, came round wiping her hands on a cloth. She

²¹³ Galatians 2:16

had obviously been grinding corn as she had a smear of flour across her cheek and her skirt and legs were dusty from kneeling on the ground.

Her face registered surprise to see four men waiting in front of the house. Then she recognized Mnason and her face broke into a warm smile, "You are more than welcome, Mnason, Master Coppersmith. And welcome to you my masters." She greeted the other three men softly.

"My husband has just gone up to help his father repair the door of his home."

Mnason said, "Young Althea has flown off to tell him of our arrival." Then he said to his companions, "This is Dorothea, wife to Herakleides."

The woman understood something of the restrictions Orthodox Jews mixing with Gentiles, said, "If you will sit under the tree there, I will bring you some wine."

Thankfully they turned towards a shady spot under which was a bench and table. Dorothea returned carrying a carafe of wine and another of water. Young Meomos and his brother followed carrying fine terracotta beakers. Just as the men poured themselves a mixture of wine and water, Herakleides could be seen hurrying down the hill, accompanied by Althea, hopping and skipping alongside him.

He was a man of medium height, clean-shaven and in his mid-thirties. He too was in a short working robe of roughly woven cloth and carried a saw and hammer.

The men all rose as he arrived. He and Mnason embraced warmly and then introductions were made. Mnason watched closely to see the reactions of Barnabas and Saul. He was quietly amused to see how quickly in the presence of Herakleides the man, they overcame their prejudices of Herakleides son of a heathen priest. For there was no doubt of their host's pleasure in seeing them. Only John Mark did not thaw at the man's warmth.

Herakleides said, "Please let me go wash and change before I join you." Then he paused and said, "Come, perhaps you would like to wash with me." Grateful at his thought, they went round the back of the house and found a well with a stone basin nearby.

After washing and feeling considerably refreshed, the visitors returned to sit under the tree while Herakleides went inside to put on another robe. He soon returned wearing a long linen garment with a simple girdle. Dorothea sent Althea with another beaker and soon the men were sitting and ready to talk.

In the pause, both Mnason and Herakleides spoke together. Stopped, looked at each other and laughed.

Then Barnabas turned to Herakleides and said, “Mnason told us you were interested in hearing more about Jesus of Nazareth. Why don’t you tell us how you came to hear of him.”

Herakleides shut his eyes and drew in a deep breath. When he opened them again his visitors saw there were tears in his eyes. “My father, as Mnason has probably told you is a priest in the temple of Apollo at Tamassos. Between the major festivals he tends the shrine dedicated to the god in that grove above us. He is a righteous man, who taught me to honour the good qualities of the gods and strive to live a virtuous life. But as I grew up with my brothers, I soon saw that while people might honour the god for his healing virtues when they needed him or wanted other favours from him, they honoured Dionysos and Aphrodite and the other deities whose worship seems to cater for a man’s baser instincts rather than his virtues. When I was about sixteen, I fell into a deep darkness of the spirit. I wandered in lonely places and my father despaired for my sanity. Finally, by accident, as I thought then, but now I know it was by the grace of God, I arrived at one of the synagogues in Tamassos. I saw some other Greeks entering and having no idea what sort of place it was, I joined them.”

Even John Mark was paying attention.

“I suppose I was about seventeen at the time. When I went in I saw all these men putting prayer shawls over their heads, like a lot of women I thought. All the time muttering to themselves. Someone handed me a shawl and told me to cover my head. I would rather have left, but it would have been difficult to push my way out and I thought, ‘They don’t look dangerous.’ so I waited to see what would happen.”

Herakleides paused as he looked back at the young man who ventured into a synagogue all those years ago.

He took up the story. “I don’t remember anything of who was there, or what the service was like, but I remember the reading from the Torah was from Deuteronomy where Moses said, ‘People of Israel, listen to all the laws I am giving you today. Learn them and be sure that you obey them.’”

Herakleides broke off. He seemed to see the men with Mnason for the first time. He looked round and saw their attention. “I don’t know if you understand. I knew immediately this Moses was giving some oracle from the god and it was obviously not going to be obscure but something clear enough to understand and be obeyed.”

A light came into his face. “I thought it would give me the answers I needed on how to live my life in accordance with a moral law. I was not disappointed. At least,” he added thoughtfully, “not then.”

“When they translated the words, it was the passage, ‘I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from Egypt, where you were slaves.’ I wondered what

kind of a god this was. Then came, 'Worship no God but me.' I thought, 'That's impossible.' Then I heard, 'Do not make for yourselves images of anything in heaven or on earth....do not bow down to any idol or worship it, for I am the Lord you God and I tolerate no rivals.'"

Herakleides looked at the men listening to him, "It was like a curtain being drawn aside and I was looking into heaven itself. Here was the answer I had been searching for and not knowing that it existed. One God, above all other gods. And when he read that this God said, 'I show my love to thousands of generations of those who love me and obey my laws.'²¹⁴ I began to cry for I thought this promise is not for me. It is for these Jews who are his people. For the rest of the service I cried."

Herakleides gave a gentle laugh, "My neighbours had not paid much attention to me when I first entered the building, but my sobs finally penetrated to those around me until an old man took me out and asked me what was wrong."

He paused as he thought back, "Truly God met my need that day, when that kind old man spoke to me. Almost unable to speak, I asked him, "What is the name of that god? I had to know. You can imagine my amazement when he said, 'We never say his name because it is Holy. Only once a year the High Priest standing before the Holy of Holies in the temple in Jerusalem speaks aloud the name of the Most High, blessed be his name for ever.'"

"His reply was so surprising, I stopped crying and stared at him open-mouthed. Then I said 'But this most Holy God is not for me. He will not show his love to me because I am not one of his people.' And I began to cry again. The old man said, 'Son, where do you live?' And I told him. So he said, 'Come home with me for our midday meal and we will talk.'

"His wife made me welcome and told me they missed their grandchildren. She made a great fuss over me, a stranger!

"What a wonderful day that was! He told me of the wonderful God of the Jews and showed me how it was his plan to bless all nations through the Jews and then he said, 'If you truly want to serve the only true God, then you must learn the Law and understand it.'

"I remember staring at him and then saying, 'You mean you will teach me about your God and I can be one of his children?' I did not know then about circumcision nor did I know how my father would oppose any suggestion I should adopt a new faith, but that was in the future."

His listeners were still held by his story when Dorothea, followed by Althea and the two boys came out carrying a water melon, a dish of goats milk cheese and olives.

²¹⁴ Deuteronomy 5:1-10

She teased her husband, “You will starve your guests to death with your talk.” With that she put the food on the table and turned to take some plates from her youngest son before he dropped them, then nodded to Demosthenes to put the mugs on the table.

The day was extremely hot and the juicy red watermelon was a most welcome interruption for the visitors. Dorothea returned with a second pitcher of wine and Althea brought more water.

Herakleides turned to Barnabas and said, “Would you bless the food for us?”

A slow smile came over Barnabas’s face and he said, “Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who creates various kinds of foods.” Then he said, “Bestow thy blessings upon the master of this house. Bless, O Lord his substance, accept the work of his hands. Keep him far from sin and transgression. Let thy grace be upon him and establish thou the work of his hands.”

“May thy loving-kindness also be with her who looketh well to the ways of her household, and may she be mindful that the woman who feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Bestow on their sons and daughter the spirit of wisdom and understanding. Lead them in the path of thy commandments so that all who see them may acknowledge that they are offspring blessed of the Lord, blessed with the knowledge of thy Law and with the fear of thee. Preserve them from all evil: preserve their lives. May thy gracious promise be realized in them, blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, blessed when thou goest out.”²¹⁵

There was a united “Amen” from Mnason and Saul and a characteristic mumble from John Mark. Both the parents and the children of Herakleides’s family were deeply moved by the blessing of them all by this stranger. For a moment Althea’s light-hearted skipping was subdued as she took young Meomos’s hand and led him back into the house. Dorothea smiled her thanks to Barnabas and also returned to the back yard with Demosthenes.

When the meal was finished, Barnabas turned to Mark and said, “Would you say the concluding blessing for us?” Mark complied without any great enthusiasm. Saul wondered why Barnabas had asked Mark rather than himself or Mnason. But Barnabas was aware that all was not well with his cousin and was not sure how to reach him.

When the table was cleared and the men had washed from their hands the stickiness of the watermelon, they sat once more under the tree.

It was Saul who prompted Herakleides to take up his story. “And so you went to school at the synagogue and received instruction?”

²¹⁵ *From Service at the Consecration of a House. Authorised Daily Prayer Book Published Eyre and Spottiswoode 1890*

Herakleides replied, "It is not necessary for me to bore you with the difficulties I experienced over the next few years. Suffice to say the more I heard of the Jewish Law and the Most High God who had given it to them, the more I wished to know. But then I began to discover that for many of your people, their faith was expressed in small unimportant ways, as it seemed to me. The restriction against worshipping idols I could understand, but the more than six hundred laws on food, washing and every part of life took all the joy from that first wonderful moment when I heard and understood there is One God, righteous Creator of all things; One who rights the wrongs of the poor and oppressed and cares for his people. I don't quite know how to put it."

He thought and then said slowly, "It almost seemed that in spite of every aspect of a Jew's life being dedicated to remembering and giving thanks to his Creator, the effect was not to make him aware of the wonder of his God, but to make his people concerned for unimportant things." There was a troubled look on Herakleides's face.

Saul lent forward. His eyes were blazing with joy at the perception of this heathen priest's son who had grasped the great Jewish paradox.

Herakleides was still looking inward trying to analyse his reactions. He concluded, "So I fell away and to my father's relief I stopped going for instruction and – his greatest fear – did not become circumcised. A great darkness returned to my mind and often I would return to the old man who had first spoken to me in the synagogue and pour out my heart. He was like a father to me and I bless him for the patience he showed to a very confused young man. It was he, who later told me of Jesus of Nazareth and some of the things he had taught. It was he, who shortly before he died, introduced me to Mnason here."

He turned to Mnason, "When was that? About ten or twelve years ago?"

Mnason nodded. "It was before the death of the Emperor Tiberius. It must have been about eleven years ago."

"Are there brethren in Tamassos?" Asked Barnabas.

It was Mnason who said with uncharacteristic sourness, "No, they are too busy making money to consider their souls." Obviously Phinehas's behaviour was still rankling with him.

Herakleides observed, "I don't think that is altogether true, my friend. I know of a number of people who have heard of Jesus of Nazareth and talk about his teaching. I'm sure they would like to hear more."

He broke off and asked with excitement, "Are you staying tonight? Can I arrange a meeting? Would you be willing to tell us more about this Jesus?"

"Who would come?" Mnason asked in surprise, "Jews or Gentiles?"

“Both,” replied Herakleides. “I’m not the only Greek who seeks for a deeper meaning to life. There are women too like my wife, who would want to listen.”

Barnabas and Saul were as excited as Herakleides. He would inform everyone that they would be teaching that evening by the river.

As he said to Saul when Herakeides left to make the arrangements, “If they receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit, we shall need water to baptize them.”

“In that case,” remarked Mnason, “We better warn Dorothea to organize towels and cloaks to wrap people in.”

Thus they preached that evening along the river bank and between thirty and forty people, men, women and children; Jews and Greeks, were baptized.

The next day, for business reasons Mnason had to return home, but Barnabas, Saul and John Mark stayed on to teach the new converts concerning the fellowship meal and their new unity in Jesus Christ. They appointed Herakleides and two Jewish converts as elders and showed them how to conduct their time of praise and worship together. They gave the little group a copy of the ‘Sayings of Jesus’, and spent the Sabbath with them before they took leave of the new brethren and pressed on to Paphos, the seat of Roman government for the island.²¹⁶

²¹⁶ Herakleides is reputed to have met Paul and Barnabas when they first came to Cyprus and was appointed first bishop of Tamassos. He was burnt at the stake. Recorded in H.V.Morton's 'In the Steps of St. Paul' Published Methuen and Co 1936

CHAPTER 11: IN PAPHOS AND INTO PISIDIA

CE 46 Late Summer

Acts 13:6-52

The weather was still extremely hot and so on the first day of the week, they left before the sun rose to get as far as possible before the heat of the day. The road had been rebuilt after the Roman manner and they joined the traffic heading for the administrative capital.

Barnabas planned one night on the road, and they were thankful when the following evening they felt a cooling of the intense heat as they approached the coast and saw the huge temple to Venus on the hill overlooking Paphos.

Enquiries soon brought them to the synagogue. The hazzan, a grave thin man with a large family showed them a room in the courtyard. He offered to provide food for them for which they were grateful. Later the three travellers sat in the small courtyard which separated the hazzan's house from the synagogue. A pair of fig trees gave deep and welcome shade. He came to sit with them and they were able to inquire if there was a large congregation at the local synagogue.

The question seemed to make Ithamar's thin nose droop sadly, as he answered, "We are not a large community and recently, since the new Proconsul has been installed, one of our people, Bar-Jesus, has wormed his way into his confidence, pretending he is a prophet."

Saul became alert, "Is this causing problems?"

Ithamar said mournfully, "Not exactly. In fact the reverse. It is very worrying."

Barnabas gave a laugh and remarked, "Surely this is good news?"

Ithamar looked even sadder. "You don't understand. The man is a charlatan. He deals in magic and performs evil tricks to convince people of his powers."

Ithamar lost his hesitant manner. "He pretends he has power from the Most High, blest be his name for ever, and because he claims to be a Jew, he will bring the name of the Lord into disrepute with his tricks.

Both Saul and Barnabas looked grave at this disclosure. Saul said, "He has access to the Proconsul?"

Ithamar said sadly, "He is constantly up at the Governor's palace, filling his head with news, scandal and nonsense whilst pretending to be his faithful adviser."

Saul looked at Barnabas and then asked, “He attends the synagogue regularly?”

Ithamar found the interest and concern of his listeners a welcome relief. He was able to share his disquiet, knowing it would not reach the ears of Bar-Jesus.

He said with a sigh, “Oh, yes, he is most punctilious. He’ll probably attend evening prayers.”

“Good,” replied Saul, “Then we will see how God intends to deal with this fraud.”

Ithamar looked worried. “I hope you don’t intend to confront him? It could mean much trouble for the Jewish community if he puts the Roman governor against us.”

Saul looked at the man with pity and said gently, “What we have not told you is why we are here. We have been commissioned to bring the Good News concerning one Jesus the Messiah to all Jewish congregations.”

Barnabas asked, “Perhaps you have heard of him?”

Ithamar looked puzzled, “No, is he some new leader come to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

“If the president of the synagogue will give us an opportunity to speak tonight, we will share with you the wonderful news of God’s plan for our people,” replied Barnabas.

“How will this deal with Bar-Jesus?” Ithamar asked, his despondency returning.

Saul answered, “Don’t be worried, God will deal with this man in his own time. In the meanwhile, perhaps the Lord will use him to open a way for us.”

No more was said. Presently Ithamar’s wife, Miriam, served them their evening meal. It was obvious she had given them of her best and this was distressingly meagre. There was a dish of stewed onions mixed with barley and some rough-ground wheaten bread. No wine, no cheese. While the guests had been served the children had sat quietly waiting with hungry eyes for what was left.

Later Saul, Barnabas and Mark walked across to the synagogue, where Ithamar introduced them to the president of the synagogue. He greeted them warmly and asked if they would speak a few words.

It was a weekday service and only eleven men came. No one could mistake Bar-Jesus. He wore a flowing black gown, with a dramatically embroidered border in red and gold thread. His sleeves were long and wide and also had a smaller version of the embroidery, which gave the overall impression of being a geometric design with the addition of a very orthodox edging of pomegranate flowers. However, in the middle of each circle, which

was part of the design, were the signs of the zodiac. The tassels on his prayer shawl were longer than everyone else's and his tefilla were made of the finest tooled leather. Everything about him was blatant and showy. It was obvious that Ithamar was not the only member of the synagogue who found his presence an embarrassment.

Bar-Jesus had come with two 'disciples'. Young men of obsequious and subservient demeanour. Unlike their master they were dressed in plain linen gowns.

Saul had suggested that Barnabas should give the message which he did with his usual charm and warmth. He told the facts of Jesus's life, death and resurrection and the commission he had given his disciples to take the message of salvation to all the world.

Barnabas ended, "And this is why we are travelling now, to share the Good News of the coming of the Messiah and invite all men to repentance so they too can receive the gift of everlasting life."

The service ended and they were invited to give the address on the coming Sabbath. The three companions then returned to their little room in the courtyard and thankfully rolled themselves into their cloaks on the mats which Miriam had given them to sleep on.

The next day about the eighth hour, after they had eaten a light midday meal. There came a loud knocking. Miriam open the door and then came anxiously calling for her husband. He had been sitting with his visitors under the fig trees. When he heard what Miriam had to say, he looked terrified and called Barnabas and Saul to the door. A Roman officer accompanied by two soldiers were standing in the bright sunshine in front of the house.

It was small wonder Ithamar looked frightened. He was sure his guests were about to be arrested! However the officer spoke politely enough to Saul and Barnabas saying, "The proconsul, Sergius Paulus has sent me to invite you to the palace to talk with him. He hears you have a strange message which he would like to hear in person."²¹⁷

Barnabas and Saul looked at each other. Saul recovered first and asked in surprise, "The governor wants us to share our message with him?"

The officer was not without imagination and could understand how lowly Jewish preachers might find such an invitation unnerving. So he said, "Sergius Paulus is a man of culture and learning. He is at present researching a book he intends to write on Cyprian lore."²¹⁸ When Elymas told him of your visit, he was naturally interested."

²¹⁷ *Sergius Paulus: Calls Saul & Barnabas to him – Acts 13:7*

²¹⁸ *In the Steps of St Paul, H.V.Morton: published Methuen and Co 1936. P 141 says that, Pliny said Paulus was the author of a book on Cyprian lore.*

The officer's explanation was no help at all. Who was Elymas? How had he heard about Barnabas's message the night before? The mystery was merely compounded. The one comforting thought was they were not under arrest!

Barnabas asked, "When does the governor require us to appear before him?"

The officer replied, "He has ordered me to fetch you now."

Barnabas and Saul went to put on their outer robes and sandals. As they passed Ithamar, Barnabas asked, "Who is Elymas?"

Looking like a stricken hare, Ithamar replied, "Oh, that's the name the Gentiles give Bar-Jesus." Then he burst out with, "Are you under arrest?"

"No," replied Saul, "We are to appear before the proconsul to give our message!"

Barnabas suggested that John Mark should accompany them. He was far from keen to go, but there seemed no danger and reluctantly he also dressed and in a short while the three men followed the officer and his two men along the street and up the hill to the governor's palace.

Saul found himself filled with a sense of God's power. Surely the prophecy of Ananias was about to come true. Here he was about to be given the chance to testify to the risen Lord before a Gentile ruler. A joy filled him as he thought of the long years he had spent in Tarsus wondering if God had forgotten him.

Barnabas was composed and at peace, both with himself and the prospect of facing a Roman governor. He felt God was leading their steps and it was only for them to remain obedient to the charge which had been laid on them.

It was John Mark whose fears of being thought a follower of Jesus, was suffering agonies of mind and spirit. He felt alone and vulnerable. Nobody understood his feelings or considered how his position in the temple was being jeopardized. It was all right for his cousin, Joseph, he had retired from temple service. In fact, thought John Mark, he had given the burden of the family's responsibility to him and had recklessly taken up with this sect which was abhorred by the temple authorities. How could these men be so insensitive to his position? Righteous anger kept his underlying fear at bay.

They walked through the palace porticoes and were shown into a large room with a fine view of the harbour and cooled by sea breezes. The proconsul was seated at a table with a goblet of wine and jug on the table beside him. A secretary was seated on a stool with his writing materials on another small table in front of him.

As they entered a figure caused Barnabas and ²¹⁹Saul to stop so abruptly that John Mark walked into them. It was Bar-Jesus! To say they were astounded was a complete understatement. He was still dressed in black robes on which various cabalistic signs were embroidered in gold thread, but on his head was a turban made with swathes of linen, doubled round many times and sewn together. Covering the whole of this was a richly embroidered cap which completely covered the turban and hung down over his forehead. It was tall and gave Bar-Jesus an impression of supernatural height. Furthermore, instead of the simple belt he had worn the previous evening he now wore a girdle, about a hand's width wide and richly embroidered. It was tied round his chest and the end hung down to his feet. His whole outfit was a mockery of the clothing worn by the high priest in Jerusalem.²²⁰

Saul, never one to dissemble his feelings felt anger boil up within him. Barnabas felt disgust. This man was evil, and he, Barnabas wanted no part in his machinations.

It was too late to withdraw and Sergius Paulus greeted them courteously.²²¹ "Do not be alarmed at my request for you to see me," he began, "I am deeply interested in local traditions and intend writing a book on the customs and history of Cyprus. But my interests are wider than that and when Elymas here told me you were visiting and heard you speak of a strange new concept of 'everlasting life', I decided to hear for myself. That is why I have sent for you."

For a moment John Mark felt almost light-headed with relief, which was short-lived when he heard what Saul had to say to the Proconsul. He was horrified, had Saul no sense? This is no way to address a Roman Senator. Barnabas could see that Sergius Paulus was listening intently to Saul. It was obvious he did not understand it all, but there was a power flowing through Saul that carried conviction.

As Saul paused a moment, Sergius Paulus asked, "And where now is this Jesus of Nazareth you speak about?"

Saul answered, "He was crucified in the time Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea. He was buried, but three days later he rose from the dead and was seen by his disciples on many occasions. I myself saw him. I, who had undertaken to seek out and destroy all the adherents of a man I thought was a fraud." Involuntarily his eyes fell on Bar-Jesus.

Saul was about to go on, when Sergius Paulus stopped him. "Wait a moment, I remember when Vitellius sent Pilate back to Rome for trial on

²¹⁹ *Saul and Barnabas: Elymas/Bar-Jesus: Paphos CE 46 – Acts 13:8*

²²⁰ *Flavius Josephus. Complete Works by Whiston. Published Pickering and Inglis 1960*

²²¹ *Sergius Paulus: Governor of Cyprus – Acts 13:7*

some murder charge. I believe he went into exile. But that was ten years ago. So when did this Jesus die?"

Saul said, "He was crucified sixteen years ago, but we are here to testify that he lives, and all those who believe in him will also live and have eternal life."

During this exchange Bar-Jesus was getting more and more uncomfortable. He had, as he usually did, reported visitors arriving in the synagogue, being one of the Proconsul's informers. Apart from being an informer, he amused the governor with his tricks and magic. There was something alarming in what this man Saul, was saying. For some reason he could see the governor was impressed and he was afraid his own influence would be undermined.

He interrupted saying, "Excellency, dismiss these men, they are talking dangerous rubbish."

Saul turned and a power seemed to flow through him. He seemed larger than Barnabas as he stared at the magician and said, "You son of the devil! You are the enemy of everything that is good. You are full of all kinds of evil tricks, and you always keep trying to turn the Lord's truths into lies!"²²²

Bar-Jesus had never been so frightened in his life. He well knew how to create a terrifying presence for the gullible, but here was something more powerful than his own carefully created displays of the supernatural.

Saul stretched out his arm toward him and said, "The Lord's hand will come down on you now: you will be blind and will not see the light of day for a time."

With a cry of terror, Bar-Jesus put his hands to his face as if warding off a blow. Then he looked wildly around him and it was obvious he could see nothing. His two disciples, who were standing in the background, were just as frightened. When the governor motioned to them to remove Bar-Jesus, they took his hands and let him out.

There was a pause. The power that had flowed through Saul left him and he turned back to the governor who said to him, "Now I know that what you say is true, this Jesus of whom you speak, must truly be the Son of God, if he gives you, his followers, such powers." He then dismissed them and they returned to Ithamar's house.

As they walked through the evening streets, the three men were quiet. The events had been amazing, but the demonstration of the Lord's power left them feeling humble.

It had been their intention to stay until after the Sabbath, but news came that a ship was sailing for Attalia and they decided to leave early.

²²² Saul: Curses Elymas/Bar-Jesus – Acts 13:10

Saul was abstracted all that evening. It was not until they had boarded the vessel and were sailing northwest towards Pisidia that Saul looked at his two companions and said, "I shall take my Roman name, Paul, in future."²²³

Barnabas knew his friend had undergone some fundamental change from yesterday's experience, but just how fundamental he did not at first understand. "Do you want to tell us why?"

The older man came out of his pre-occupation and suddenly seemed to light up. "Yes, I do. Yesterday God gave me confirmation that he does indeed intend me to take the gospel to the Gentiles, and if that is so, I shall travel as 'Paul the Roman citizen' rather than 'Saul the pharisee.'"

John Mark was appalled. His worst fears concerning this trip were being confirmed. Saul was obviously possessed and he, John Mark, wanted no more to do with him. Presently he saw that Saul had fallen asleep and he took the opportunity to talk to Joseph.

He began abruptly, "I'm going back to Jerusalem," nodding in Saul's direction he added, "I think he has gone mad."

Barnabas looked at his cousin with love and understanding. "One day you will know for yourself that Jesus is God's chosen One. Now you cannot see it, but when that day comes, you will know without any doubt and your testimony will bring many to know and love the Lord Jesus."

John Mark turned away, tears had come into his eyes as Barnabas spoke. He shook his head angrily at himself and walked to the far side of the ship. He was thus spared Paul's angry reaction when Barnabas informed him that John Mark was leaving them.

It was an uneasy group which landed in Attalia. Thankfully they found a ship sailing eastwards along the coast and were able to secure a place on it for Mark.²²⁴ Barnabas embraced him warmly and sent his love and greetings to Mark's mother. Paul looked coldly at the young man. At the very moment he knew God had confirmed him in his ministry, he felt this man belittled his calling. He was hurt and angry.

The unsatisfactory departure of Mark, saw Paul turn his face determinedly on to Perga, which was inland from the port about half a day's journey.²²⁵

The port city of Attalia was predominantly Greek in style and influence, but as they walked inland they saw the loaded donkeys and camels were led by thickset, dark-skinned people. When Paul and Barnabas came near to Perga they could see the town was a native city built of mud blocks.

²²³ Paul: *Changes his name from Saul – Acts 13:9*

²²⁴ Mark: *Returns to Jerusalem – Acts 13:13*

²²⁵ Perga: *Paul & Barnabas arrive CE 46 – Acts 13:14. Acts 13:13 says Mark left Paul and Barnabas at Perga, but Attalia is the nearest port to Perga.*

The two companions found an inn on the outskirts of the town. Barnabas purchased something for them to eat, and Paul bought dried figs for their journey inland. Then after washing they retired to their room began the prayer before sleep, “Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who makest the bands of sleep fall upon mine eyes, and slumber upon mine eyelids.... Blessed art thou, O Lord, who givest light to the whole world in thy glory.”

At this point Barnabas stretched out his hand to Paul and said, “Forgive me brother before we sleep for the estrangement that has come between us this day.”

Paul’s eyes filled with tears. He rose and embraced Barnabas, “The anger was mine, forgive me.”

Once more at peace with one another, they continued the prayers and felt the truth of the words as they said, “Let the pleasantness of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us: yes, the work of our hands establish thou it.”²²⁶ They finally rolled themselves in their cloaks and with their travelling bags securely between them they were soon asleep.

It took them over a week to reach Pisidian Antioch, following the valley from Perga up into the mountains until finally they left the native villages and saw before them a great walled city on the lower slopes of a mountain which overlooked the plain and was backed by the towering peaks the Sultan Dagh, on which they could still, hot as it was, see traces of snow in the crevasses.²²⁷

They followed the road to the city gates and Paul asked Barnabas yet again if he could remember the names of any of those who had become Believers on that first Pentecost after the Resurrection.

Barnabas smiled fondly at the little man. “That was fifteen years ago and there were thousands of people in the crowd. Don’t worry, the Lord will reveal the believers to us in his time,” with that Paul had to be content.

At the gates, a Roman official checked to see if they were merchants and whether import dues were payable, then passed them through. They walked into the main thoroughfare, the local Phrygian people were rubbing shoulders with Greeks, Romans and even some Jews going about their business. They asked one of their fellow countrymen the way to the local synagogue. The street where they finally found it was in the better part of town. Obviously the Jewish community was prosperous.

An enquiry from the hazzan for accommodation brought them to the home of a short, thickset woman of about thirty years. Her name was Hadassah, she

²²⁶ *Authorised Daily Prayer Book published Eyre and Spottiswoode 1962*

²²⁷ *Antioch in Pisidia: Paul & Barnabas arrive CE 46 – Acts 13:14*

had been recently widowed. Her children were still young and she augmented her income from letting rooms to visiting Jews.

When the evening meal had been cleared away, Hadassah and her maid came with their spinning to exchange news with the two visitors. They learnt that her husband had died of smallpox the previous year. The same disease had left Hadassah's homely face pock-marked. She told them her children were too young to take over the business and it was being run for her by a kinsman. However her husband had left a number of business debts and Hadassah was struggling to provide for her household.

Then she asked them the purpose of their visit, since she could see they were not business men, nor had they any of the local contacts, such as a visiting rabbi or Levite or representative from the Jerusalem Sanhedrin would have.

Barnabas began by telling her of their commission to share the good news of salvation. Hadassah listened with interest and later asked if the evening following the Sabbath she might call her whole household and some neighbouring friends to come and listen to what her visitors had to say.

The next day was the day of preparation for the Sabbath. They went to the early morning prayers at the synagogue and made themselves known to the local president, who welcomed them and invited them to preach at the Sabbath morning service. Visiting preachers were always welcome, especially to Jewish communities somewhat isolated from the main-stream of life in Jerusalem.

They spent the rest of the day exploring the city with its spacious squares, porticoes and sculptures lining the streets. They found it was a Roman city with a strong Greek community, but the underlying native city could be seen in the temple dedicated to Men, the local moon deity and an even bigger temple dedicated to Cybele, the 'Great Mother' whose cult had spread even as far as Rome.²²⁸

On the Sabbath, Hadassah, her children as well as some of her Gentile slaves went to the Synagogue. The women and children sat in the gallery. Paul and Barnabas were shown to the seats in the front. They could see it was indeed a prosperous community. Many Gentile Greeks and even a few Romans were amongst the congregation. In the gallery there were more Gentile women of high rank.

The prayers were said and the allotted portions from the Torah and prophets were read. Then the president of the Synagogue invited the visitors to speak.

²²⁸ *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia Vol 1 P142*

During the three weeks since the incident before Sergius Paulus, there had been a dramatic change in the relationship between Barnabas and Paul. It was as if Paul had been given wings of the spirit. Always he had seen himself as Barnabas's assistant. He had deeply appreciated how Barnabas had called him out of his own spiritual exile in Tarsus and he had seen the big Levite as one specially endowed by God for building up the brethren. Paul had always been aware of his own intellectual gifts and seen how his convincing arguments from the Law and the prophets was contributing to the growth amongst the Believers, especially in the Greek communities. Now he knew that he was specially endowed by God to deliver the gospel, not as Barnabas's assistant, but as one empowered as a leader in his own right.²²⁹

Barnabas was good for one to one ministry or speaking words of wisdom in simple and direct ways. He was not one who felt comfortable giving a major address to a learned and critical audience. To Paul such an audience acted as a powerful stimulant to release his gifts. It was therefore Paul who stepped forward, lifted his hand and began to speak.²³⁰

When Paul returned to his seat next to Barnabas he knew he had shocked the leaders of the synagogue but later as they were leaving, many people crowded round them and asked them to come back next Sabbath and tell them more about these things.

Indeed many, both Jews and Gentiles, followed Paul and Barnabas back to Hadassah's house, where they asked questions and Barnabas told them how they could become reborn of the Spirit and have the love of Jesus himself living within them. There was great excitement and people were reluctant to leave. Finally after encouraging them and promising to tell them more, the last visitor was persuaded to go and they sat down to a late Sabbath meal.

During the following week they were invited to many homes to teach and share the Good News of salvation. They found the Gentile converts, both rich and poor, receptive to the message as were some of their Jewish listeners.

The next Sabbath the synagogue was packed with people from all parts of the city. The leaders of the synagogue were extremely upset by the turn-out of so many Gentile sensation-seekers.²³¹ This was no way to teach people the requirements of the Law and bring them into orderly conversion.

They challenged Paul and Barnabas on this, "You are subverting the Law by your teachings and you bring it into disrespect."

Paul replied, "You break the Law daily, living as you do in this Gentile city and so you are all brought under God's judgement. Besides, no one is put right in God's sight by doing what the Law requires. What the Law does is to

²²⁹ From Acts 13.13 the order of names changes from Barnabas and Saul to 'Paul and his companions.'

²³⁰ Paul: Preaches in Pisidian Antioch – Acts 13:16

²³¹ Jews: Oppose Paul: Pisidian Antioch – Acts 13:45

make man know that he has sinned. What we are bringing you now is the Good News of God's way of putting people right with himself. It has nothing to do with Law, even though the Law of Moses and the prophets gave their witness to it. God puts people right through their faith in Jesus the Messiah."²³²

There was an angry reaction from the leaders of the synagogue. Then Paul stepped forward and said in a loud voice, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. But since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life- " His anger at their stubbornness made him sarcastic – "We will leave you and go to the Gentiles. For this is the commandment that the Lord has given us:

‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
so that all the world may be saved.’”

With that Paul and Barnabas left the synagogue followed by some of the Jewish members and a great many of the Gentile listeners who were filled with joy at what they had just heard.

While it was a day of rest for the Jews, for the city it was business-as-usual. The market square was noisy, full of people and crowds milling round the stalls. Paul asked where they could find somewhere quiet so they could continue teaching, some suggested sitting under the arches of the aqueduct. Others recommended a spot near the river.

Finally a Greek man, in his early thirties said, "Why don't you come to my house? It's not large, but we have a room off the courtyard where you can teach."

Barnabas smiled at him and asked, "What is your name, my friend?"

The man, whose wife was standing next to him said, "I am Theognis and this is my wife, Helen." They saw a short, rather plump young woman with a pleasant face.

Paul thanked him and they followed the couple to a moderate-sized house facing onto the street. He showed them into a large room furnished with a number of stools and a couch. Helen called to a young Gaulish slave girl to bring in extra cushions and soon the whole company was seated.

Some of the men and women who had come to Theognis' house were familiar with the synagogue service. However after Paul's dynamic sermon on the previous Sabbath, many of the Greeks had brought friends and other members of their families. These people were unfamiliar with Jewish Law and custom. It was with this mixed group that Paul and Barnabas wanted to share their experience of Christian group worship of the church in Antioch.

²³² *Romans 3:19-22*

Barnabas with his strong baritone voice began, “Sing a new song to the Lord.”²³³

It was a well-loved psalm and the Jews joined in,
“Sing to the Lord, all the world!”

The hymn ended with the words:

“When the Lord comes to rule the earth

“He will rule the peoples of the world with justice and fairness.”

Cries of joy and exclamations of praise broke spontaneously from the people in the room.

Then Barnabas began to teach the group, followed by Paul, who gave them further teaching on the meaning of baptism. At the end about half of those present asked for baptism, but many begged them to speak again so that family and friends could hear this strange new message. After some discussion they decided that those wishing for baptism would meet later that afternoon on the banks of the river Antius which flowed round the foot of the hill on which Antioch stood.

Theognis invited them to stay for the midday meal. It was obvious he could not hear enough about Jesus and both he and his wife, Helen, longed for baptism and the new life. Later that day they were the first ones to be baptized.

The invitation to speak and the numbers of people who flocked to hear them continued. So much so they had to hold their meetings in the open air to accommodate all that came.

The popularity of their countrymen infuriated the leaders of the local synagogue. They refuted the things Paul and Barnabas taught as ‘utter nonsense’ and when it became clear many Gentiles and some Jews did not think it was, the accusations became more serious. They became ‘blasphemers and breakers of the Law’. Any Jew who was sympathetic to them faced expulsion from the synagogue. Some, afraid of the consequences, returned to the fold and stopped attending Paul and Barnabas’ meetings. When this still brought no end to their activities, the leaders came together to decide how to proceed.

This was no democratic Greek city, but one administered strictly according to Roman legal procedures. The emperor Augustus had settled the veterans from the Lark Legion there some fifty years previously to bring law and order to the bandit-infested areas of southern Galatia. Obscure religious wrangles over some foreign god was not a charge likely to impress the civic authorities.

²³³ *Psalm 96*

Seven of the most influential members of the local Hebrew community met to find a way to silence these trouble-makers.

Ezra, a scribe, led off by saying, “There is enough evidence of blasphemy for the Council of Elders to make a conviction and they could be sentenced to thirty-nine lashes. It is my experience that that generally cools a man down.”

There was a chuckle of agreement from one or two of those present.

The president of the synagogue, Nahum was a black-bearded, tall man with a strong physique who wielded a great deal of power, not only in the Jewish community but in the Gentile one as well. He gave a snort and said, “It is my experience that fanatics thrive on suffering for their cause.”

Another man, Jacob, whose trading contacts and contracts to supply the local garrison gave him considerable inside knowledge said, “The one thing the Romans fear is any disloyalty to the Emperor. If we could convince the authorities these men were preaching subversion they would be expelled from the city.

A thoughtful silence greeted this suggestion.

A man named Peleg asked, “And what would you tell the authorities? You can hardly expect them to take seriously this story of a man crucified sixteen years ago by Pontius Pilate as posing any threat today.”

A devout member of the congregation, Malachi, said “I think Ezra is right, they should be punished for blasphemy. It would be easy to find enough witnesses, because we all heard them preach that first Sabbath they were here.”

Nahum observed, “There’s nothing to stop us from having them up for judgement, but I’m telling you it won’t be enough. However I think there is also a way to develop Jacob’s suggestion.”

Another man, Simeon, said, “Yes, why not suggest to the Roman wives who attend the synagogue that these men are dangerous.”

The men looked at him in surprise and Peleg asked, “What do you mean?”

Simeon thought a moment and said, “Well, I don’t think it would take much, especially if our Council of Elders convicted them on blasphemy and we could make sure they know that under our Law this warrants a death sentence, but if we could also suggest that their activities are a threat to law and order – something along the lines that they disrupt the populace and stir it up and this is drawing the people away from their loyal allegiance to the Emperor.”

Nahum nodded his head, “Yes, I like that, subtle hints that there is a conspiracy brewing, something like that. The Roman authorities would have to act.”

Next day, the fourth day of the week, the hazzan was sent to summon Paul and Barnabas to a sitting of the local Sanhedrin for the following day.

The court consisted of twenty-three men of pure Jewish descent. It sat in the synagogue. In all rules of evidence, it paralleled the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem.

The hazzan came to the house of Hadassah about the ninth hour. Paul and Barnabas were planning a series of house meetings at the homes of those who had been baptised. Bertram informed his mistress of the visitor and Hadassah paled and sent him to call Paul and Barnabas. She realised the significance of such a visit since she was not unaware of the growing opposition amongst the leaders of the synagogue against the two men. She herself was undecided about their message and was worried their continued presence in her house might discredit her in the eyes of the Jewish authorities. Such an event would be a catastrophe. As a widow she needed the moral support of the community, especially as she provided acceptable accommodation for devout Jews visiting the city.

Paul and Barnabas came to her summons and saw by her face she was fearful.

"The hazzan is waiting for you," she told them and then added, "If you are in trouble with the Jewish authorities, I must ask you to leave."

Dismayed at the prospect, both men went to the front room where the hazzan was waiting. This man had no particular feelings about Paul and Barnabas and their activities but he knew who paid him and where his loyalty lay. He merely said, "You are summoned to appear before the council of Elders tomorrow at the third hour."

Barnabas asked, "On what charges?"

The hazzan said bleakly, "Blasphemy."

Paul said angrily, "What do you mean 'blasphemy'? On what occasion?"

The hazzan, who had delivered many summonses and was used to the reaction of outraged innocence on the part of the accused, replied, "You will meet your accusers tomorrow," he turned and left the house.

The two friends looked at each other in dismay. This was indeed bad news for their programme and for the little flock of new converts. Unlike Cyprus there were as yet no natural leaders such as Mnason in Salamis and Herakleides in Tamassus.

They turned to find Hadassah looking coldly at them. "I heard the charge and I ask you to leave."

Barnabas looked at her and said gently, "We are not yet found guilty, my sister."

Hadassah's voice rose in anger, "I don't have to hear the verdict to know your presence in my house does me and my children no good. Now go." She pointed to the door.

Paul sighed and also said quietly, "We will fetch our things. How much do we owe you?"

Slightly mollified that they were not making trouble, Hadassah said, "You owe for the four days of this week, since you paid already for last week."

They fetched their travelling bags and clothes. Barnabas paid Hadassah and they left. With one accord they walked down the street and through the bustling market place to Theognis' house. They found he had left for the gymnasium, but when Helen heard of their trouble she sent a Gaulish slave to fetch him. Then she bustled about getting the two women servants to prepare a guest room for them. She wasted no time on enquiring what had happened.

Helen saw their traveller's bags were put in the room, and then insisted they sat down in the courtyard and served them with wine. Thankful for her welcome and understanding the two men began to discuss the implications of the summons they had received.

Paul said, "You realise they mean to evict us from the city?"

Barnabas shrugged and said, "They have no authority to do that. I think they will beat us and try to frighten us into leaving of our own accord."

Paul said slowly, "You have never suffered the thirty-nine lashes, my friend. There is little chance we shall be 'leaving of our own accord' after such a beating."

Barnabas looked at his small companion with compassion. He had often seen the scars of Paul's beatings and wondered about them. "Let us pray for the Lord's blessing and guidance."

They both knelt and for a while there was only the soft murmur of them praying in tongues. Then Barnabas said, "You, O Lord, have charged us with this mission to preach the Gospel to all who would receive it. Now we lay before you the burden of our hearts. As the Jews rejected you and punished you, we offer up ourselves to share in whatever suffering may be required. We pray for strength to face our accusers and to forgive them even as you taught us. But above all we pray for these lambs, this little flock who look to you as their shepherd and saviour. Guide us how they may be protected and sustained should we not be able to bring them to full maturity in you."

He looked at Paul. He could see the thought of another beating was troubling him. In fact, he thought to himself, it should be troubling me. I have seen the result of such beatings and have even seen men permanently crippled, although that was not the intention.

He rose and placing his hand on Paul's head he added, "Fill this your child with confidence. Cast out all fear and let him know we are privileged sharers in your sufferings."

Paul's eyes filled with tears and he rose to embrace Barnabas. "Thank you my brother."

Soon after this Theognis arrived back and they told him of the summons and accusation with the probable punishment if they were found guilty.

Theognis looked horrified, "But how can you be accused of blasphemy? What have you said they could possibly interpret as being against God?"

Paul, who well knew how any point of Law could be stretched to cover any eventuality if required, sighed and said, "If that is the charge, they will certainly find some way to make us guilty of it."

Immediately a change came over Theognis, "Helen," he shouted, "Come here quickly."

Helen came running in alarm, "What is wrong, my husband?"

Quickly Theognis told her the charge and the probable result. Then he said, "Send message to Johanan and Stephanas." He thought a moment, "Yes, and Ebenezer and Demetruis as well. Tell the servants only to say the matter is urgent and I shall expect them at sundown this evening."

He turned back to Paul and Barnabas, who were looking at him in astonishment. Gone was the rather easy-going, good-natured Greek gentleman. Here was the successful and hard-headed man of commerce.

"Now," he said, "We need to plan for the worst and expect the best. First, what is likely to happen? Tell me exactly what you think."

Paul's eyes lit up. Here was someone after his own heart. Keen, efficient and enthusiastic. Suddenly he felt some of the burden of responsibility shifting from his shoulders.

Paul began, "Tomorrow we will appear before the court of twenty-three elders in the local synagogue, there we will be formerly accused and the evidence will be led. If it is sufficiently compelling they will not require more than one witness. We will then give our defence and the court will give judgement. After that we will be sentenced and the least we can expect is thirty-nine lashes in front of the judges."

Barnabas said, "He has received this punishment before. It leaves a man in a terrible state."

Paul answered, "It's not that which worries me, although it is not something I look forward to. Your group is not ready to be left on its own and we will not be in any condition to resume teaching for some time."

Paul stopped and his eyes grew sad. "I am sure they will find some way to force us to leave."

Barnabas looked at him, “They have no jurisdiction in a Roman city.”

“Maybe not,” replied Paul, “But there is more than one way to lose your money, if they really set their minds to it they will find some way to get rid of us.”

He was thinking of his ignoble descent from the walls of Damascus and how a few influential Jews had had the ear of the governor.

Barnabas had never seen his friend so depressed.

Paul repeated bleakly, “You are not ready to be left on your own.”

Theognis said, “Why do you think I have sent for those four men? You will need to show us what we must do to care for the brethren. Did you not tell us that Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would lead his followers into ‘All Truth’? Don’t you think that promise is for us too?”

Suddenly, like a cloak, the gloom dropped from Paul. He rose and embraced Theognis and said, “Bless you my brother. Forgive me my lack of faith.”

Later that evening when the other four men had arrived, Paul and Barnabas prayed with them and as they prayed the whole room was filled with the presence of the Risen Lord. Paul and Barnabas laid their hands on each of the five men and asked for God’s special blessing to guide them as they undertook the care of the little community of believers.

Barnabas said, “My brothers, in all things you are to be an example of good behaviour. As our Lord himself said, ‘You are like light for the whole world,’ so your light must shine before people so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven.”²³⁴

As the evening drew to a close, Theognis said, “Is there any special preparation you need to make for tomorrow?”

Paul answered, “If we receive the punishment I suspect they plan for us, then it would be a kindness if you can have a cart loaded with cushions to bring us home.”

The events of the next day followed along the lines Paul had predicted. The court pronounced sentence, which was carried out immediately. It was about a week later, just as the two men were recovering, that the eviction from the city which Paul had feared took place.

Helen, who had Greek friends still attending the synagogue was told that some of the Roman women had complained to their husbands of the two Jewish trouble-makers who were stirring up many Greek and even some of the local Phrygian people.

²³⁴ *Matthew 5:14 & 16*

Helen was most indignant when she heard the kind of rubbish that was being put around about Paul and Barnabas. She said, “They say you are teaching the people there is a king greater than the emperor and that this king is the only true God.”

“And then,” observed Theognis, “I suppose they say that we are being taught not to respect the emperor any more.”

Helen gave her husband a worried look, “What will you say when the time comes to offer sacrifices to the deified Emperor?”

If Theognis had thought about the matter, it did not seem to worry him, “That is unlikely, since I am not in public office.” They were sitting in the courtyard at the back of his house.

He turned to Paul and Barnabas and remarked, “It might be a good idea to make some provision for your future plans. I will send round to the others to join us.”

A little while later, when the other men had joined them, Theognis shared the news they had heard from Helen. The newly appointed elders pondered the problem.

Then Stephanas said, “I have a business friend in Iconium. I could give you a letter of introduction. Also my steward was due to fetch a consignment of carpets from him. It would be possible for him to depart earlier if necessary and not only keep you company on the road but show you where he lives.”

Johanan, a Jewish convert supported this suggestion. “I know members of the synagogue in Iconium and some of them would be glad to hear the message of salvation which you preach.”

Later two Roman soldiers arrived at Theognis’s house and demanded to know where the ‘two trouble-makers were hiding?’ The officer then delivered an order for Paul and Barnabas to leave Antioch ‘forthwith.’ Since they had been expecting the news, both men were ready and after fetching their travelling bags they were escorted to the gates of the city, where they waited for Stephanas’ steward.

CHAPTER 12: ON TO ICONIUM

CE 46 to CE 47 Spring

ACTS 14:1-25

Stephanas' steward was a tall, blue-eyed Gaul called Lutarius. He had a train of twenty donkeys and two Phrygian slaves to help him. For the outward journey to Iconium the donkeys were lightly laden with a mixture of trade goods so Paul, who was still suffering from his beating, was able to ride some of the way. Barnabas, whose physique was more robust, was glad to walk.

The distance to Iconium²³⁵ would require them to be three nights on the road.²³⁶ The end of summer could be felt in the cooler nights and the countryside was brown and dry and the roads dusty and full of traffic. Long caravans of camels, some with more than two thousand beasts, plodded up from Babylon and Damascus. Oxen pulling wagons loaded with bags of corn, and flocks of sheep all stirred the ever-present dust into choking clouds.

Lutarius told them a little of his own life story.²³⁷ "I belong to the Trocmi tribe. It was one of the three Gaulish tribes that conquered Asia Minor about two hundred and fifty years ago." He glanced at his companions, "We are a proud people, great horsemen and warriors but King Attalus of Perga defeated us and finally we had to submit to Rome. Emperor Augustus made us part of the new province of Galatia." He sighed, "We are a tamed people now, although some of our young men hunger for the heady days of old and take to the horses to go raiding. Then the Romans make us all suffer and many of us are sold into slavery."

"How did you come to be serving Stephanas?" Barnabas asked.

"My father decided he did not want his sons sold into slavery. He thought at least one of us should learn the art of trade and commerce so we would not be short-changed by dealers coming to trade for our fine horses. After a great deal of heart-searching my father approached Stephanas on one of his trading trips, as chief, he often entertained such men and he respected Stephanas as an upright and honest man. However when my father told me I had been bonded for seven years to him, I nearly took to the hills. I bitterly resented being sent away like that," he paused as he thought back.

"But you've come to accept it?" Barnabas's voice was gentle.

²³⁵ Distance from Pisidian Antioch to Iconium is about 96 kilometres

²³⁶ Iconium: Paul & Barnabas' visit CE 46 – Acts 14:1

²³⁷ Encyclopaedia Britannica 1959 Vol 5, Page 105 'Celt'

Encyclopaedia Britannica 1959 Vol 17, Page 852 'Phrygia'

Lutarius smiled, “I’ve not only ‘accepted it’, I realise how right my father was, there is so much more to the world than galloping horses on the open plain and holding wild raiding parties. My master has opened a door to the world for me.”

The road on which they travelled rose slowly. The mountains surrounding Antioch fell behind them to be replaced by a dry stone-covered plain fringed with blue mountains rising like islands from a brown sea. Only in the north did the flat plain vanish into brown distance. Groups of wild donkeys could be seen picking their way over the stony ground searching for food. They saw wild tribesmen with goat-hair coats, the skin inside and rough pelt outside, herding great flocks of sheep whose wool supplied the makers of rugs and carpets in Iconium.

On the third day a sudden burst of green gave welcome relief to the dusty plain. The sight reminded Paul of Damascus. A town on the edge of the desert, well-watered by the river which ran round it. Iconium, too, had plenty of water flowing from the mountains and creating a green oasis with orchards of fruit trees and gardens.

The town lay between twin peaks, and was the meeting place for five important caravan routes. Some of these caravans had been two years or more on the road. Iconium was thus a great commercial centre. Lutarius paid the taxes at the city gates on the donkeys and his trade goods and then leaving the beasts in the care of the two slaves, he took Paul and Barnabas to Stephanas’s friend, Onesiphorus, where he introduced them and handed over a letter. He then left to attend to his master’s business.

Onesiphorus read the letter with a puzzled frown on his face. “I don’t understand my friend Stephanas’ letter, but you are welcome to my home and perhaps you will be able to explain what he is writing about.”

Paul, who was still suffering from the effects of his beating, was desperately tired. So Onesiphorus’ wife, Penelope showed them to a room and later sent one of the servants with some food, so it was only the next day that Onesiphorus had a chance of finding out about his strange visitors.

When Paul and Barnabas explained they brought a message of salvation to all who would listen, Onesiphorus was not impressed. Religion was mostly a lot of rubbish and he had better things to occupy his time. However he remained courteous to his visitors and when they asked if he would like them to move to the local synagogue, he insisted they should stay.

On the morning of the Sabbath three days later, Paul and Barnabas rose feeling rested. Earlier when they had attended one of the synagogue services, they had received an invitation to address the congregation. Onesiphorus, who had business contacts with the Jewish community, asked if he might

accompany them. If he had thought at all about his motives, it was because he thought such a visit might be good for business.

What Onesiphorus heard on that Sabbath morning changed his life. He was not the only one who was deeply impressed and requests to teach more about this new 'Way' came from all sides. Many people were healed and before long everyone was arguing both for and against the teachings of this Lord Jesus.

Inevitably there were influential members of the Jewish synagogue who rejected the message. Not only was it too revolutionary, but it ran counter to the Torah, especially when they saw how Paul taught the Gentiles that it was not necessary for them to come under the Covenant and be circumcised before being baptised into the new faith. The fact that Paul and Barnabas were staying in a Gentile home also deeply offended many of the Jews.

Onesiphorus and Penelope, together with their three children were all baptised. Their home soon became the main meeting place and as autumn gave way to winter, Paul and Barnabas gradually built up a strong group of believers. For Onesiphorus and Penelope, their conversion had fundamentally changed them. However their young family found the long periods of prayer and fellow-shipping tiresome.

Polemarchus at sixteen, spent most of his day at the palaestra, he had some skill in wrestling and liked to compete in the local festivals. Niceratus was twelve and still learning music and poetry. He not only played the flute, he was also a chorister and sang with the other youths at the various festivals. Althea, a lively girl of fourteen, was full of laughter and song. Her best friend, Bernice was the only sister to Cephalus, to whom she was betrothed. (They were the children of her father's business partner.) Cephalus, a spotty youth, was likely to inherit a large fortune. He spent his days trying to improve his physique at the gymnasium or holding intent discussions under the auspices of his tutor, who had aspirations to be known as a scholar and a philosopher of the Stoic school.

Onesiphorus was worried about the pagan influences on his children. It was a part of the whole structure of their lives. With his knowledge of the Risen Christ, he realised their involvement in local religious rituals was incompatible with their new faith. His children had not objected to baptism, but they had obeyed their father and had no real understanding to that which they were now committed.

Barnabas could readily identify with his problem, for he himself struggled with the lack of faith in John Mark, although in his own family, the children had accepted Jesus as Lord. They had been younger and more easily guided into The Way.

Barnabas, in reply to Onesiphorus's worry said, "Even the Lord Jesus's own brothers did not come to believe in him until after his death. Faith does not come from without, but from an inner conviction."

Paul said firmly, "But children must obey their parents."

Penelope, who was spinning, said gently, "It is not that Althea does not obey me. She is a willing and obliging girl. It is more that her mind is on frivolous things."

Again Paul, not having raised his own children said confidently, "Oh, marriage will settle her down. Young girls are full of notions."

Penelope was not reassured, "She is betrothed to Cephalus, who is not a Believer. It pleases her that she will marry someone of substance." She sighed and added, "Even if he doesn't pay much attention to her at the moment."

Barnabas looked concerned, breaking a betrothal was a serious matter, but eternal life was even more important. He looked at Onesiphorus and felt he could not ask the question. Then he shook himself, he must at least try. "Is there no way to end the betrothal?"

Onesiphorus looked scandalized, "That is unthinkable."

The four adults lapsed into uneasy silence. They were sitting in a sheltered spot in the courtyard, where the sun could warm them and the ever present wind could not reach them. Paul suddenly realised he must address this problem of family relationships in the young church, but how? He lapsed into deep thought and then slowly lifted his spirit into the presence of Christ Jesus.

Barnabas, recognizing the signs turned to Penelope and said gently, "We must pray for guidance, not only for Althea, but also for Niceratus and Polemarchus. As our Lord's brother, James says, 'The prayer of a good person has a powerful effect.' And while you pray for your children, seek in every way to make your own lives a shining example of love and caring for others. In this way not only your children, but your slaves and friends will see you are followers of the Lord Jesus."

Penelope smiled at him, "Thank you, my brother. You encourage me not to despair."

It was in the month the Romans called March that things came to a head. The first spring rains had fallen and the countryside was covered in soft green. In Onesiphorus's home the children began to talk about the coming festival to Cybele, the Great Mother, which was celebrated all over Asia during this time.

Niceratus had announced during one meal, "I have been chosen to lead the boys' choir during the processions for the Great Mother."

His father and mother stopped eating and looked at their youngest son. Unaware of the impact of his remark, Niceratus said to Polemarchus, “Are you wrestling in the games after the festival?”

Polemarchus had noticed his parents reaction and looked at his father.

Onesiphorus said quietly, “No one in this family will take part in any of the ceremonies to a pagan goddess.”

Niceratus, his mouth full, stopped chewing and looked in amazement at his father.

It was Althea who wailed, “But I’m betrothed and I am to be dedicated to the Great Mother.”

Penelope said, “You are a Christian and when you were baptised you were dedicated to the Lord Jesus.”

Althea was stricken, “But can’t I be dedicated to both? Bernice and I are going together.”

Onesiphorus looked at Penelope. Here was a problem they had not considered. His business partner had no interest in this new faith. He was a hard man, and ruled his family like a tyrant. He would not take kindly to being told that Althea would not be taking part with Bernice in the festival, especially as her dedication this year was a part of her preparation for marriage to his son.

Barnabas could see this previously pagan household was in deep trouble. He looked across to where Paul was reclining. He too had stopped eating. Barnabas said gently, “Jesus once told his disciples that no one can serve two masters. You cannot possibly be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ and dedicated to a pagan goddess.”

Althea burst into tears and ran from the room. Penelope looked apologetically at Barnabas and rose to go after her.

Polemarchus said, “We did not choose to be baptised, our parents insisted....”

He caught his father’s furious eye and became silent.

Paul looked across to where Onesiphorus was sitting and said, “My friend, we need to address this matter. I suggest you call a meeting of the brethren – especially those who are not sure of where they stand in relation to pagan practices and we will show you the Way of the Lord.”

Onesiphorus would have liked to have dealt with his family’s affairs before confronting the rest of the brethren, but he hardly felt he could tell Paul that, so he remarked, “Tomorrow evening the brethren will be meeting here in any case, will that be soon enough?” Paul nodded.

Onesiphorus asked Barnabas to say the concluding grace.

Later Barnabas said to Paul, “This family has a big problem, perhaps we should leave them to work through it.”

Paul looked in amazement at his friend, “How can they possibly ‘work through it’ without knowing the right way? We must make sure they have no doubt about what is required of those who follow the Lord Jesus.”

Barnabas looked troubled, “But here is a divided family. Yes, they were all baptised, but you heard Polemarchus, the children obeyed their parents in this. They had not made their own commitment. You cannot force someone into the faith.”

Paul was not deflected. He merely reiterated, “They must be taught the right way.”

The next evening a large number of families, pagan and Jewish, men, women and children, gathered in the courtyard of Onesiphorus’ house. The night was cold but clear. Braziers were lit and people were wrapped warmly in cloaks, apart from some stools for older folk, people had brought their own cushions. Torches in the sconces on the walls gave a flickering light, and a lampstand stood near a table on which a scroll was placed.

The worship began with a hymn and then Barnabas rose and went to the table, “Brother Paul has asked me to read from the prophet Isaiah.” He took the scroll from its cover and after finding the place began to read in Greek, “All those who make idols are worthless, and the gods they prize so highly are useless. Those who worship these gods are blind and ignorant.” Barnabas had doubts whether this particular passage was going to help.

“The people who make idols are human beings and nothing more....The metalworker takes a piece of metal and works with it over a fire. His strong arm swings a hammer to pound the metal into shape. As he works, he gets hungry, thirsty and tired.

“The carpenter measures the wood. He outlines a figure and makes it in the form of a man, a handsome human figure, to be placed in his house. He might cut down cedars to use, or choose oak or cypress wood from the forest. Or he might plant a laurel-tree and wait for the rain to make it grow.”

Barnabas saw everyone was listening, including, he was glad to see out of the corner of his eye, Onesiphorus’ sons.

“A man uses part of a tree for fuel and part of it for making an idol. With one part he builds a fire to warm himself and bake bread; with the other part he makes a god and worships it. With some of the wood he makes a fire; he roasts meat, eats it, and is satisfied. He warms himself and says, ‘How nice and warm! What a beautiful fire!’ The rest of the wood he makes into an idol, and then he bows down and worships it. He prays to it and says, ‘You are my god – save me!’

“Such people are too stupid to know what they are doing. They close their eyes and their minds to the truth. The maker of idols hasn’t the wit or the sense to say, ‘Some of the wood I burnt up. I baked some bread on the embers and I roasted meat and ate it. And the rest of the wood I made it into an idol. Here I am bowing down to a block of wood!’”

“It makes as much sense as eating ashes. His foolish ideas have so misled him that he is beyond help. He won’t admit to himself that the idol he holds in his hand is not a god at all.”

Barnabas paused and looked round the listening group, then he concluded, “The Lord says, ‘Israel, remember this; remember that you are my servant. I created you to be my servant, and I will never forget you. I have swept your sins away like a cloud. Come back to me; I am the one who saves you.’”²³⁸

Barnabas rolled up the scroll and replaced it in its cover.

A deep voice began to sing, “The Lord is my light and my salvation;
‘I will fear no one.’”²³⁹

Those that knew the psalm joined in, and those that were not familiar with the words contributed to the harmony. Paul was deeply moved by this choice of psalm. In spite of his apparent assurance to Barnabas, he felt uncertain how best to reach these new converts, surrounded as they were by a strongly pagan society. How to protect them? They did not have the teachings of the Law and the Prophets ingrained into them like the Jewish believers, yet they had responded with spontaneous joy to the Good News of Jesus Christ. As he reflected, the final words of the psalm lifted and opened his spirit to receive the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

“I know that I will live to see
The Lord’s goodness in this present life.
Trust in the Lord.
Have faith, do not despair.
Trust in the Lord.”

There were others beside Paul who found encouragement in the words of the psalm. Onesiphorus and Penelope, sitting in separate groups looked across the courtyard at one another and smiled.

Paul rose from his seat and stood in front of the group. “My dear friends,” He began, “Keep away from the worship of idols. You know yourselves how pagan rituals include not only drinking and sex but various disgusting practices including that of self-inflicted injuries. You, who are baptised into

²³⁸ *Isaiah 44:9-22*

²³⁹ *Psalms 27*

Jesus Christ, are now the temple of God. God's Spirit lives in you! Therefore keep yourself pure and holy."²⁴⁰

The house of Onesiphorus was separated by a narrow alley from the house next door. A window of this house looked down into the courtyard where the brethren were sitting, and framed by the window, was the outline of a young girl. She was listening as intently as any of those in the courtyard below.

Paul's voice grew stronger, "When we take the cup in the Lord's Supper, we give thanks to God and when we drink from it, we are sharing in the blood of Christ. The bread we break; when we eat it, we are sharing in the body of Christ. Because there is one loaf of bread, all of us, though many, are one body, for we all share the same loaf.

"Consider the people of Israel; those who eat what is offered in Sacrifice share in the altar's service to God. Do I imply, then, that an idol or the food offered to it really amounts to anything?"

He looked and saw every one was listening. "No! What I am saying is that what is sacrificed on pagan altars is offered to demons, not to God. And I do not want you to be partners with demons. You cannot drink from the Lord's cup and also from the cup of demons; you cannot eat at the Lord's table and also at the table of demons."²⁴¹

Paul raised his voice and declared, "Do not fool yourselves; people who worship idols, or are immoral or adulterers or homosexual perverts or who steal or are greedy or are drunkards or who slander others or are thieves – none of these will possess God's Kingdom.

"Some of you were like that. But you have been purified from sin; you have been dedicated to God; you have been put right with God by the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

He needed to drive home this lesson of purity. Many of his listeners had been brought up in a pagan society and had not questioned the practices associated with the worship of idols.

"The body is not to be used for sexual immorality, but to serve the Lord; and the Lord provides for the body. God raised the Lord from death, and he will also raise us by his power.

"You know that your bodies are parts of the body of Christ. Shall I take a part of Christ's body and make it part of the body of a prostitute?"

He glared at them, "Impossible! Or perhaps you don't know that the man who joins his body to a prostitute becomes physically one with her? The scripture says quite plainly, 'The two will become one body.' But he who joins himself to the Lord becomes spiritually one with him.

²⁴⁰ 1 Corinthians 3:16

²⁴¹ 1 Corinthians 10:14-21

“Avoid immorality. Any other sin a man commits does not affect his body; but the man who is guilty of sexual immorality sins against his own body.”

His eyes grew soft and his face filled with an inner light. “Don’t you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and who was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourselves but to God; he bought you for a price. So use your bodies for God’s glory.”²⁴²

Paul returned to his seat, he could see his listeners were inspired and helped. He thought of the spring festival dedicated to the Great Mother and was aware of the tensions which would tear the Iconium community apart. He seemed to withdraw into himself as he began to pray for this group of believers.

The time of worship came to an end and still Paul was praying. Barnabas motioned that he was not to be disturbed and he bade those present good night and saw them out.

The next day, the girl who had listened in the upstairs window, sought out Althea to ask about the man who had spoken. Althea at fourteen, was four years younger than Thecla.²⁴³ But being neighbours, they had grown up alongside one another.

Althea was surprised at Thecla’s interest and in spite of herself, she was impressed that this older girl should want to know more about Paul’s teachings.

Althea tried to answer Thecla’s questions and found to her surprise the more she explained, the clearer her understanding of the effect of Jesus Christ in a person’s life became. Suddenly she knew that there was no way a person could offer her body to the Great Mother and not betray Jesus. As her mind began to accept the teaching she had rejected, she began to cry and Thecla, not quite understanding Althea’s conflict, hugged her and cried with her.

Penelope came in on them with alarm, but Althea ran to her and said, “Mother I know brother Paul is right, there is no way I can offer my girdle to the goddess and still be faithful to Jesus.”

“Thank God!” Penelope hugged her daughter.

The festival of Cybele began on the day of the spring equinox.²⁴⁴ Participants had days of preparation beforehand ending when the young maidens went to pick the laurel leaves to make the garlands. It was the day before the festival was due and Bernice came to fetch Althea to go with the maidens to the laurel groves surrounding the temple of Cybele. When Althea

²⁴² 1 Corinthians 6:9-20

²⁴³ There is a whole legend of Thecla of Iconium who preserved her virginity for the sake of her faith through many varied and wonderful adventures. Her story goes back at least to the 2nd century.

²⁴⁴ Cybele: Spring Festival : Iconium – Cybele Endnote

said she was not going, Bernice could not believe her ears. Horrified she ran home to tell her brother, Cephalus. He, mimicking his father's autocratic stride walked round to Onesiphorus's house. There he found his betrothed and her family were adamant. He left in a high temper and found his father, Callias to inform him. Callias in turn went to Onesiphorus. In the meantime Thecla's behaviour was giving her family cause for worry. She spent her days waiting at her window in the hope of hearing Paul speak again. The young man to whom she was betrothed, Thamyris, lost patience with her and decided that if Paul was eliminated Thecla would 'come right'. Similar tensions affected other Gentile families and soon the heads of families began to meet to decide what action to take.

The Jews who had opposed Paul and forbidden him to speak in the synagogue were delighted to hear of the growing opposition to him in the Gentile community and one of the officials in the synagogue was delegated to approach the Gentile community to decide on joint action.²⁴⁵

The first day of the festival of the Great Mother began. The chief priest, priestesses and eunuchs, dressed in women's clothes and like the women, with long perfumed hair, paraded through the whole city. They carried a branch of the sacred pine tree, symbol of Attis, before taking it to the sacred laurel grove and temple of the Great Mother on the banks of the river. The young god, Attis was represented in the procession by an extremely handsome young man, Melanthius. He was the only son of Gentile friends of Onesiphorus and Penelope. It grieved them to think of the sacrifice he was making.

The Christian families kept themselves at home and spent the day in prayer and fasting, interceding for those members of their families involved in the pagan festivities. In particular Onesiphorus prayed for Melanthius and his parents.

The dedication of a young man to the Great Mother, in the role of Attis was not an annual event and it meant there was even greater attendance than usual of the surrounding tribesmen, who anyhow used the four day festival for trading. Their encampment on the outskirts of town with the setting up of booths and trading stalls, attracted in turn traders from other centres, until the whole town was full to over-flowing.

It was with some satisfaction that the organisers of the festival noted there was no dropping off in the numbers of people attending it. Irate people who wanted direct action against Paul and his big friend, were told to wait until after the festivities. Advice with which the Jewish sector agreed, pagan festivities were always a time of anxiety in their community.

²⁴⁵ *Jews: Opposition to Paul in Iconium – Acts 14:1*

Tension also filled many Christian homes. Polemarchus and Niceratus were far from reconciled to missing the whole celebration. Niceratus especially resented not being able to take the lead place in the boys' choir but there was no chance for him to disobey his parents' strictures. For Polemarchus it was a different matter. He had had considerable freedom of movement since he started to attend the palaistra and he was determined to see the rite of the Taurobolium. He had thus made out to be completely reconciled to not attending and apparently partook of the times of prayer and fasting with whole-hearted dedication. His disappearance on the second day of the festival was not particularly remarked.

Polemarchus slipped out and found his fellow-students from the palaistra. They looked in surprise to see him without a garland and not in festival clothes. Between them they made a make-shift garland and since the day was cold, it seemed acceptable that some of them wore their short cloaks.

The Procession was gathering once more in the central market place of the town. A much garlanded six year old bull was to lead the procession to the mother's shrine. He was followed by a ram, sacred to Attis. Melanthius, in the role of Attis was surrounded by eunuchs and priestesses. He wore a long white robe and his hair was long and round it he wore a golden fillet. The bull moved slowly up the road, ropes round his neck neither guided nor held him. He seemed to move without urging, although he occasionally gave a questioning bellow, as if to ask where his cows were.

Polemarchus and his friends followed the whole procession as it wound through the streets and out to the temple, which was built on a low hill. In front of the temple a trench had been dug, Melanthius removed his robe and climbed down, a grating was laid over him. A Choir of young boys sang hymns of praise to the Mother while the bull was stood over the grating and further ropes were attached to his feet to restrain him. When the time came, the high priest came forward and raising the knife, swiftly cut the bull's neck. With a roar and a plunge, the animal turned on the priest, but the ropes held him, and a second cut severed the jugular vein. Blood poured through the grating onto Melanthius beneath. The bull sagged to his knees and as his life's blood drained, he rolled over onto his side.

The grating was opened and with a shout of triumph the Melanthius emerged, covered with blood, which purified him and made him an acceptable offering to the Great Mother. Then the ram was led forward and in honour of the purified 'Attis', it too was sacrificed. The high priest, priestesses and eunuchs then led Melanthius into the temple precincts. There was a clash of cymbals and beat of drums as those in the service of the Mother began to dance, Melanthius with them. The choir sang and the whole crowd

drew near to the temple watching and waiting for Melanthius's moment of irreversible dedication to the goddess.

The drums began to take on a hypnotic rhythm, the dancers whirled and spun. The hair, both of the women and the castrated priests swirled out from their heads. The day wore on and still the dancers pounded and spun, the frenzy of their movement increasing until with total abandonment they pulled knives from their robes and began to slash themselves. Such was their hypnotic state, no blood appeared. Finally Melanthius drew a knife and taking his testicles in his hand, he emasculated himself. With a shout of triumph he threw his manhood before the statue of the Great Mother and collapsed before her. The cymbals and drums gave one last crash and were silent. Slowly the eunuchs and priestesses began to rouse from their hypnotic frenzy and turned to attend to the youth lying in front of the goddess.

Polemarchus had more or less known what was going to happen, but the sight of the blood-covered Melanthius spinning and turning with the other priests and priestesses began to worry him. The throbbing drums and wildly played flutes made his blood run faster and faster. He felt caught up in the excitement and yet a part of him held back, comparing what he saw with the words Paul had spoken. With the final crash of drums and cymbals he found tears running down his face. Confused and ashamed he turned away and ran for home.

For the Pagan community the rest of the day was spent in fasting and mourning for Attis's lost manhood.²⁴⁶

Meanwhile Onesiphorus asked Penelope where Polemarchus was on such a day. She could not remember seeing him leave the house and neither could any of the slaves. When the midday meal came and went, and he still had not made an appearance, they began to suspect he had joined the crowds at the temple of Cybele.

Onesiphorus had one of his rare rages. That his eldest son should deliberately defy an express order, and that he had gone to watch what he termed, "That filthy show," made him angrier than he could ever remember. Everything fed his rage. Penelope thought having Paul and Barnabas there had made matters worse. Polemarchus's defying his authority had strangers as witnesses.

²⁴⁶ References for the rites of Cybele, the Great Mother of the gods and Attis:
EncyEncyclopaedia Britannica (1959 ed) Vol 2 661d Attis
EncyEncyclopaedia Britannica (1959 ed) Vol 6 721c Criobulium
EncyEncyclopaedia Britannica (1959 ed) Vol 10 747b Great Mother of the gods
EncyEncyclopaedia Britannica (1959 ed) Vol 14 516a Worship of the Great Mother
EncyEncyclopaedia Britannica (1959 ed) and Attis
EncyEncyclopaedia Britannica (1959 ed) Vol 21 836a Taurobolium on March 24

Barnabas finally went to Onesiphorus and said gently, “Sometimes a young man needs to find out for himself where the truth lies.”

Onesiphorus grunted and walked out of the room.

It was Niceratus who seethed. He more than Polemarchus had wanted to attend the ritual because he had a leading role. His father’s rage made him tremble, but it did nothing to sooth his own feelings of being cheated of his rights. He wondered how he would face his friends and whether the choir master would accept him back seeing he had let him down. There was no one with whom he could discuss his worries.

Polemarchus realised his absence would have been noticed, but he had no idea of the turmoil it had created. He did not feel ready to face his family. His feelings were still too confused, so he decided to make his entrance quietly through the slaves’ quarters. A narrow door further down the alley and guarded by an old slave was opened at his soft tap.

The old man’s eyes widened as he saw Polemarchus, and he said in his rough Greek, “You in trouble. Your father angry. Better keep away.”

Polemarchus wondered what to do. Then his old nurse came and seeing him said, “You’ve created a fine mess, my boy,” but before she could elaborate Polemarchus suddenly burst into tears and she found herself comforting him as if he was still her baby.

She hugged and hummed to him, letting him cry himself out. Finally sniffing and wiping his eyes with his hand he said, “It was horrible. Melanthius... he... cut himself...”

“Hush, my child. I know what he did. He is now a servant of the goddess. She will care for him.”

“But I can’t believe that any more. He did it for nothing... a block of stone, like the prophet said.”

“Don’t you believe that my child,” said the old woman. “The Great Earth Mother gives life to all her creatures and cherishes them....”

Her words suddenly crystallized the muddled thoughts that had filled his mind all day. He straightened himself and asked, “Is my father angry?”

The old woman shuddered, “I’ve never seen him so upset.”

Polemarchus shut his eyes and then turning he strode across the slave’s courtyard, through an archway into the courtyard of the household, up the stairs on the far side and to his father’s room. He knocked and when told to enter he opened the door to find his mother, father and two guests sitting round a brazier.

Before his father could speak, he said, “Father, I have sinned against you and against heaven.” The words of the story which Jesus had told about the prodigal son, brought a deep silence to the room. Polemarchus continued, “I

had to see for myself what happened when Melanthius dedicated himself to the goddess. It was terrible.” His voice broke and he paused, “But I now know that what these fathers have taught us about Jesus the Christ is true and right. Will he forgive me for doubting?”

Onesiphorus rose and embraced his son. Penelope wiped the tears from her eyes and Paul and Barnabas said a quiet prayer of thankfulness.

It was Paul who surprised everyone by getting up and hugging the boy, saying, “My son, I was even worse than you, because I had been dedicated to the service of the Most High God since my youth, yet I not only did not believe in Jesus as the Christ, I actively went out to arrest and persecute those who did believe in him. Repentance brings salvation and a new life in Jesus Christ. What you have learned today, you will never forget.”

And so peace returned to the household, with much joy and thanksgiving.

The next day was the Sabbath. Paul and Barnabas went to the Synagogue as they always did. In spite of the antagonism of much of the Jewish community and the order by the president and elders that they were not to address the congregation, all the Jewish believers and some of the Gentiles converts, all attended Synagogue. This week in particular, with the Festival to Cybele, they felt in great need to affirm their faith in the God of their fathers.

After the service one of the older members of the congregation took Barnabas aside and said, “You are both in great danger. There have been discussions with the city’s magistrates and others concerning your continuing influence on the people of Iconium. A meeting is being arranged tomorrow to decide what to do with you.”

“What do you think they can do to us? We’ve not caused a riot, or broken any laws,” remarked Barnabas.

“I don’t think you appreciate how angry the leaders of the synagogue are. Many of the ‘God-fearers’ have left and no longer come to Synagogue for instruction. They feel your message is undermining their authority. It is the Jewish leadership who is pushing the city magistrates to take action,” replied the old man, “They suggest that you are corrupting more and more people. You know yourself how many families are divided since some members have been baptised into Jesus Christ, and now refuse to participate in the local festival.”

Barnabas nodded, “So what do you suggest?”

“I think you should leave Iconium as soon as possible. I suspect that on the last day of the festival, when there is much drinking and fights break out, especially amongst the tribesmen, some of the local bullies will drag you out and you will be stoned. It is the easiest way to eliminate you without the

bother of charges and a formal trial, and such incidents are not uncommon at festival time.” Zerah’s face was worried.

Barnabas said slowly, “Then Onesiphorus’ family is also at risk. I think you are right. It is time for us to move on. We were planning to leave soon and a few days earlier makes no difference to us.”

The old man smiled and said, “I think a few days will make all the difference to you!”

Barnabas took the point. “Yes, you are right, but that is hardly the argument that will make Paul leave. Thank you my friend. I will talk to Onesiphorus and we will make all haste to leave the city.”

When Barnabas spoke to Onesiphorus later that day, it was obvious that similar rumours had reached him, because he said, “I did not want to make you feel unwelcome, but yes, our brother is right, Callias is furious and has broken off the betrothal of Althea to Cephalus. For this I thank God, but he is a powerful man and makes a bad enemy.”

Barnabas was full of concern, “What of your business relationship with him?”

Onesiphorus shrugged, “Until the caravan returns from Babylon, we cannot break up the partnership. There are six of us who put money into the venture and while he probably won’t want to associate with me again, at least for the time being he’s stuck with me.”

Barnabas said, “Paul does not know all this yet, I think I must call him, so we can decide what to do.”

Paul had been at private prayer when Barnabas found him and said, “You need to know something. Will you come down to talk with Onesiphorus.”

To Barnabas’s amazement Paul looked straight at him and said, “It is time to leave Iconium.”

Whatever prompted Paul’s remark, Barnabas knew they were saved the difficulty of making Paul do something with which he did not agree.

Paul heard the news without surprise, merely remarking that , “The Lord had revealed we must go forward with our mission.”

Onesiphorus said, “There are still two days of the festival to run. Tomorrow people will start cooking vast quantities of food and they will be at home. It is on the final day that we can expect trouble because then comes the climax with much drinking and licentiousness. I think we should try to get you out of the city tonight. It will look strange for people to be leaving early but if you go at night, few will notice.”

There was some discussion as to whether they should return to Antioch, but Paul was adamant, “The Lord said, ‘Go forward’, not back.”

Onisephorus remarked, “If you go to Lystra, I know no one with whom you can stay. There is no synagogue and while it has a Roman garrison, the townspeople are Lycaonians and don’t speak Greek,” he thought a moment and then said, “I have a slave who comes from Lystra. Let me call him.”

Barnabas asked, “Can he be trusted?”

“Oh, he’s a good enough fellow. If he has a chance to visit his family I am sure he will see you come to no harm.”

CHAPTER 13: TO LYSTRA AND DERBE

SPRING TO LATE AUTUMN 47

ACTS 14:8-14
2 TIMOTHY 1:5
GAL 4:13

The slave that Onesiphorus gave them as guide was an older man. He had fair hair, a large shaggy beard streaked with grey, piercing blue eyes and an unpronounceable Gaulish name. His Greek name was Theron. He was a buyer for Onesiphorus and was used to travelling the back roads of the country buying rugs and carpets from the villagers and paying for them in goods.

They left Iconium on a bitterly cold, windy night with a threat of rain and certainly not conducive to casual encounters. The horses supplied by Onesiphorus were hardy and shore-footed. The road to Lystra had been made under the orders of Caesar Augustus when he chose it for his Roman garrison, the surface was good and they had no delays.

They arrived exhausted the following evening. Theron, who spoke little proved resourceful and reliable. His own family lived in the district, but a relative lived in Lystra itself and although the house was small, they received a warm welcome. Paul and Barnabas were shown a small back room where the woman of the house brought them a simple meal of lentils flavoured with a handful of herbs. After which they thankfully went to an early rest.²⁴⁷

The next day Theron left them to visit his family and to make arrangements for the care of the horses. Onesiphorus had suggested Theron stayed on with Paul and Barnabas to act as interpreter since the local population spoke Gaulish dialects. Theron promised to be back in two or three days.

Paul and Barnabas left their lodging to walk round the town which was situated on a long low hill in a secluded valley at the junction of two broad streams. The houses were small with little to indicate the influence of Rome. The only Greek influence they had seen was when they passed a temple dedicated to Zeus just outside the city the previous evening. They made their way to the main square and saw that the people were busy and energetic, a mixture of fair-headed Gauls and dark haired, brown-eyed indigenous people, who seemed to co-exist in a harmonious way.

²⁴⁷ *Lystra: Paul & Barnabas arrival CE 47 – Acts 14:8*

Barnabas asked, “How are we to preach to these people who have no Greek?”

Paul replied confidently, “The Lord will provide someone.”

At which moment a man approached them and speaking passable Greek said, “I see you are visitors to our town. Let me guide you and act as your interpreter when you want to do business.”

Paul looked at Barnabas and smiled, then he said, “We are not here to trade, my friend, but you can help us, because we bring Good News which we would share with the people of this town.”

The man looked surprised. “I charge a denarius²⁴⁸ a day as a guide, so if you are willing to pay me, I will interpret for you for the same price.”

Barnabas was not impressed and said, “We do not require your services for the day and a denarius is too much,” he turned away.

“No, wait,” said the man, “In that case I would charge five As²⁴⁹.”

Barnabas was still unimpressed and made to walk on.

Finally the man said, “If it is just for the morning, I would accept three As.”

Barnabas nodded, “In that case we would accept your offer.”

Paul asked, “Where is a good place for us to address the people?”

The man pointed across the square to a slight rise. They made their way through the stalls, penned sheep and the general crush and hubbub of a market day.

With confidence, Paul stood on the rise and looking across the square he lifted his hand and began in a loud and carrying voice, “People of Lystra, we come to you, bringing you Good News of salvation.” It was the first time Paul addressed a crowd of pagans who had no knowledge of the God of the Jews. Always he had begun his mission in a new town from the synagogue with its following of Greek-speaking God-Fearers and converts. Now he had to start from no common point of understanding. How to reach them?

His opening words had turned some curious faces towards him. “We are here to announce the Good News of the Living God, who made heaven, earth, sea and all that is in them. We are here to tell you of Jesus the Anointed One of God, who came to earth and lived in Galilee of Judaea. He was crucified and died, but I am here to testify that he rose from the dead and lives!”

The interpreter struggled with the strange concepts. The crowd had heard this kind of thing before. Many of the gods came to earth. It is true that some of the mortals who met with them were given immortality but not nowadays.

²⁴⁸ A silver coin often translated in the Bible as a penny

²⁴⁹ The smallest Roman coin with a value of about 1/13th part of a penny

Anyhow there was business to transact and no time to listen to some wandering preacher.

Paul could see he had lost his audience. Then his eye fell on a man sitting nearby. His legs were badly deformed, and it was obvious he lived from begging. He was not old but his deformity gave him the appearance of age.

Paul saw the man had been listening attentively and was still looking fixedly at him.²⁵⁰ He knew this man, pagan and unlearned as he was, yet had the faith to be healed. Looking straight at him in a loud voice Paul commanded, “Stand up straight on your feet!” The interpreter translated the words in an even louder voice and people turned round to see what was happening.

The crippled man jumped up. He did not stop to think that it was impossible for him, and to the amazement of all who knew him, including himself, he walked around. His shouts of joy turned other heads and soon the word was spread throughout the market place that the cripple was healed by the little preacher.

The result was beyond the imagination of Paul and Barnabas. Their interpreter fell to the ground in abeyance. People were shouting and pointing, and many ran up to kiss their hands and feet. It was acutely embarrassing to the two friends, they tried to speak, but the crowd was far too excited.

Barnabas asked their interpreter, “What is happening? Why are the people so excited.”²⁵¹

“They say the gods have come to visit their town again.”

“What do you mean?” asked Paul.²⁵²

“We have a story that Zeus came with Hermes to Lystra in the form of men, and now we know the story is true, for you have come again.”

“That’s rubbish,” replied Paul, “You can see we are men just like yourself.”

The interpreter was far from convinced and looked frightened. Barnabas said, “Do you think Zeus would quibble over the price of a day’s work?”

A faint frown crossed the man’s face. In the meantime people were running in all directions.

Paul asked, “What’s happening?”

The interpreter said nervously, “They have gone to call the priest of Zeus at the temple. They want to offer sacrifices to you.”

Barnabas and Paul were filled with horror. They tore their clothes and ran into the milling crowd, shouting and begging them to stop. They were caught

²⁵⁰ Paul: *Heals crippled man in Lystra – Acts 14:8*

²⁵¹ Barnabas: *In Lystra thought to be Zeus – Acts 14:12*

²⁵² Paul: *In Lystra thought to be Hermes – Acts 14:12*

up in the movement of the crowd towards the city gates and the temple of Zeus. In the crush they lost the interpreter and were unable to make themselves understood.

When they reached the gates, they saw the priest of Zeus was already leading two garlanded bulls towards them, and young boys had flowers ready to make into more garlands.

Nothing Paul nor Barnabas said could penetrate the noise and excitement. Finally Barnabas gave a great roar of anger which needed no interpreting.

They heard the people in the crowd say nervously, "Zeus is angry." There was a degree of silence into which Paul, suddenly seeing the interpreter, beckoned to him. Again voices could be heard saying, "Hush, Hermes wants to say something."

An expectant hush fell on the crowd. Paul making sure the interpreter was beside him said, "Why are you doing this? We ourselves are only human beings like you. We are here to announce the Good News, to turn you away from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven, earth and all that is in them."

The crowd was not going to listen for long, Paul continued, "In the past God has allowed all people to go their own way. But he has always given evidence of his existence by the good things he does."

The interpreter kept up with Paul and in the pause before he continued a voice in rough Greek shouted, "What things?"

"He gives you rain from heaven and crops at the right times; he gives you food and fills your hearts with happiness."

The crowd wanted to get on with the sacrifice, but when they saw it upset 'Zeus and Hermes' they turned, muttering with puzzlement to go back to their trading. The priest of Zeus, who had been dragged out to meet 'the gods' was far from pleased at the debacle. It made a mockery of his position, just as these two men were making a mockery of Zeus and Hermes.

Gradually the crowd drifted away and just a few of the curious were left talking to the man who had been healed. Paul turned to him and through the interpreter said, "You have been healed through Jesus Christ, the son of the only living God."

The man, whose name was Khacan asked the interpreter, "Who is this Jesus Christ, that I may worship him? Surely such a god is powerful and worthy of honour."

The small group of people also murmured their agreement.

When Paul heard the tone of the question he asked, "Is there some place where we can go so that my friend and I may teach you?"

After a few moments discussion, the interpreter said, “If you would honour me in my poor home, you are welcome to come, for I want to hear more myself.”

“What is your name my friend?” Asked Barnabas.

“Artemas, sir,” he replied.

The small party followed him through the streets and down a narrow alley. His house was indeed small. He had a young wife and three little children. The front door opened into the main room and an archway showed a small sleeping area where the sleeping mats had been neatly rolled up and stacked. Another door led out into a tiny courtyard at the back. A fig tree was the only growing thing and the party of curious listeners sat themselves on the ground, while Paul and Barnabas were provided with low stools.

Barnabas explained their mission and from where they had come. His listeners were men and women of the poorer section of the community, who mostly had no education. Yet this strange tale gripped them.

Then Paul began to teach, “When God sent Jesus to live amongst us, he revealed the secret he had hidden through all past ages from all mankind but it is now revealed to his people. God’s plan is to make known his secret to his people.”²⁵³

His listeners drank in every word the interpreter gave them.

“This rich and glorious secret which he has for all peoples, including you, is that Christ is in you through baptism and you can share in the glory of God.”

For a moment there was silence. Then a woman asked, “What is this ‘baptism’?”

Barnabas looked at this little group of strangers. He was not at all sure they understood and were ready for baptism. He thought Paul was rushing things.

He asked doubtfully, “Do you really understand what we are telling you? The Israelites are God’s chosen people, whom you may know as ‘The Jews’. God promised to our forefather Abraham, that through him, all the peoples of the world would be saved. This promise was made many generations ago. But now in our own life-time we have seen the fulfilment of this promise through the one we call the ‘Anointed One of God,’ Jesus. He fulfils all the promises made to our people since the time of Abraham.”

The interpreter was obviously impressed by what he was translating to his listeners. He communicated this to them by the conviction in his voice and they nodded in understanding.

²⁵³ Col 1:27

One of the older men said, “I have heard about these Jews. Don’t they insist on circumcising their men?”

The others looked shocked.

“Yes,” replied Barnabas, “Circumcision is a sign of the Covenant God made with Abraham and we who are Jews are the people of the Covenant, but God has opened a new way to graft even those we call Gentiles into God’s holy family. This new Way is through Jesus, as my brother, Paul has told you.”

The man who had been healed said firmly, “Well if this Jesus has healed me through these men here. I want to be part of their family!”

Laughter greeted this remark. Paul said, “There is much more you need to know, but it is late. When can we meet together with you again?”

After some discussion in which several people said they wanted to bring friends to hear the ‘Good News’, it was agreed that they would have to find a larger place. The problem with an outside venue was the bitter cold. Finally it was agreed to meet the following evening, and Artemas undertook to approach a certain man for whom he had done some work to ask if they could use his courtyard, which was relatively large and sheltered. He also agreed to come to Paul and Barnabas’s lodgings and fetch them in good time.

The next evening, Artemas took Paul and Barnabas to a much larger house in the upper part of town. The moment they reached the front door they saw a mezuzah on the door post and Paul stopped. “I thought you said this was a Greek family?”

The interpreter asked, “The man I work for is Greek.”

Paul pointed to the delicately engraved bronze tube, which held the portion of scripture appointed by Moses in the book of Deuteronomy²⁵⁴. He turned to Barnabas, “This householder must be married to one of our people.”

Barnabas nodded his agreement.

The door was opened Paul and Barnabas were not taken, as expected to the courtyard, but to an upstairs room. Presently a tall serious-looking man, with grey hair, came in and greeted them. “I am Lamachus.” He stopped, seeing the clothing of his visitors, “Artemas did not tell me you were Jewish teachers.”

Barnabas said, “We saw the mezuzah on the door-post and when Artemas told us you were Greek, we wondered if you have a Jewish wife?”

Lamachus smiled, “Yes, my wife’s name is now Eunice,²⁵⁵ for the day I married her was truly a ‘Happy Victory’ for me, and since her mother was widowed, she also lives with us, for I travel much and I am away for long

²⁵⁴ Deut 6:9

²⁵⁵ Eunice: *Of Lystra* – 2 Timothy 1:5

periods, so she is company for Eunice. But let me call them, they will be delighted to have fellow-countrymen to visit. I know they miss fellowship with those of their faith.”

Lamachus turned to a young man, “Timothy, call your mother and grandmother to come and meet these visitors.”²⁵⁶

A youth, not yet old enough to shave, dressed in the short tunic of a Greek student, ran down the stairs into the kitchen area.

In the meantime the people who wanted to hear Paul and Barnabas began to arrive and were shown into the courtyard. First was Khacan, he had brought a friend who hobbled in on crutches. Khacan’s face was shining with excitement as he reassured the man, obviously for the umpteenth time that he was welcome.

Young Timothy returned, followed by two women. Lamachus motioned to Paul and Barnabas. “This is my wife, Eunice. My dear, we seem to be entertaining two of your countrymen. This is my mother-in-law, Lois.²⁵⁷ She is truly ‘good and desirable’!” The gentle compliment obviously touched the older woman.

The two men saw that Eunice was a tall, stately woman, with a grave beauty. She was younger than her husband. Her hair was dressed, as was she, in the Greek manner, and they would not have known her for a Jewess. Her mother on the other hand, still dressed with the traditional clothes of her countrymen. Her head was covered and from her brown wrinkled face, two dark eyes sparkled.

It was Lois who spoke, “My sons, you are an answer to prayer. Now I know that the Holy One, Blessed be He, hears the petitions of his children!”

Barnabas greeted her gravely and introduced them both, “I am Joseph of the tribe of Levi, from Cyprus, and my friend here, is Saul of the tribe of Benjamin from Tarsus.”

Lois looked at her daughter, who hesitated and then spoke to her husband, “My lord, would it be acceptable to you if these fellow-countryman stayed with us?”

Lamachus replied, “You know you are welcome to invite whom you will,” he turned to Paul and Barnabas, “You will have much to tell one another. I am afraid that Lystra has no Jewish community and my wife and her mother feel greatly deprived.”

Both women looked at him in surprise. He smiled at them and said, “Do you think I cannot hear you discussing how far you can live according to your

²⁵⁶ Timothy: *A youth in Lystra – Acts 16:1*

²⁵⁷ Lois: *Timothy’s grandmother – 2 Timothy 1:5*

Law and how far you must live according to my wishes?” He gave a gentle laugh.

The noise of quite a substantial gathering came through the open door. Lamachus said, “Whatever you have to say, you obviously have aroused much interest. Perhaps it is time for you to give your message.”

Lamachus and the two women led Paul and Barnabas down the stairs into the large, sheltered courtyard, indeed there were about fifty people seated on the floor. Most of them were poor and some were obviously sick or crippled.

Barnabas looked at Paul. He wondered how he would address such a mixed group of people, he need not have worried.

Paul, who often looked small and insignificant seemed to fill out with the inner power he possessed through Christ, and the words flowed.

Barnabas could see that Paul’s talk was far above the heads of the simple people who had come to listen. He hoped that Paul would simplify the message.

The man with the crutches whispered to his friend, “What’s he talking about? I thought you said he could heal me?”

Khacan, who also could not understand Paul, said “Hush up and listen.”

Paul realised most of his listeners had no idea what he meant. It was difficult to know how to make contact with them. He paused a moment and prayed for guidance.

“I am a servant of God, who has given me this task to perform for your good. It is the task of fully proclaiming his message. We must warn and teach all who will listen. Warn, because those who reject the message we bring and remain slaves to sin, and the wages of sin is death.”²⁵⁸

The tone of Paul’s voice as he said these words, brought a sense of uneasiness to his listeners. Even if they only vaguely understood what he was saying, they yet recognized he was deadly serious. Paul continued in the same vein.

Artemas struggled with these strange concepts. But even so, his simple listeners shuddered.

The crippled man who had accompanied Khacan said, “I am me own master.” There was a ripple of laughter.

“What did he say?” Asked Paul. His remark was translated and Paul warned, “My friend, if you are then you are the slave of Satan.” There was a grim note in his voice.

He continued, “And there is only one way to be freed from the power of sin and death, you must be baptized into union with Christ Jesus. By baptism

²⁵⁸ *Romans 6:16*

your old sinful self will die to sin. Just as Christ Jesus, when he died on the cross, took the punishment that awaits us, and he suffered death in our place. But death could not hold him captive. Three days later he rose from death as Barnabas and I can both testify. He lives, and through baptism, we can live a new life.”²⁵⁹

His audience had begun to get the drift of his teaching, but it took some time before Barnabas could see that most of them really understood the message they were hearing. He looked across to where Lois and Eunice were sitting. He need have no worry there, their faces were filled with understanding and joy. He looked at Lamachus. He was not sure that he was convinced, but courtesy prevented him from leaving for more congenial activities.

Barnabas wondered about the youth, Timothy. His grandmother obviously had told him of the Law and prophets, but he had been brought up under his father’s influence, yet the boy was listening with attention.

By late most of those in the room were asking for baptism. Barnabas stirred and said, “You need further teaching.” Most of those present welcomed the suggestion and after some discussion it was agreed that they would meet the next day by the river where the women gathered to wash the clothes. Barnabas thought Lamachus did not look sorry.

Khacan approached Paul and asked something. Paul turned to Artemas who interpreted, “He says can you heal his friend, Kerim here, the same as you did him?”

Paul looked at the man. “It is not I who heal, but Jesus Christ and in his name I bid you stand up.” With wonder on his face he looked down at his legs and then back at Paul. Tears came into his eyes and he stood straight, letting his crutches fall to the ground. Those who saw fell back in fear. Paul said, “Give thanks to the Risen Lord, Jesus Christ.”

Others who were sick pressed forward for healing. Both Paul and Barnabas laid their hands on all who came. Not all were healed and to these people who turned away in disappointment, Barnabas said, “Come tomorrow, you need to know the full truth of the One who offers you salvation and healing, not just the body, but of your soul.”

The days soon became full. Some days they taught by the river and others in the market square. They visited the homes of those who invited them. Artemas became a loyal and staunch supporter with Khacan running messages whenever he was needed. When Theron finally returned to assist them, he found his services were not required and he returned to Iconium with

²⁵⁹ *Romans 6:3-4*

a letter (which Barnabas dictated to Artemas, who revealed yet another skill) telling Onesiphorus of their warm reception in Lystra.

In the evenings Paul and Barnabas stayed up late talking to Eunice and Lois, sometimes Lamachus sat with them, but often he excused himself. At first Lois was both shocked and disappointed that far from Paul being ‘A proper rabbi,’ as she had confidently told Timothy, he not only did not teach strict adherence to the halachah, but insisted that people who lived under the Law, were condemned and not saved by it. Later as she heard more of Paul and Barnabas’s teaching, she and Eunice became filled with faith and understanding of their new life in Jesus Christ.

Some days after Theron’s departure Barnabas remarked, “I think perhaps we were hasty in letting Theron go, I suspect Artemas’s family is suffering from all the work he does for us.”

Paul looked at him thoughtfully and nodded, “You are right my brother, have you been paying him anything?” Paul well knew they had little money left.

“No, when I pressed a denarius into his hand after that first day, Artemas refused it.”

Paul was impressed, “Did he say why?”

“Yes, he said, ‘You have more than repaid me with the gift of Eternal Life!’”

They discussed the problem with Lamachus, who had taken note of Artemas’ proficiency as a translator. When Lamachus asked if he could write and found he was an accomplished scribe, he offered him employment as his steward to replace an employee who had recently died. This happy arrangement, for secure employment was hard to come by in Lystra, meant Artemas was less available to Paul and Barnabas. It was soon decided to meet together in the evenings of each market day, which was held every fourth day – the Jewish week was not known in Lystra.

It was inevitable there was disagreement amongst the residents of Lystra concerning this new ‘god’ Christos, or whatever his name. The Roman garrison did not take much notice so long as the meetings were orderly, but the priests of Zeus soon recognized the threat to their livelihood and there were others who found faith in Christ often brought deep conflict into their homes.

The weather was now much warmer although the sudden downpours turned the country roads into red quagmires. The Roman road was open in all weathers and the caravans were moving in both directions. Paul and Barnabas had no premonition that their quiet teaching in Lystra was about to come to an end, and it was only later that they gained some idea of what provoked the storm.

One market morning Paul was sitting in what had become his accustomed place, teaching and answering questions. Artemas was with him as Lamachus let him help Paul as often as possible. Barnabas was teaching in another part of town. Suddenly the busy market scene was stirred by the arrival of several men on horseback. At first their presence did not alarm Paul and Artemas, but presently there came shouts and the crowd began milling about. The riders were talking through an interpreter and proclaiming some dire news. The crowd began to surge and grow angry, people pointed to where Paul was sitting and suddenly the whole scene exploded around Paul and Artemas. Paul looked up in surprise and found himself staring at some vaguely familiar Jewish faces. He was grabbed by rough hands and flung to the ground. Artemas and the people around him ran back in fear as the first rock crashed down onto Paul.²⁶⁰

It all happened so quickly and Artemas saw there was nothing he could do to help Paul so he sent Kerim to find Barnabas. The rocks continued to pound down on Paul's unprotected body, when it was obvious he was dead, the crowd dispersed and two of the public slaves dragged his body outside the city's walls, leaving him lying on the rubbish dump.

Artemas and some of the other believers, who had followed at a distance, ran crying and wailing to retrieve Paul's body. They gathered round him, and to their joy and amazement, Paul gave an agonised groan. With help he struggled up and supported on both sides walked slowly back into town. Avoiding the market square, and going through the narrow back streets, the party surrounding Paul finally reached Lamachus's home.

There were black bruises on Paul's head, his eyes were swollen shut and he was bruised and bleeding from numerous cuts on his body. Under Lois's watchful eye Paul was helped to his room. A young slave girl helped Lois to put healing salve on the cuts and bruises who then gave him a drink to ease the pain whereon he lapsed into a semi-conscious sleep.

To Lois's relief, Barnabas finally returned with Kerim. They had searched fruitlessly for Paul in the city and had seen the Jewish party being escorted up to the Roman garrison, obviously to give an account of themselves. This meant that with a near riot on market day, Paul would be unable to preach publicly, at least for a while.

Lamachus, who had contacts with the Roman authorities discovered the situation was far more serious than even Barnabas supposed. It appeared that the Jews who had stirred up the crowd against Paul had come from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium with the express intention of exposing Paul as a

²⁶⁰ *Paul: Stoning in Lystra – Acts 14:19*

dangerous revolutionary.²⁶¹ Their report to the Roman governor had alarmed him.

“If the authorities discover Paul survived the stoning, you can be sure they will arrest him and he will be further beaten.” Lamachus’s face was grim, these men were causing him a grave embarrassment.

“Then we should leave as soon as possible for Derbe,” Barnabas remarked.

The group who had accompanied Paul back to Lamachus’s house had waited to hear how he was.

“Where will you stay?” Artemas asked, “Do you know anyone there?”

Khacan said, “Brother Paul will not be able to travel for several days.”

A man called Hassan said, “If he is moved by ox cart, he could leave immediately.”

Khacan looked scornfully at him, “And where would you get an ox-cart?”

Hassan, dark haired and brown eyes glittering replied, “As it happens I have a load of goods I’m taking to Derbe.”

Khacan, who obviously did not like the other man said derisively, “If you take brother Paul on a wagon, you’ll shake him to death.”

Tempers were rising. Barnabas said, “I thank you brother for your suggestion. When are you planning to leave?”

Hassan flashed a dark look at Khacan and a smile to Barnabas, “Tomorrow at dawn.”

Barnabas looked at Lois, “Do you think he will be able to travel so soon?”

Lois thought a moment and then said, “With the Lord’s help, some straw and a draft of poppy extract, he will manage.”

Lamachus who had been a silent onlooker suddenly said, “I have a business acquaintance in Derbe who might very well be willing to help you, at least until Paul recovers his strength. His name is Gaius and he is a doctor who serves the Roman garrison there, his family originally came from Macedonia like mine. I’ll write him a letter,” he took Artemas off to help him.

The journey to Derbe was agony for Paul.²⁶² Great purple black bruises had developed overnight. He suffered from an excruciating headache and could barely see. Lois doctored him as best she could, and gave both salve and extract of poppy for Barnabas to treat Paul on the journey. Which on Hassan’s loaded waggon was expected to take several days.

When Paul finally arrived at the home of Gaius he was delirious. Lamachus’s letter was sent in to Gaius who presently came out to inspect his

²⁶¹ *Jews from Antioch & Iconium: Stir up mob in Lystra – Acts 16:19*

²⁶² *Paul: Arrives in Derbe – Acts 14:20*

two visitors.²⁶³ He looked thoughtfully at Barnabas and after seeing Paul was unconscious he said, “Bring him in.”

Under Gaius’s care Paul made slow progress. There was fear that he had suffered a cracked skull and although the bruises faded within two weeks, it took a great deal longer for Paul to regain anything like his former strength. Some days he felt weak and disorientated, and Barnabas was deeply concerned for him, praying daily for his recovery.²⁶⁴

Gaius soon discovered the nature of their mission and found Barnabas a very agreeable guest. Barnabas enjoyed the family life of his host, whose young wife was charming and had recently had her first child. Barnabas’s obvious pleasure in playing with the baby endeared him to her and he soon found himself teaching a receptive and understanding household. Long before Paul was up and about, Gaius and his whole household had been baptised. He then opened his home to those who were similarly attracted by this new teaching.²⁶⁵

Paul and Barnabas spent the summer in Derbe, where Paul finally recovered his strength. Except for the Roman garrison the town was entirely pagan and they had no opposition from the local inhabitants, who were mostly blue-eyed, fair-haired Gauls. Paul and Barnabas built a strong community and had time to establish Elders to care for the little flock. They gave the last of the codex of the ‘Sayings of Jesus’, prepared by the brethren of Antioch into Gaius’s care.

It was towards the end of summer that Paul said, “We need to return to the believers in the other towns.”

“Do you think that wise?” Gaius asked.

“It is much closer if we return to Syrian Antioch through Tarsus,” Barnabas remarked.

“We need to see the believers we left in the cities along the way. We cannot just leave them without making sure they are holding strong their faith in the Lord Jesus.” Paul stopped. He became so still Barnabas looked at him to see if he was all right. He saw Paul appeared to be listening.

“What if the authorities find out you have returned?” Gaius asked.

Paul did not reply and Barnabas motioned for him to be quiet.

Finally Paul shook his head and seemed to awake. He looked at his companions and said slowly, “We must appoint elders in each group, you know how our own people are organised round the synagogue and how they share the responsibility for the spiritual welfare of the community.” He

²⁶³ *Gaius: Of Derbe – Acts 20:4*

²⁶⁴ *Galatians 4:13*

²⁶⁵ *Acts 20:4 ‘Gaius of Derbe’ travelled with Paul*

suddenly looked at Barnabas and his manner became decisive, “That’s it, we will ask each group to choose seven men and if we are satisfied they are mature in their faith, we will ordain them in the same way as the pharisees ordain men of learning.”²⁶⁶

Barnabas nodded, “That is what happened amongst the brethren in Jerusalem when there was too much for Peter and the other apostles to do, the seven were chosen for their faith by the community and the apostles prayed and laid their hands on them, they then saw to the good ordering of matters amongst the believers.”

“That’s it. Our people must be responsible for their own affairs. If there are disputes amongst them, they should not resort to pagan judges. They must be an example of how Christ in them guides them into all righteousness.”

“What if the authorities find out you have returned?” Gaius repeated his question.

“We will undertake no public preaching. It is not my intention to stir up further trouble for those who love the Lord, only to make sure they are holding to their faith.”

This promise from Paul encouraged Barnabas, “If we return through these cities, when do you think we will be home in Antioch?” Barnabas’s thoughts were turning increasingly to home and thoughts of his wife and sons.

“If we can spend two weeks in each town with the brethren, this should give us time to appoint elders. We might expect to arrive in Attalia in Tishri²⁶⁷ and perhaps we could be home for Tabernacles.”²⁶⁸

Barnabas doubted such an optimistic assessment, but felt a surge of hope that at least it gave an indication of Paul’s intentions.

They called together the believers and Paul explained about the appointment of elders, “You are to choose seven of your number who are strong in their faith in Jesus Christ. These men are to be of good character and sincere. They must not drink too much, nor be greedy for money, but be sober, self-controlled and orderly²⁶⁹. They are to encourage others with true teaching and also to show the error of those who are opposed to it.²⁷⁰ If there are disputes amongst you, you must settle them amongst yourselves, do not let unbelievers judge you.²⁷¹ You are purified from sin and have been put

²⁶⁶ *The Jewish People in the First Century. Vol 1. Edited by S.Safrai and M.Stern published Van Gorcum and Co BV Assen 1974. See the discussion on P.390 and cf Acts 6.5-7*

²⁶⁷ *About September*

²⁶⁸ *Mid September*

²⁶⁹ *1 Timothy parts of Chapter 3: 1-13*

²⁷⁰ *Titus 1:9*

²⁷¹ *1 Corinthians 6: Parts of 1-6*

right with God by the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God so you must live in the power which is yours through Jesus Christ our saviour.”²⁷²

Barnabas then said, “We shall be leaving after the next Fellowship Meal, we want you to bring forward the men you choose so that we may pray for them and lay our hands on them.”

Gaius was impressed by the charge laid upon the little group which met at his house. He wondered if there were seven men of the group suitable to act in this capacity and later he shared his doubts with Barnabas. He was greatly surprised with Barnabas’s response.

“Your own household can supply at least three suitable men.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, there is of course yourself, and what about Deiotarus and Castor?” Barnabas asked.

Gaius looked shocked, “But they are barbarians, Gauls, their people are wild animals.”

Barnabas gave a gentle smile, “I’m not asking you about their people, I’m suggesting these two men are full of the Holy Spirit and show the kind of maturity needed to nurture your group.”

“But they are slaves,” Gaius felt he had clinched the argument.

“We too are slaves of our Lord Christ Jesus and we all must submit to the same Master in heaven.”

Gaius grunted. He felt there was no comparison, you could not have a barbarian ruling a Greek. Barnabas rose and laid his hand on Gaius’s shoulder, “Pray about it my friend, ask the Lord to reveal to you the nature of his kingdom on earth.”

By the day of the Fellowship Meal, when the names were finally put forward, it was not only Barnabas who had seen Deiotarus and Castor were suitable. When Gaius submitted their names, they were warmly endorsed by the group.

The fellowship meal ended and there were tears as each one took leave of Paul and Barnabas. They planned to leave the first thing in the morning.

A collection for the departing men was handed to them by Castor, who eyes filled with tears and he handed it over saying shyly, “May you be blessed and may God keep you safe on your journey.”

Their return journey through Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch was greeted with great joy by the brethren, who welcomed the appointment of elders.²⁷³ They left each group strengthened and encouraged. Their enemies were unaware of their passing. It was only in Antioch that Paul, who often

²⁷² 1 Corinthians 6:11

²⁷³ Paul & Barnabas: Appointed Galatian church elders – Acts 14:24

suffered from headaches since his stoning, had one which was completely incapacitating.²⁷⁴ He lay for three days with a wet cloth over his eyes unable to eat. Barnabas and the brethren were deeply concerned and prayed fervently for him. Finally, faint and almost blind with pain, he vomited and immediately felt better. This delay in their plans brought them to Perga too late to sail for home, so they spent the winter preaching both there and in Attalia.²⁷⁵

They arrived back at Syrian Antioch just before Passover the following spring.

²⁷⁴ 2 Corinthians 12:8 Paul says, 'I was given a painful physical ailment, which acts as Satan's messenger to beat me and keep me from being proud.'

(Good News Bible)

The Greek version reads, 'Wherefore lest I should be exceedingly uplifted there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan in order that me he might buffet, lest I should be exceedingly uplifted...' (Greek-English New Testament, Published Regency Reference Library, Michigan.)

There is much debate over the nature of this problem of Paul's. Since it obviously caused him on-going embarrassment it is suggested he started suffering from migraines after his stoning in Lystra, these were triggered by his encounters with antagonistic Jewish authorities.

²⁷⁵ Perga: Paul & Barnabas preach – Acts 14:25

CHAPTER 14: RETURN TO ANTIOCH IN SYRIA

CE 48 Spring

Acts 14:27-28

It was late afternoon some time before Passover, when Paul and Barnabas knocked on the door of Stephen and Mary's house in Singon Street.²⁷⁶ They were tired from their walk up from Seluecia,²⁷⁷ but the pleasure of his return to his family lit up Barnabas's face, and even Paul felt he was coming home.

The door was opened by the same little Syrian maid, who had grown considerably larger and plumper. For a moment she looked puzzled and then threw open the door to let them in. Mary, who was carrying some washing in from the yard, stopped and shouted, "Abigail, who do you think is here?" The tone in her voice carried to all parts of the home, and soon everyone came running.

It was a time of joyful reunion. Junius and Joseph had both grown into young men, Joseph with the beginning of a dark beard like his father. The little girls, were fast becoming young women. The joy of their return with everyone asking questions made too much hubbub for anyone to hear the answers.

Finally Mary's voice rose above the noise, "You boys take your father and brother Saul and help them wash. You girls go and get them refreshments, quickly now. They look half-starved."

While this was not quite true, both men did indeed look much thinner and tired from their travels. Mary turned to Abigail with a smile, "You will need to visit the mikvah later, but for now come and help me prepare an evening meal fit for two hungry men."

After sunset Abigail accompanied by a young slave girl, carrying her clean clothes, hurried round to the synagogue to immerse herself in the mikvah and make herself ready to receive her husband. She rubbed sweet-scented oils on herself. Then she dressed in her best blue robe and put on her gold ear-rings and a necklace of gold hung with golden coins. The girl brushed and bound up her hair. Then Abigail covered her head with a delicate blue silk shawl with a golden thread woven through it. A gift to her from Barnabas when they were married.

As they took their places round the table, Stephen asked, "Do I hear you calling brother Saul, Paul?"

²⁷⁶ Paul & Barnabas: Return to Syrian Antioch CE 48 – Acts 14:26

²⁷⁷ Seluecia: Port for Syrian Antioch – Acts 13:4

Barnabas looked across at Paul who nodded. It seemed so long ago that he had changed his name and it had been strange to hear himself called ‘Saul’ again.

Paul answered, “Yes, indeed. When my father registered me as a Roman citizen, he gave me the name ‘Paul’. And it was after we gave our testimony before the governor of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus, I decided that if we were taking the message of our Lord Jesus to the Gentile world, I would use my Roman name.”

Stephen nodded. It was true many Jews had their Jewish name and either its Greek equivalent, or Greek names, as did he and Mary. It was just unusual to choose a Roman name.

Barnabas said, “We would like to call all the brethren together so we can give a complete account of our travels. When would you suggest?”

“Why not wait until the first day meetings?” Stephen asked

“How many groups are there now in Antioch?” Barnabas smiled.

Stephen nodded. “Yes, I see what you mean. There are now four groups meeting in homes in different parts of the city,” he thought a moment, “If we send out messages tomorrow, which is the day of preparation for the Sabbath, perhaps we could all gather in Herod’s Hall for first day worship. I’m sure Manean could arrange for us to use it.”

Mary asked, “What about the Fellowship meal? Can’t we ask that families bring and share, so that we can also eat together?”

“In that case,” said Stephen, “We need to ask them to come earlier.”

Abigail’s gentle voice said, “But that will be difficult for the Jewish families who will be eating their Sabbath meal.”

After some more discussion it was finally agreed that the meeting would be after sunset, and the brethren would be asked to bring bread and wine to share for a Fellowship meal after Paul and Barnabas had given their report.

Suddenly Stephen announced, “Simon Peter is in Antioch!”²⁷⁸

Barnabas said, “And now you tell us! When did he come? And where is he staying?”

Stephen answered, “He stays with Nicolaus. He will be glad to see you both. He has been here since last year. It seems John Mark’s return from Pamphylia and his report upset the Elders in Jerusalem. So they sent Peter to find out what was happening here.”

Paul’s face was grim, “What in John Mark’s report upset them?”

Stephen could see Paul was angry. “It seems the brethren in Jerusalem felt we had no authority to send you out to teach in other countries. You know

²⁷⁸ Peter: In Antioch – Galatians 2:11

they are unhappy at how Gentiles have been admitted into full fellowship here in Antioch without first being circumcised.”

Paul said, “I thought this matter had been settled by Peter himself when Barnabas and I were last in Jerusalem.”

Stephen shrugged, “It seems the brethren who belong to the Pharisee party, and also those who were disciples of John the Baptist, and many others are insisting that it is only by coming under the Covenant of Abraham that God will save the Gentile nations of the world.”

Paul said angrily, “What then of Jesus? Does his sacrifice count for nothing?”

Stephen did not want to argue with Paul. He could see the little man was physically exhausted and needed rest. He said, “I think they want to protect the Gentile believers from the influence of the pagan world by protecting them with the hedge of the Law.”

Abigail came in carrying some dried figs, Barnabas who was about to respond to Stephen’s remark, suddenly saw Abigail. “You look beautiful my wife.” She gave him a shy smile and Barnabas rose, “Come my brothers, let us rest. Surely the Lord will show us the Way.”

Paul who was indeed feeling exhausted rose too, Barnabas gave thanksgiving for their safe return. Then turning to Abigail he held out his hand, his eyes gentle and full of love.

Stephen muttered to Paul as the couple left the room, “I don’t expect Barnabas will be resting much!”

Paul slept much of the next day, while Barnabas spent the day with Junius and Joseph.

Just before sunset Mary and Abigail came to light the lamps and say the benediction which ushered in the Sabbath. The members of the household embraced each other saying ‘Sabbath Peace’. Then all the male members of the household walked round to the synagogue for the evening service.

Paul and Barnabas were warmly received.

Nicolaus²⁷⁹ arrived with Peter,²⁸⁰ who embraced Paul and remarked, “The ox is thin, did he not eat of the harvest?”

Paul smiled, “Even camels are thin at the end of the journey!”

Barnabas hugged Peter and asked, “Is all well with the brethren in Jerusalem?”

Peter smiled, “They are well.”

²⁷⁹ Nicolaus: *A Gentile from Antioch – Acts 6:5*

²⁸⁰ Peter: *Syrian Antioch CE 48 – Galatians 2:11-14*

Barnabas asked, “And the household of Mary and John Mark, are they in health?”

Peter replied, “They are well, but Mary grieves. John Mark is not at peace with himself.”

Paul heard Peter’s remark, but forbore to comment as they entered the synagogue to begin the service. Lucius had asked the hazzan to announce a meeting of the believers which would be held in Herod’s Hall the following evening when brother Barnabas and Saul would give a report on their travels.

The news of Barnabas and Paul’s return ensured that Herod’s Hall was packed with the families of the brethren. After a time of joyful thanksgiving and worship, Lucius raised his arms and a silence fell on the gathering.

“It is just two years since we sent out our brothers Barnabas and Saul to take the Good News of the Lord Jesus to wherever the Spirit led them.

Last year during Passover, some of our number, heard in Jerusalem that John Mark had left them after they went across from Cyprus to Pamphylia. Our brothers who returned from Jerusalem brought disturbing news that the brothers in Jerusalem were angry we had sent out Barnabas and Saul to take the Good News to unbelievers in other lands. We are glad that the Lord sent us brother Simon Peter to reassure us that we have not displeased the Lord Jesus in this work. We are glad that he is present to hear for himself the report of our two brothers and judge if we acted wrongly in this matter.”

Lucius smiled at Barnabas and Paul, “We look forward to hearing how the Lord has used you and whether he has blessed your work,” he sat down.

Paul had suggested earlier that Barnabas should be the first to address the brethren. Barnabas rose and was silent while he offered a prayer for guidance. Then he began, “Some of you have already discovered that the Saul whom you sent out has returned to you as Paul!” There was laughter and a few puzzled looks.

“I can tell you that the Lord has richly blessed our mission. Wherever we stayed, we left strong groups of believers who gave thanks and praise to God through the One they came to know as their Saviour, Jesus Christ.” A murmur of praise and thanksgiving rippled through the listening crowd.

“However the Gospel was not everywhere received without opposition. We encountered the worst of this from the Jewish authorities in the towns of Lycaonia. Also there were some Greek converts in the various synagogues who strongly opposed the Gospel, especially when they saw their uncircumcised countrymen being accepted as full members of our fellowship. I suppose the sacrifices they made to become Jews after the flesh, make them feel that baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus is too easy for Gentile converts.”

Barnabas eyes rested on the crowd before him.²⁸¹ Here was a community of believers, Jews, Greeks, Syrians and even some Romans. They were all united by their faith in Jesus Christ. No one pointed fingers in condemnation but all strove to show their faith, as the Lord himself had ordered, in their love for one another. There were problems, but even Jesus had problems with his closest friends... He caught Peter's eye.

Barnabas continued. "It was at Antioch in Pisidia that the Jews rejected the message so vehemently we had to tell them it had been necessary for them to hear the word of God first, but seeing they rejected it we would turn to the Gentiles."

Barnabas was aware Peter moved abruptly.

"The Gentiles were filled with joy at what we told them and the Lord established a strong group there. However the Jews stirred up the authorities and we were tried by the leaders and elders of the synagogue and sentenced to be flogged."

There was a murmur of dismay which quietened as Barnabas continued, "Then we left Antioch and went on to Iconium. Here we were greeted warmly and the message we gave was accepted by both Jews and Gentiles. We stayed there through the winter. It was during the spring rites to the local earth goddess, that opposition to us came to a head. Particularly when Jews from Antioch arrived and stirred up the local synagogue against us. They were going to stone us but when we heard it, we left and went to the neighbouring city of Lystra." Barnabas stopped and thought back. His face became sad as he remembered the same sequence of events being repeated.

"In Lystra there were few Jews and no synagogue and mostly Lycaonian-speaking peoples who do not know Greek. Brother Paul saw a crippled man listening to us and in the name of the Lord Jesus, he commanded him to stand up. He had never walked in his life. Immediately he sprang up and began walking around. The town's people were filled with amazement, but what happened next was terribly distressing." Once more Barnabas stopped. He had thought about leaving the whole incident out, but decided he could not.

"Well, go on, what happened," Manean's voice rang out.

"They – er -um -they thought we were gods and wanted to make a sacrifice to us."

There was a moment of stunned silence, and then laughter rippled round the hall. The Jews looked shocked, but the Greeks could not contain their delight.

Titus's father finally asked, "Which gods did they think you were?"

²⁸¹ *Barnabas: Reports back – Acts 14:27*

Barnabas looked acutely embarrassed and said softly, “They thought I was Zeus and Paul was Hermes because he did most of the talking.”

This time everyone laughed. When it had spent itself and the crowd was quiet once more, Barnabas continued, “Then Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium and stirred up the crowd. This time they stoned brother Paul and left him for dead.” There were cries of horror and people looked at Paul and saw with new understanding the signs of suffering in his face.

“It was only when the brethren went to bring his body in for burial that our brother was found to be alive.”

Many voices gave God thanks for his deliverance.

“We had to leave Lystra and went on to Derbe. Here was a totally pagan town, most of the inhabitants were descendants of the three Gaulish tribes that invaded the area, although there was a Roman garrison there. They too were filled with the Holy Spirit just as we had been. Yet they had had no knowledge of God, and worshipped strange spirits and demons. Truly God our Father wants the message of salvation to go to all peoples. They treated us with great kindness. Then we felt we should return to strengthen all the groups we had left along the route before coming back to Antioch. Brother Paul will tell you how we left these groups.” He was about to sit down and then remembered, “Oh, yes, wherever we went we left each group the codices of the ‘Sayings of our Lord’ you sent with us, these were received and studied with great joy.”

Barnabas smiled at Paul and thankfully returned to his seat and a babble of conversation broke out amongst the community.

Then Paul rose and raising his hand began, “My brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus, I greet you in his name. May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you peace.”²⁸² The whole company said “Amen.”

“I want to confirm what brother Barnabas has told you. That wherever we preached the Good News of Jesus Christ, there were people hungry and thirsty to receive him. And to those who were baptised into his name, he delivered them from their sins and brought them into new life. As my brother has told you, those who rejected the Lord, stirred up the Gentile authorities against us with lies. But those who were born into Eternal Life stood firm in their faith.

“Later when we were in Derbe with the Gauls we saw they had little experience in organisation and we decided to appoint Elders to guide and oversee them. Then on our return journey, we appointed Elders in each group.”

²⁸² Paul: Reports back on 1st Missionary Journey – Acts 14:27

As Paul was talking, Lucius's account of Mark's return to Jerusalem and the effect on the brethren was passing through his mind. He found this news profoundly disturbing. There were implications which could only mean trouble and conflict. He looked at Peter. He wanted to emphasize the new life that had been brought to the Gentiles was profound and permanent.

"We can testify that, Jew and Gentile, men and women, slave and free, all are one in union with Christ Jesus.²⁸³ We have seen the promise of God, which he made to Abraham has been fulfilled in our own times."

Spontaneously exclamations of praise and thanksgiving filled the room.

Paul was saddened that there seemed to be deep divisions growing amongst the brethren. Then he remembered the all-enveloping love of Jesus and knew that nothing could separate him from that love.

He waved his hand to the table on which the loaf of bread and flask of wine had been set. "The cup we will share after giving thanks to God, is a sharing in the blood of Christ. The bread we will break, when we eat it, is a sharing in the body of Christ. Because there is the one loaf, all of us, though many, are one body, for we all share the same loaf.²⁸⁴ Wherever groups of people meet together in the name of Jesus Christ, they affirm this Oneness they have in him. Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts. In the same way, all of us, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free, have been baptized into the one body by the same Spirit, and we have all been given the one Spirit to drink."²⁸⁵

Another outburst of praise and thanksgiving filled the hall during which Paul sat down. Manean rose to his feet and said, "I am sure there are many questions our brothers and sisters would like answering. Perhaps I can start off by saying, you were away two years, how long did your money last?"

A ripple of laughter went round the room. Manean was rich, extremely open-handed and always concerned for the practical.

Barnabas answered. "We were careful with the money, but as you correctly supposed it did not last the whole journey. In each place we stayed with believers who cared for our physical needs. We also taught each congregation to set aside a sum of money every First Day to help the poor. Before we moved on to the next city, we were furnished with enough money to carry on. However we do need to consider ways to support ourselves during future missions. As you saw, our garments wore out and many of the people with whom we stayed were poor themselves."

²⁸³ Galatians 3:28

²⁸⁴ 1 Corinthians 10:16-17

²⁸⁵ 1 Corinthians 10:12-13

Another questioner asked, “Tell us more about the ‘Sayings of Jesus’. Were they well received?”

Paul answered, “The codices were everywhere received with joy, and immediately became a source of study and inspiration, especially in communities where there were few Jewish members and the Gentiles have little or no knowledge of the books of the Law and the prophets.”

Barnabas added, “They were easier to carry than scrolls, and easier to find the place when you want to read from them. We recommend that every worshipping group should have a copy.”

Peter nodded, “Yes, even in Judaea we find people who did not know the Lord, value reading his sayings. But we inscribe them on scrolls. What are these ‘codices’ you mention?”²⁸⁶

Lucius rose and looked round the hall for someone who had brought a copy. Many were offered for Peter to examine. He took one and looked at it in surprise. Here was a small group of vellum sheets written on both sides, bound with a leather covering and small enough to be put in a pocket.

He turned the volume over and over. Then he looked up and said, “May I take a copy home with me? Brother Sa-Paul is right this is surely easier to carry around than a scroll.”

The owner of the little book said, “Take that copy, my brother and welcome.”

The questions continued until finally Lucius rose and said, “I think that is enough for tonight, let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and ask brother Peter to lead us in the blessing of the wine and the bread.”

The weeks and months of summer passed peacefully for the Christians of Antioch. The return of Paul and Barnabas and the presence of Peter strengthened the groups throughout the city and many more people were baptised into the faith.

The city of Antioch was not much troubled by the presence of these strange ‘Christians.’ The summer festival began with the usual influx of visitors. Drinking, debauchery and vice of every kind flourished.

Christian families were caught in the same kind of conflict of interest as Onesiphorus’s family had been. The relationships between the Jewish and Gentile believers was warm and loving and the strict adherence of many of the Jewish believers to the demands of their faith while yet keeping

²⁸⁶ The International Standard Bible Vol iv page 815a “The books of the N.T. were no doubt written on papyrus....The Epistles, being more like private correspondence were very likely written on papyrus sheets arranged in codex form (similar to the modern book form)...at a very early date the codex form came to be used instead of the roll for all N.T. books....

fellowship with the Gentiles, often helped the Greek and Syrian believers to see life did indeed go on, even without the props of pagan society.

It was shortly after the influx of summer visitors to the festival of Apollo²⁸⁷ that a new delegation arrived from Jerusalem. James, the brother of the Lord, was concerned by Peter's continued absence, and four of the brothers had undertaken to find out if all was well with him.²⁸⁸

These were strict Jews, men who had known the Lord and after a period of doubt following his death, had come to accept him as the Messiah. The leader of the delegation was a Pharisee by the name of Enoch. He was accompanied by three companions. Enoch was a man in his late fifties, well-build, with a large square beard and intent, intelligent eyes.²⁸⁹

They made their way to one of the synagogues where they obtained lodging. The next morning they enquired the whereabouts of Simon Peter. The hazzan sent them with his son as guide to Nicolaus's house where they found Peter and Anna. They knew Nicolaus because he had been a Gentile convert who had been appointed to supervise the distribution of funds, along with Stephen and five others.²⁹⁰ Nicolaus had returned to his home town of Antioch when the persecution broke out after Stephen's death.

They were welcomed by the servant, who took them to the courtyard where Peter and Nicolaus were talking to a group of Greek men and women. Peter broke off his talk when he saw Enoch and rose to embrace him and the three men with him. He introduced them to those present.

"What brings you to Antioch?" Peter asked.

Enoch replied, "Brother James and the elders were concerned to have no report from you and sent us to see that all was well."

Puzzled Peter remarked, "Why should you expect a report from me?"

Enoch looked at the group to whom Peter had been talking and said, "Let us discuss these matters later."

Nicolaus invited Enoch to address the group who had been listening to Peter, but he declined, saying, "We will listen if you do not mind, and then perhaps brother Peter will accompany us back to our lodgings."

Peter finished his teaching and Nicolaus said, "My brothers, you will join us for our midday meal?"

Enoch frowned, although he knew Nicolaus was a convert and therefore might be considered an acceptable host, yet he sensed that he had 'reverted' and no longer kept a ritually pure home. "We will return to our lodgings."

²⁸⁷ Held August 10th. About 8 km S.W. of the city were the famous groves and sanctuary of Apollo. It was a place of great natural beauty. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* Vol 1 p 866.

²⁸⁸ James: Acts 15:1 & Galatians 2:12

²⁸⁹ Jewish Delegation: Arrives in Syrian Antioch CE 48 – Acts 15:1

²⁹⁰ Acts 6:5

With that the four men rose to leave. Peter felt the implied criticism of their departure and rose to go with them.

News of the arrival of the ‘brothers from Jerusalem’ caused interest and excitement, and a meeting was quickly arranged. Paul and Barnabas wondered at the motives for their visit. They heard that Peter was keeping them company and they were engaged in much serious discussion.

Enoch chose to attend the Sabbath morning service at the synagogue in the wonderful marble-paved street of Herod. The synagogue was as magnificent as any of the public buildings that lined this street. Every part of this building spoke of the wealth of the Jewish community which worshipped there.

The leader of the synagogue greeted Enoch and his companions. When he saw he was a pharisee, he extended to him a warm invitation to address the congregation. Many of the brethren, both Jews and Greeks, hoping to hear him speak, had chosen to come, including Paul and Barnabas who usually went to the Sington street synagogue.

When the time came for Enoch to speak, he began, “Greetings from your brethren in Jerusalem in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Enoch’s manner of delivery was portentous.

As his talk proceeded, there were many who listened to him with growing satisfaction but many others heard him with consternation and dismay. Paul made as if to rise, but Barnabas held him back.

Enoch continued in his ponderous manner, “And God said, ‘Any male who has not been circumcised will no longer be considered one of my people, because he has not kept the covenant with me.’²⁹¹ Now the brethren in Jerusalem have been deeply troubled for many years that Gentiles have been admitted into your fellowship without bringing them into the Covenant and Torah. What has alarmed them even further is that you sent out missionaries to take this message of ‘Universal Salvation’ to other places.”

Enoch’s remarks provoked an angry mutter. Paul could no longer be contained and he jumped up to say, “How can you subvert the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ in this way? No one has ever been put right by doing what the Law requires...”²⁹²

People joined in shouting both for Paul and for Enoch and the Sabbath was in danger of being desecrated.

The president stood up and called for silence. He was clearly angry and said, “These matters are not edifying, we shall conclude the service. I beg those of you who are disciples of Jesus to conduct yourselves in a seemly

²⁹¹ Genesis 17:4-15

²⁹² Paul: Dispute with Jewish delegation – Acts 15:2

manner. We want none of the riots and disorder which may result in the authorities persecuting the Jewish community in Antioch. If you want to argue this out, you will remove to some private home.”

With that he nodded to the hazzan who concluded the prayers. The final blessing was said and he dismissed the people. His intervention did nothing to appease either side. There was too much at stake. No one wanted a large angry gathering in their own home, but after some discussion it was agreed that Enoch and his three companions, together with Peter, Paul, Barnabas and some of the other elders of the Christian community would go to Manean’s home to thrash out the whole issue.

Manean, urbane and courteous, could do nothing to thaw the frozen angry participants to the disagreement. Paul, Barnabas and four of the local elders entered together. Enoch and his party kept to the other end of the room and Peter hovered uneasily between the two groups.

Peter said, “We need to discuss openly and honestly the causes of this disagreement.”

Paul who knew the full implications of what Enoch had said, felt grief threatening to overwhelm him. The message of salvation had brought such joy and life to everyone who accepted it. How could these men re-impose the Law?

Enoch, secure in the knowledge that he was right said, “Brother Peter, you know how troubled the brethren have been in Jerusalem concerning the irresponsible way that the gospel of salvation has been preached to the Gentiles. We are here to make sure that all are brought into a right relationship with the children of Israel, in the manner that God has laid down in Holy Scripture.”

Barnabas spoke gently, “My brother, have you not seen how the Holy Spirit baptises the Gentiles into new life in Christ Jesus?”

Joshua, one of Enoch’s companions, a tall, thin, ascetic-looking man said, “We are deeply dismayed at the way the Jews live like Gentiles in this hedonistic city. You know that the halachah is there to protect the people from such heathen influences. Yet it seems to us that every one of the laws meant to protect people from sin and keep them pure before God, have been overthrown.”

Paul could no longer contain himself, “You know that no one who has kept every piece of the halachah has ever been put right before God. I myself was without equal in my obedience to every requirement of the Law, yet was I amongst the lost. It was only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that I came to salvation....”

Enoch interrupted, “Yes, but where did the Lord teach against circumcision? Where did he advocate breaking the Law? Rather did he not teach a stricter adherence to the Law?”

Barnabas replied, “Is it not exactly because the Lord broke the petty regulations of the halachah that he antagonised the Pharisees? Did he not heal the sick on the Sabbath, did he not defend his disciples when they picked wheat and ate it on the Sabbath?” He turned to Peter, “You were there, what did he say?”

Peter looked uncomfortable. It distressed him that there should be such division amongst the brethren, yet he could see no way to reconcile the two sides. He answered Barnabas, “The Lord Jesus asked the pharisees if they had never read how David and his men went into the house of God and ate the shew bread, which only the priests could eat. And also something about the priests break the Sabbath law every Sabbath but are not guilty.”²⁹³

Enoch broke in and said, “But he never condemned circumcision. He said himself, ‘I have been sent only to those lost sheep, the people of Israel.’”²⁹⁴

Manean, who had not meant to be drawn into the discussion interrupted, “But he said that to the Canaanite woman, whose daughter was sick, and he healed the child, if I remember correctly?” He looked at Peter.

Peter nodded, “He was pleased with her answer when he had said to her, ‘Let us first feed the children. It isn’t right to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.’ And she came back at him with ‘Even the dogs under the table eat the children’s leftovers!’ He commended her and sent her home, where he said the demon would have left her daughter.”

Joshua said, “This supports our contention that in fact the Lord came to Israel and not to the Gentiles. It is God’s plan that through Israel, all the nations of the world will be saved.”

Paul countered him, “It is God’s plan that through Jesus Christ the peoples of the world shall be saved, not through circumcision and bringing them under the Law, but by repenting of their sins, and being baptised into the death of Our Lord Jesus, so they can be rise into Life with him.”

Enoch looked forbiddingly at Paul, “Brother Saul, nowhere did the Lord Jesus say such a thing. Nowhere in scripture do we read that this was God’s intention. You teach completely contrary to our whole tradition. Your activities threaten to tear the brotherhood apart.”

Paul was furious, “You are hoping to appease the authorities by trying to make the Lord Jesus acceptable to them, yet I tell you again, no one is put

²⁹³ *Matthew 12:1-8*

²⁹⁴ *Matthew 15:24*

right with God by doing what the Law requires, we have been put right with God through our faith in Christ Jesus.”²⁹⁵

Barnabas was not entirely sure about Paul’s remark. He asked Enoch, “Are you saying that Gentiles must be circumcised and come under the Law before they can be saved? Have we not seen that in fact they receive the Holy Spirit without being circumcised?”

Joshua said, “We are not disputing that. We are saying that to show their new faith is binding on them, they need to become circumcised, and brought into the Covenant of God’s people.”

Peter nodded. This was something he could understand. He wondered why Paul objected to something so obvious.

The argument went on and on. Paul would not give way although Barnabas and Peter and the rest began to feel that Enoch was in the right. Finally they broke up. No one was happy at the outcome. Peter hoped that Barnabas might talk some sense into Paul so that the issue could be resolved before he returned to Jerusalem with Enoch and the brethren.

That night Paul had another of his excruciating headaches and was laid up for three days. When he recovered he was even more dismayed when Titus let slip that Peter had refused an invitation to dine with them.²⁹⁶

Paul confronted Barnabas and asked, “Is it true what I hear from Titus, brother Peter has stopped visiting Gentile homes?”

Barnabas answered uneasily, “I think he feels that until the status of Gentiles within the church is resolved he will abide by the teachings of the Law concerning table-fellowship with Gentiles.”

Paul exploded, “And what about you? Are you also going to repudiate all that we have taught these last two years?”

Barnabas was truly distressed, “I don’t know. This whole issue is much more complicated than I first thought.”

“But when you fetched me from Tarsus, wasn’t it exactly because of this issue? Did you not want scriptural proof that people are saved not by the Law, but by faith? Were my teachings not acceptable to you and the other brethren here in Antioch? Are we now going to tell all those Gentiles we were wrong and they are not properly saved?” Paul’s voice broke.

Barnabas looked sadly at his friend. Paul had suffered so much, but if they were to preserve the unity of the church, surely they needed to accept that the Jewish brethren had right on their side? He sighed and said, “I truly don’t know.”²⁹⁷

²⁹⁵ Galatians 2:16

²⁹⁶ Peter: Refused to visit Gentiles – Galatians 2:12

²⁹⁷ Barnabas: Doubts Paul’s teaching – Galatians 2:13

The week wore on and tension continued to rise. The Gentile brethren were angry and deeply disturbed. Only Paul continued to behave towards them as he always had. Matters came to a head when Paul called round to see Peter at Nicolaus's house and found he had moved.

"Where can I find him?" Paul asked Nicolaus. Then he noticed the anger in Nicolaus. "What is wrong?"

Nicolaus said bitterly, "My home is no longer pure enough for Peter. He has gone to stay with Simeon, who keeps a ritually pure house."

Paul could not believe his ears. "But you are circumcised and were a Jew before you became a follower of our Lord."

"Yes, but since so many Gentiles have become believers, and no difference has been made between Gentile and Jewish believers, and my wife is Syrian, we have no longer been keeping the purity laws."

Deeply angry, Paul said, "Come, we will fetch Barnabas and go to Simeon's place."

Barnabas was also distressed by the news. The whole issue was tearing them apart. They found Enoch and his companions at Simeon's house. Nicolaus was embarrassed by the confrontation, but Paul would not let him withdraw.

He pointed at Peter and shouted, "You are a Jew, yet you have been living like a Gentile, not like a Jew. How then, can you try to force Gentiles to live like Jews?"²⁹⁸

Enoch said, "Well, he has repented of his foolishness and agrees with me."

Suddenly Peter straightened up. "We cannot resolve this issue here and now. I will return to Jerusalem with Enoch. We will all pray to the Lord Jesus for guidance to see what the Lord requires in this matter," he spoke with authority.

Paul was going to speak, but stopped. Perhaps he should reassure the brethren here in Antioch and suddenly he could not wait for Enoch to leave.

He turned to Nicolaus and Barnabas and said, "In that case let us leave them to make their preparations," he turned to go.

Peter stopped him, "My brother, 'let not the sun go down on your wrath'. Do not let us part in anger."

Paul stopped but did not turn.

Peter continued, "We have been born again as children of an immortal parent. The Lord watches over us and listens to our prayers."²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ Paul: *Confronts Peter in Antioch – Galatians 2:11-12*

²⁹⁹ *1 Peter 1:23 and 1 Peter 3:12*

Paul turned and found himself embraced in a bear hug. Peter said, “Go in peace my salty friend!”

Paul looked surprised and Peter explained, “The Lord once said to us, ‘Everyone will be purified by fire as a sacrifice is purified by salt. Salt is good; but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have the salt of friendship amongst yourselves, and,’” His voice dropped, “live in peace with one another.”

With tears in his eyes Paul bade farewell to Enoch and his companions, as did Barnabas and Nicolaus.

CHAPTER 15: NEWS FROM GALATIA

CE 49 Spring

Acts 14:27- 15:1-2

Galatians

Early the following spring three men of mixed physiques arrived asking the whereabouts of ‘Paul of Tarsus and Barnabas of Cyprus’. When it had been ascertained the men they wanted were Jews, they were directed to the synagogue in Herod’s street. Here the hazzan re-directed them to the synagogue in Singon street and from there they were shown the house where Barnabas and Paul were lodging.

Paul had joined a tent-making family and spent most mornings working at his trade. Barnabas, too was working as secretary and book-keeper for a group of merchants, skills he had used during his days doing Temple service. Late in the afternoon the three travellers, bone-tired and hungry met the two men they sought as Paul was returning from his work in one direction and Barnabas from his, in the other. The five men met at the door.

With cries of surprise and pleasure Paul and Barnabas recognized these unexpected visitors, who returned the embraces with heartfelt thanks that they had finally arrived.

Barnabas flung open the door and his deep voice filled the house, “Abigail, Mary come quickly, we have visitors!”

The hallway filled as the women and servants came in answer to Barnabas’s bellow. Stephen also appeared from an upper room and the introductions were made. “This is Demetrius from Pisidian Antioch, this is Artemas from Lystra,” he paused while he recollected the name, “And this is Castor the servant of Gaius from Derbe,” as Barnabas introduced the three men, his voice became softer and his expression more and more puzzled.

Those to whom they were introduced were puzzled also, Demetrius was obviously Greek, and contrasted strangely with Artemas, who was dark skinned, with a hooked nose, and Castor was fair-haired and blue-eyed.

Paul’s heart was full of foreboding. “There is something wrong, my brothers?”

Barnabas, who knew bad news was always better on a full stomach, said, “Can’t you see they are famished. Let their news wait while they wash and eat.”

The men were thankful for Barnabas’s intervention. Truly their news was bad. They had travelled over-land through the Taurus mountains and the

Cilician gap, making as much speed as they could, but the snow on the pass lingered and the journey had been difficult. They were footsore, hungry and badly needed rest.

With one of Mary's sustaining meals before them, the men began to revive. Over the meal Castor told the children a little of his family's background and how his ancestors had come over the Hellespont and had ridden their sturdy horses in triumph, conquering the whole of Asia up to the Taurus mountains.

"But you don't rule there now," there was a note of disbelief in Junius's voice and Joseph kicked him.

Castor noticing the by-play between the boys smiled, "No, King Attalus of Pergamum defeated our people and we were confined to the central province."

The boys wanted to hear more but when the meal finished, Stephen took the men to the upper room, where they could explain their strange mission. The news was worse than even Paul had imagined.

Demetrius began the story, "Early last summer a delegation of Jewish brothers arrived from Jerusalem. Of course we welcomed them with great joy. But very soon it became obvious they had been sent by the elders in Jerusalem to tell us that it was not enough for Gentiles to be baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, if we were to be fully part of the People of God, we must be circumcised."

An exclamation of dismay escaped from Paul.

It was Barnabas who asked, "What made them send such a delegation to you?"

Demetrius, who did not know of the relationship to Barnabas said, "It appears that the travelling companion who left you in Pamphylia returned to Jerusalem with a report about your teachings and how you were admitting anyone into the fellowship of believers."

Paul burst out, "How did he know? He was only with us in Cyprus?"

Barnabas said, "Well, he could see even then we were not insisting on circumcision. And why should we, when Peter himself had baptised Captain Cornelius's family and friends in Caesarea and no one insisted they should be circumcised?"

Demetrius shrugged his shoulders and said, "It seems they questioned the authority you had to come and teach, since neither of you were followers of the Lord during his life-time, and you were not authorised by the leaders in Jerusalem."

This news was shocking to both men but the full implications of how dreadful this action would be on the growing church only slowly dawned.

Barnabas asked with grief and pain in his voice, “What did your group do?”

Demetrius said, “We were torn apart. Some Greeks, who had long been ‘God-fearers’ at the synagogues and had accepted the gospel you preached with joy, now felt betrayed. Some agreed to circumcision but some left our fellowship. The Jewish brethren were glad of this assurance that circumcision was necessary, because it restored their relationship with the local synagogues. For the rest of us who had received the message of salvation from you, we could not believe you had led us astray. We met and prayed for the Lord Jesus to guide us, but for a long time we couldn’t decide what to do.”

Demetrius’s eyes filled with tears, as he repeated, “We were torn apart,” after a pause he said, “Then they left. But first they made sure where you had gone because they were ‘authorised’ to follow up and straighten out all the communities you had ‘misled’ with your message of a ‘free and universal salvation.’” His voice choked with bitter sadness at the memory of the devastation this delegation had left behind. He nodded towards Artemas, “He can tell you what happened next.”

Artemas had changed since their first meeting. He had grown in spiritual maturity. There was an aura of wisdom, which replaced the glib street-knowledge of one who had lived by his wits on the fringes of the rich. His work for Lamachus had given him an added status which sat well on him.

He looked at Paul for a long moment before he said, “You changed our lives. Khacan in particular sends you loving greetings. He has taken a wife and has a flourishing business mending pots and pans and sharpening knives. The family of Lemachus also send you greetings, and Eunice begs you to return when you can.”

He stopped a moment before picking up the thread of Demetrius’s story. “The delegation went first to Iconium, where the effect of their message was apparently similar to the brethren in Antioch. It brought deep divisions with some dropping away, some accepting circumcision and the rest refusing to accept circumcision as the price of salvation, when they already had experienced it as a free gift.”

Artemas paused and again looked at Paul, somehow he seemed to know that this news was wounding him more deeply than Barnabas, although Barnabas’s face was full of dismay.

He continued, “They arrived in Lystra towards the middle of summer. I think the fact there is no synagogue in Lystra made it more difficult for them to break our fellowship. Lemachus received them courteously and we were called to hear them preach. Their message filled us all with anger. Especially

when they suggested you were not empowered by God to preach the good news of salvation.”

His eyes sparkled. “We had seen the power of God working through you, and when we heard what they had to say, we refused to listen to more. Our sisters Lois and Eunice were deeply troubled, for young Timothy is half Jewish and they thought perhaps God wouldn’t accept him without circumcision, but we insisted we had all been baptised and had received God’s Holy Spirit so how could these trouble-makers now say we were not saved?”

He grinned, “They did not stay long after that, and went on to Derbe.” He looked at Castor. “You can finish their ‘Odyssey’.

Castor took up the story. “My master, Gaius sends his regrets that he could not come himself, and he asked me to accompany these brothers to give you our account of those men. They arrived and went to a local inn, because they could not find any Jewish families with which to stay. It took them a few days to find some of our brethren, because they couldn’t speak the language and people couldn’t understand what they wanted.” His blue eyes held the hint of a smile. “Since no one in Derbe knew about a god called ‘Chrestus’! They were sent to the local shrines and temples, much to their annoyance, and then finally someone took pity on them and sent them to my master’s house.”

Castor appeared at ease amongst the group. It was obvious he too had matured in his faith, “Like our brethren in Antioch, we were very excited to hear of a visit from our brothers in Jerusalem, and made them welcome. But it puzzled us when they would not accept hospitality and chose instead the discomfort of the local inn, where they did their own cooking. They told us to arrange a meeting as they had important things to teach us.”

The faint smile had left his eyes as Castor remembered the hurt at the arrogant behaviour of the visitors.

“At the meeting they told us the same story, that we could not be fully saved without becoming circumcised. This news was shocking to us. We remembered the stories you had told us of your people having made a Covenant with God and being circumcised as a sign, but you had never told us that this was a condition of our salvation. We argued with them, and they told us that while you might be a great teacher, you, whom they called ‘brother Saul’ were not a proper ‘Apostle’ and ‘brother Joseph’ was also not authorised to teach. You were not sent out by the brothers in Jerusalem and had no authority to baptise foreigners into the fellowship of the Lord Jesus.”

Paul groaned. A silence filled the room as the implications of all this filled each one with deepening dismay.

Demetrius cleared his throat and said, “By this time our group had decided to send a group of us to see how our brothers in Iconium had reacted to this

message. Stephanas, Ebenezer and I went. We each represented parts of our torn community. It was not a happy journey and when we came to Iconium we found the brethren there as torn as we were. We had long discussions with their group, but could reach no conclusion. Ebenezer said we should obey these elders from Jerusalem as men who had direct authority from the Lord.”

Again Paul groaned.

Demetrius continued, “Onesiphorus was not convinced but there were those who were. Stephanas stayed in Iconium, while Ebenezer returned home. I was so upset that I wanted to see the brethren in Lystra and Derbe. I couldn’t believe you had taught us wrongly. Onesiphorus agreed to accompany me as far as Lystra, where we heard how the brethren there had refused to listen to these ‘experts’. I felt a glimmer of hope for the first time that maybe things would be all right.”

Paul lifted his head. Nothing he had so far heard would have led him to believe ‘things would be all right’.

“While we were in Lystra, we heard the Elders from Jerusalem had returned, but they made no attempt to meet with the brethren again and so we did not know what had happened at Derbe. Onesiphorus agreed to continue with me as far as Derbe, and the brethren at Lystra asked Artemas here, to accompany us. They made a collection to provide for our journey, because by this time we began to see we must find you and tell you what had happened and ask your advice.”

Barnabas looked up at this. He was feeling the oppression of this devastating story, as he pictured the pain and dismay amongst the believers.

“When we arrived in Derbe we found the brethren angry and confused. They were only too pleased to have someone to come and find you and ask what we should do. After some discussion and prayer, we three were chosen to come. Onesiphorus by the way, sends you loving greetings, but he felt he could not be away from home during the winter. Because by this time it was late in the season, and we decided we should stay in Derbe until spring, so we could be on our way as soon as news came that the passes were open.”

A deep silence greeted the end of his story. Neither Paul nor Barnabas had realised how far the Jewish opposition to Gentile believers was prepared to go. They wondered how Peter was reacting to these developments.

Finally Barnabas stirred, “Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, the true Judge. We bless you that these our brothers have reached us safely. We remember before you the communities from which they come and ask you to guide and strengthen them. We ask you O Father of our Lord Jesus Christ to reveal your will to us.”

To which the others replied, “Amen.”

Stephen said, "I think we should call a meeting of the leaders of the church. They should hear how the so-called leaders in Jerusalem have reacted to the mission of our brothers. You were not lightly chosen and sent off. You went with the prayer and fasting of the whole church. How could the Holy Spirit have given us wrong guidance?"

He could see how deeply this news had affected Paul. "Take heart my brothers, our Lord will show us the way through this."

Paul did not respond, but Barnabas nodded, "Yes, I think you are right, we should call a meeting as soon as possible."

Stephen then turned to the visitors, "Our home is small and already full. I am sure you are ready to rest. I have made arrangements for you to sleep next door with our friends, but you will eat here with us."

Demetrius spoke for the three travellers all, "Thank you for your kindness and welcome. Truth to tell, we are longing to rest. The journey was hard, but by tomorrow we should be recovered."

Paul remained sunk deep in his sombre thoughts. The all too familiar pain had begun in his head and lights were flashing before his eyes.

It was Barnabas who said, "Go in peace my brothers. May no thoughts trouble you, nor evil dreams, nor evil fancies, but may you rest perfectly in the Lord."

Stephen murmured, "Amen," and went to show them where they would stay.

Barnabas looked at Paul, "Come my brother, let us sleep, in the morning the Lord may reveal his will in this matter." Paul did not appear to hear and after a moment Barnabas left him.

Later Paul rose and climbed the outside steps to the roof, where he cast himself on his face and wept bitterly. Then he rose to pray but his headache had become intolerable. Groaning, he begged the Lord to free him from the pain.

The next day Barnabas found Paul unable to rise with the pain in his head. Worried, he sent a message for Luke, who they had come to know as a kind and sympathetic doctor, but even Luke's ministrations could not help and it was the familiar three day agony before Paul finally vomited and rose, pale and exhausted to look for Barnabas.

When he found him he announced, "I must write to them!"

Barnabas looked troubled, "Don't you think we must first meet with the elders and see what they have to say?"

Paul said, "You meet with the elders. I must write to them." Then as if seeing Barnabas for the first time, "Perhaps you are right, we must meet with the elders."

The meeting took place in Manean's home later that day. Paul's three day absence had enabled the news to circulate amongst the brethren and there was much anger at what they had heard.

All the hurts of Enoch's visit were revived and intensified. The meeting began with angry denunciations and several wild suggestions were made. In the end two proposals met with the united support of the group. The first was approval of Paul's determination to write to the sister churches in Lycaonia reassuring them. The second was that a delegation should go to Jerusalem and have this issue cleared up once and for all.

Lucius turned to Paul as the meeting broke up and said, "Please convey our loving greetings to our brothers in Lycaonia when you write." Paul nodded.

Paul went round to Titus's home and left a message that he wanted him the following morning as his amanuenses. Then he went on to see Aeneas, the tent-maker and explain his absence and ask to be excused for a further two days. Aeneas was not at all pleased to lose the services of one of his better workmen, especially as there were orders to finish now the travelling period was in full swing.

Titus arrived early the next morning, and Paul greeted him gratefully.

"Did you bring your writing materials?"

Titus replied, "I brought my pens and ink, but I had to borrow papyrus from my father." While Titus was getting ready, Paul sat thinking.

Finally Paul said, "From Paul, whose call to be an apostle did not come from man or by means of man, but from Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from death. All the brothers who are here join me in sending greetings to the churches of—," He shut his eyes and thought a moment, if he said 'Lycaonia' the term was almost synonymous with calling them all 'bandits and thieves' since the Lycaonians were notorious throughout the empire, and because of this a great source of slaves as the Romans sought to bring order and stability to the area.

Finally he opened his eyes and looked at Titus, saying firmly, "churches of Galatia. May the God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace."³⁰⁰

Paul recounted his own ministry. It was a long letter and Titus began to struggle. He repeated aloud as he wrote, "Suggestions to me."

Paul stopped and waiting for him to catch up. It gave him a chance to think exactly what point he was trying to drive home. Paul continued, "For by God's power I was made an apostle to the Gentiles, just as Peter was made

³⁰⁰ Galatia: Pauls writes letter to Churches CE 49 – Galatians

an apostle to the Jews. James, Peter, and John, who seemed to be the leaders, recognized that God had given me this special task;³⁰¹

While he waited for Titus, Paul reflected. It was strange, most of the others had been called by the Lord, and had first been his disciples or ‘followers’, before being empowered by the Holy Spirit and then being ‘sent’³⁰². He had been struck down and almost immediately empowered to preach. Then he thought of the long years when nothing he said or did went right, and he thought maybe he had indeed spent those years trying to ‘follow’ the Lord. Of being taught the Way of the Lord in spite of himself. The thoughts tumbled over themselves and he saw that Titus was ready for him.

Paul asked, “Where was I?”

Titus read, “God had given me this special task:”

“Oh, yes,” he remembered, “So they shook hands with Barnabas and me, as a sign that we were all partners. We agreed that Barnabas and I would work among the Gentiles and they among the Jews. All they asked was that we should remember the needy in their group, which is the very thing I had been eager to do.”

Abigail came to the door, “There is a meal waiting downstairs, or would you like me to send it up?”

Paul answered, “I think my brother here could do with a break to rest his hand. If you don’t mind waiting a few moments, we will be down.”

Abigail nodded and left them.

Titus was ready and Paul continued, “But when Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him in public, because he was clearly wrong. Before some men who had been sent by James arrived there, Peter had been eating with the Gentile brothers. But after these men arrived, he drew back and would not eat with the Gentiles, because he was afraid of those who were in favour of circumcising them.”

The scorn Paul had felt then, filled his voice as he remembered the deep affront Peter’s action had caused to the Gentile brethren in Antioch. He concluded with the events up to Peter’s return to Jerusalem and then stopped.

“Let us leave it for now and go to eat. I’m afraid I am going to keep you busy for some time yet.”

Titus smiled. Paul had suddenly become more human as he had revealed some of the pain of his past. Titus had always seen him as someone who knew all the answers and saw other men’s doubts as weaknesses. Now Titus realised that Paul had his own doubts, not about the gospel, but about himself. Everything he had said this morning had been to prove himself.

³⁰¹ Galatians 2:10

³⁰² ‘Disciple’ means follower and ‘Apostle’ is one who is sent.

The afternoon wore on and the shadows deepened in the room. Finally it became too dark to see. Paul stopped and said, "There is still more that needs to be said, but perhaps we must finish this letter tomorrow."

Titus shook his cramped hand and looked up, "I could carry on if you like, after we have eaten."

Paul was tempted, but he knew he had exhausted Titus who was not a professional amanuenses, so he shook his head and said, "It will be easier for you to write in daylight. Also I will review what I have said so far."

The papyrus scroll laid across the table, the written side of it re-curling itself on the floor, and the unwritten section lying on the other side, gradually diminishing in length. Titus gathered up his pens. Stopped the ink and then rolled the scroll neatly before handing it to Paul.

He saw Paul was also tired. "Thank you for that bit about, 'there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free men, between men and women'. I don't think I ever quite understood how we have been united to one another through Jesus Christ."³⁰³

Paul embraced him and said, "Thank you my son. Go now and come back early in the morning. We should be finished by midday."

They walked downstairs together and Mary caught sight of them and asked, "Are you staying to eat, Titus?"

He shook his head and answered, "No, but I might stay for the midday meal tomorrow, if that is all right."

Mary said, "You know this home, you are always welcome."

Barnabas came out from the courtyard where he had been washing. "How did the letter go?"

Paul smiled and replied, "It's not 'gone' yet. It's still 'coming'!" Then he added, "But we should be finished in the morning."

Later he sat with a lamp trying to decipher the script, but his eyes were not strong and in the dim light he could not make out the words. He thought back to what he had said. On the whole he felt satisfied with his exposition of the purpose of the Law and the examples he had used. Especially the one of Abraham's two sons, one from Hagar, the slave-woman and the other, Isaac by Sarah, a free woman. The one born naturally and the other as a result of God's promise.

Then he wondered if it was a good idea to refer back to his own weakness and ill-health when he arrived both in Iconium and later in Derbe. But no! His comparison of his own travail to a mother in child-birth, bringing to life Christ's nature in them. This led straight on to the comparison between Hagar

³⁰³ Galatians 3:28

and Sarah, and illustrated what he meant of the difference between himself and those legalistic Jews who wanted to re-impose the slavery of the Law.

He felt tired, physically and mentally, but the wonder of this mysterious life of Christ within him had replaced the pain and anger, and he felt a deep thankfulness. He went to bed and dropped into a profound sleep.

Titus arrived just after Paul and Barnabas had finished washing and saying their morning prayers together.

Paul and Titus once more removed themselves to the upper room. Titus had re-filled his ink-well and brought a new batch of pens. He unrolled the parchment and found the place.

Paul said, "Please just read the last sentences."

Titus read, "Send the slave-woman and her son away; for the son of the slave-woman will not have a part of the father's property along with the son of the free woman. So then, my brothers, we are not the children of a slave-woman but a free-woman."³⁰⁴

Paul closed his eyes and began, "Freedom is what we have – Christ has set us free! Stand, then, as free people, and do not allow yourselves to become slaves again."

He waited for Titus and then continued, "Listen! I, Paul, tell you that if you allow yourselves to be circumcised, it means that Christ is of no use to you at all."

Paul thought, I must drive this home to them and he added, "Once more I warn any man who allows himself to be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the whole Law." That should make them think! But it was much more than this.

"Those of you who try to be put right with God by obeying the Law have cut yourselves off from Christ. You are outside God's grace."

He waited for Titus, "As for us, our hope is that God will put us right with him; and this is what we wait for by the power of God's Spirit working through our faith..... For when we are in union with Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor the lack of it makes any difference at all,"

The wonder of this gift from God filled Paul once more and he said, "What matters is faith that works through love."³⁰⁵

His eyes filled with tears as he thought of the people they had left in each of the cities they had visited. "You were doing so well! Who made you stop obeying the truth? How did he persuade you? It was not done by God, who calls you. 'It takes only a little yeast to make the whole batch rise,' as they say."

³⁰⁴ Galatians 4:30-31

³⁰⁵ Galatians 5:1-6 & 7-15

Surely Christ himself would be their guide? Surely he would not leave them helpless to those who would tear the flock apart? Paul continued, “But I still feel confident about you. Our life in union with the Lord makes me confident that you will not take a different view and that the man who is upsetting you, whoever he is, will be punished by God.”

Paul thought back to Iconium and the events that led up to their departure from that city. Whoever was preaching this destructive message was no better than the poor deluded Melanthius.

Paul went on, “But as for me, my brothers, if I continue to preach that circumcision is necessary, why am I still being persecuted? If that were true, then my preaching about the cross of Christ would cause no trouble. I wish that the people who are upsetting you would go all the way; let them go on and castrate themselves!”

Titus looked up, startled by the tone of Paul’s voice. Paul explained, “The priests of Cybele practise self-mutilation in Iconium. The brethren in Iconium suffered greatly when they withstood the pressure on them to sacrifice to Cybele during the spring rites.”

Titus nodded and finished the sentence. Paul in the meantime wanted to turn them away from these negatives and end on the positive life of renewal which their union with Jesus brought them.

He continued dictating and then began to contrast their human nature and the work of the Spirit within them. As he walked up and down a light came into his face and when Titus glanced up to indicate he was ready, he was struck by the beauty in Paul’s face. How it could change!

A note of triumph entered Paul’s voice as he said, “But the Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control. There is no law against such things as these.....And those who belong to Christ Jesus have put to death their human nature with all its passions and desires..... The Spirit has given us life; he must also control our lives.... We must not be proud or irritate one another.”³⁰⁶

There was a gentle knock on the door and Abigail looked in. Titus glanced up and continued writing. Paul who had just completed a turn and was facing the door, saw her. He smiled, “Don’t tell me, my sister that it’s time to eat?”

Abigail asked, “Are you not hungry?”

Titus said, “Even if brother Paul is not, I am. I have smelt the bread baking and it begs for my attention.”

Abigail laughed, “Are you ready now, or do you want us to wait?”

Paul said, “No, we can finish after the meal. It won’t be long now.”

³⁰⁶ Galations 5:16-26

Later when they returned Paul said to Titus, “I think I have almost finished.”

Titus looked at the ink and decided it would not be enough. Carefully he cut off a small length from the ink-stick, crushed it and then tipped it in the ink pot. He added a little water and stirred it until it had all dissolved. Once more he checked his pens and renewed their points. Satisfied all was ready, he looked up at Paul.

Paul began once again. After a while Titus looked up, wondering if Paul had made a mistake Paul caught the look in his eye and said, “No, I mean we should help carry each other’s burdens, but I also mean that people must not expect it. People must not leave their problems to others.” Titus nodded.

When he had finished Paul said, “Let me add a few words in my own hand.” Titus rose and handed him a fresh pen.

Paul made a stroke and saw how much larger (and more untidy) his handwriting was in comparison to Titus’s neat script. “See what big letters I make as I write to you now with my own hand!” He wrote.

Then he continued, “The people who are trying to force you to be circumcised are the ones who want to show off and boast about external matters. They do it, however, only so that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. Even those who practise circumcision do not obey the Law; they want you to be circumcised so that they can boast that you submitted to this physical ceremony.”

Paul knew whoever was behind this ‘circumcision mission’ would never forgive him, and he would continue to suffer for his stand. But the issue was absolutely fundamental to the message he preached. Did they understand? It was not the physical act that mattered.

He wrote, “As for me I will boast only about the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; for by means of his cross the world is dead to me, and I am dead to the world. It does not matter at all whether or not one is circumcised; what does matter is being a new creature. As for those who follow this rule in their lives, may peace and mercy be with them – with them and with all God’s people! To conclude: let no one give me any more trouble, because the scars I have on my body show that I am the slave of Jesus.”³⁰⁷

He closed his eyes. It was enough. Let him close the letter. “May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all, my brothers. Amen.”

He rose from the stool and let Titus sand the wet ink. Then he said, “Before this letter is copied to be sent to the churches in Galatia, I think Barnabas and the other elders must read it.”

³⁰⁷ Galatians 6:11-18

Titus started rolling the parchment and he said, “Why don’t I take it round to Barnabas now and see what he thinks. Then maybe he would make a suggestion.”

Paul agreed to this and Titus tied the roll of parchment and then placed it in its bag for protection before hurrying out to find Barnabas.

Barnabas was employed by pagan merchants, but his absolute honesty and endless good humour had endeared him to them. When Titus arrived with the letter, Barnabas said, “I am not free to read it now.”

“What’s the matter?” Asked a voice, “Why are you not free?”

Barnabas turned to see the eldest of the merchants standing in the archway.

“It is not for me to read correspondence which is not concerned with your affairs, my master,” replied Barnabas.

The old man glared at him and said, “And if I say you are to read the letter?”

Barnabas smiled at him, “Then of course I would have to obey your orders!”

“Then read it and settle whatever needs your attention,” growled the old man.

Barnabas took Titus into the courtyard and sat on a bench beneath an apricot tree. Carefully he unrolled the parchment and began to read. He read it right through before he looked up at Titus. His voice was gruff with emotion, “Truly the Lord knew what he was doing when he chose Paul. Take this straight round to Lucius and if he agrees ask him to arrange with Manean to have copies made.”

“How many should I tell him?” Asked Titus.

“Hmm.” Barnabas thought and then counted on his fingers, “Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and an extra copy for us.” He thought again, “And maybe the brethren in Jerusalem will want one at a later stage. Oh and yes, we have had no word from Mnason in Cyprus, but I should think we ought to send one or two copies there, just in case they too have been visited. How many is that?”

Titus, who had been keeping track said, “Seven or eight.”

“Well,” said Barnabas, “See what Lucius thinks, but it is easier to make all the copies we need now, than to have to make one or two later because we haven’t enough.”

Titus then remembered Paul’s instruction, “Brother Paul asked me whether this letter should not go to the elders for approval before it is copied. I think he thought they might want it changed or to add to it.”

Barnabas put his arm around Titus, “There is nothing to add, our brother has said it all – far better than any of the rest of us. Let it be sent in his name. He includes greetings from us all.”

All those who read the letter agreed with Barnabas, and Manean arranged to have ten copies made at the local scriptorium. These were also written on papyrus but made up into proper scrolls, with water-proof bags to carry them.

When the three delegates from Galatia had also read the letter, they rejoiced at the powerful line Paul had taken and they wasted no time but left the next day to take the reassuring news back to their respective communities.

CHAPTER 16: THE COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM

CE 49 July

Acts 15:4-33

After the departure of Demetrius, Artemas and Castor, the leaders met to discuss the next step. There was still much anger and no one was satisfied to leave the activities of the Jerusalem leaders unchallenged. This point of circumcision and coming under the Law was too fundamental to leave unresolved. At the meeting, they finally decided to send Paul and Barnabas, together with Titus and Nicolaus as a delegation to Jerusalem.³⁰⁸ A collection was made for their expenses and special prayers were made for them and the brothers in Jerusalem before their departure.

It was in the Jewish month of Ab, or late July when they finally arrived in Jerusalem one evening just before the gates were closed. They walked through the familiar streets to the home of Mary. Paul was not feeling very happy about seeing John Mark again, but Barnabas was adamant he would stay nowhere else, and anyhow they needed to make their peace with Mark. Titus, who liked him had no feelings of anxiety about meeting him. Nicolaus would have preferred to stay with some of his friends attached to the synagogue of the Freedmen in lower Jerusalem, but they had all agreed that it would be better if they kept together.

It was thus with mixed feelings the four men knocked. The door was opened by Rhoda, who stared at the visitors for a moment before throwing the door wide and turning to run and call her mistress. It seemed the five years since their previous visit had done nothing to slow her down or blunt her impetuosity!

Mary had been spinning in the courtyard with her maids. She came through the doorway, tears of joy filled her eyes.

"Oh, Joseph. How wonderful to see you again!" She exclaimed, "And brother Saul, Titus," Each one was given a warm hug. When she came to Nicolaus, she stopped and looked puzzled. "I've met you before?"

Barnabas said, "You remember Nicolaus, he was one of the seven, chosen with Stephen to oversee the finances."³⁰⁹

Mary's face broke into a smile, "Yes, of course, but that was a long time ago, no wonder I wasn't sure. You had a wife and two children, are they well?"

³⁰⁸ Paul & Barnabas: To Council of Jerusalem CE 49 – Acts 15:2

³⁰⁹ Acts 6:5

Nicolaus smiled, "Thank you my sister, they are well, and we now have six children!"

Barnabas asked, "Where is John Mark?"

Paul thought a slight shadow might have crossed Mary's face as she said, "Oh, he should be home soon. He will be glad to see you again."

Paul wondered if he would, especially when he heard the reason of their visit.

But he had misjudged Mark. He was indeed glad to see Barnabas and Titus and for their sakes he greeted Paul courteously enough.

Later after supper, they caught up on all the news. There was much to tell and they talked late into the night.

In the morning the four men went round to where Peter and Anna were staying and found a warm welcome. They walked out into a small courtyard where a few pomegranate shrubs gave a little shade. Paul broached the object of their mission by saying, "We have come to settle once and for all the issue of the circumcision of Gentiles."

Peter looked grave. "Yes, I wondered how long it would be before you came. This issue is causing much controversy even here in Jerusalem."

Barnabas lent forward, "Who is at the bottom of it all?"

Peter frowned, "I don't think anyone is 'at the bottom of it'. It is perhaps because here in Jerusalem many of the Pharisees have joined our group and they hold to the full Torah as well. Then as you know, many of the priests became baptised into the fellowship, and they long to see their more senior colleagues convinced that Jesus is truly the Messiah. But you know how the Sadducees feel about the teachings of the prophets and resurrection from death. They reject it, holding only to the five books of Moses as being authentic 'Teaching from God.'"

Paul said, "In other words they are trying to use Jesus Christ for their own ends?"

Peter looked unhappy, "Maybe some of them, but many are devout and genuine followers of the Lord and look for his promised return at any time. They long for the whole nation to accept Jesus as Messiah, because then they are convinced the Romans will be overcome and God's righteous kingdom will take over."

"What do John and the other Apostles have to say?" Asked Barnabas.

"They are unhappy at the divisions in the community, especially John. But you must also realise that while your missionary journey caused a furore here, the issue of circumcision is not something that affects the church of Jerusalem directly. Most of them have never seen the conversion of Gentiles,

but many do not relish the idea of wholesale conversion of Gentile communities outside the Covenant.”

“What about Captain Cornelius and his household? Are they proposing to go and circumcise them all?” Paul asked.

Peter smiled, “The issue doesn’t exactly arise any more, brother Cornelius returned to Rome.”

“Yes, but surely there are still uncircumcised brethren in Caesarea?” Paul insisted.

Peter thought and said, “There may be, but not many.”

“And did Cornelius take his faith back to Rome with his family or leave it in Caesarea?”

Again Peter smiled, “He took it back to Rome and they have a group meeting in his house. We occasionally hear from them though other Roman officers.”

Paul’s eyes widened. The thought that the message of salvation was now in Rome itself made him pause. How he longed to take it there himself!

Barnabas said, “We need to call a meeting. What do you feel about it?”

Peter said, “I agree, I will tell the others you are here and discuss with them the best way of getting everyone together.”

Barnabas asked, “How many of the Twelve are in Jerusalem? “

Peter thought and then said, “John is here and Philip is in Caesarea, Matthais is here, Matthew and Andrew are in Galilee, Bartholomew is in Samaria, Thomas went to India many years ago and we have had no news from him, Simon is here and so is Alphaeus’s son, James. Judas, son of James went to Alexandria. How many is that? Have I left anyone out?”³¹⁰

Paul said, “James is with the Lord, and with yourself that is twelve. That means five of you are here. Do you know how the others feel on this issue?”

Peter looked grave, “No, most of us have not had to think of the issue, and those who have, feel that the Lord himself never condemned circumcision.”

Paul looked at Barnabas but said nothing. The peace he had felt after the letter to the Galatians was ebbing away. This was not going to be an easy meeting. Later he suggested to Barnabas that they should fast and pray.

It took a few more days, and the news of the arrival of the delegation from Antioch brought long and heated discussions amongst the brethren all round Jerusalem.

There was the problem of venue and who should take part in the debate. The synagogue of the Freedmen was chosen as being large enough to

³¹⁰ List of Apostles Luke 6:14-16; Matthew 10:1-4; Mark 3:13-19 Little is known of where these men went to, except for the strong tradition that Thomas went to India.

accommodate the whole group, and after prolonged discussions, it was agreed the elders of each congregation, as well as the apostles should take part.

Two days later about the fourth hour, the men began to assemble. Amongst the leading pharisees was Nicodemus, Joseph from Arimathea, both members of the Great Sanhedrin, and Simon of Bethany. Each one who arrived greeted Barnabas and Paul courteously and sat down.

The gathering asked Joseph of Arimathea to preside over the meeting because he was not only a senior member of the Sanhedrin but was respected and liked by all parties. He asked Simon Peter to dedicate the meeting to the Almighty.³¹¹

Peter rose and prayed. “Our Father in heaven, we remember the costly sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We purify ourselves and offer to you our sincere love for one another. Through Christ we have been born again as children of an immortal parent. Now we ask you to guide us into all Truth that we may fully understand your will in the matters we have before us today. May your will be done.”³¹²

Everyone said a heartfelt “Amen.”

Simon of Arimathea looked round the room and said, “My brothers, you must all freely speak your minds so that we can understand the issues involved. Then we will wait for the Holy Spirit to reveal the will of the Lord in the matter.”

After a pause, Simon of Bethany rose, “Brothers, I speak for many of my colleagues when I say that we cannot agree to the wholesale conversion of Gentiles without them submitting to circumcision and the Torah. You all know how strictly the Lord Jesus interpreted the Law of Moses and teachings of the prophets. How he said ‘I have not come to do away with them, but to make their teachings come true.’ If Gentiles are baptised into fellowship without the Torah, how will they know what is required of them?”

Simon decided to forestall anyone reminding them that Jesus was equally critical of the teachings of the pharisees concerning the halachah, the application of the Torah to daily life, where each prescribed act was intended to help make the whole of a man’s life one of service to God.

“I know that the Lord Jesus criticised the outward signs of religion when the heart is full of greed and envy,³¹³ but we are not here referring to the outward signs of religion, we are talking about the Torah, which the Almighty, blessed be he forever, gave to guide his people and protect them from the world.”

³¹¹ Council of Jerusalem CE 49: Paul & Barnabas attend – Acts 15:6ff

³¹² 1 Peter 1 parts of 17-23

³¹³ Matthew 23, Mark 12:38-89, Luke 11:43,46, Luke 20:45-46

Barnabas looked at Paul, but he was strangely relaxed and unresponsive to the arguments which Simon was putting forward so persuasively. He continued in this vein for some time and then returned to his seat.

A man, neither Paul nor Barnabas knew, then rose. Simon of Arimathea said, "Yes, brother Michael son of Zebediah."

Michael was a thickset man, with an impressive full beard and black curly hair. He moved with self-confidence. "Greetings in the name of the Lord, my brothers," he began in a deep resounding voice, "You all know that Johanan, Jeshaiiah and myself were appointed to visit the synagogues and towns where our brothers Joseph and Saul preached the Good News." He looked at Paul and Barnabas and continued, "It was felt necessary to confirm those who had come to the Lord Jesus in their faith. We found to our dismay that far from leaving the towns of Lycaonia with strong and thriving communities of Believers, our Jewish brothers were torn by controversy and the so-called Gentile converts had taken over the running of these groups. Few if any of these Gentiles were circumcised and under the Torah, the vast majority were from totally heathen backgrounds."

For the first time Barnabas felt Paul stir angrily. He felt angry himself. He could just see the manner this Michael and his colleagues had gone about 'confirming the brothers in their faith.' Then suddenly Barnabas felt Paul relax, he glanced at him and saw Paul's eyes were shut and that he was praying quietly to himself.

Michael was continuing, "We made it clear to these people that no one who was uncircumcised was eligible to hold office in the church. That all Gentiles must be taught the whole Torah so they would have a strong foundation for their faith. We visited Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe before returning. I must report that matters in Lystra and Derbe are far from satisfactory, there are no synagogues there and the converts are totally ignorant of the Torah. In fact in Derbe we made no headway at all. But I am pleased to say that we left the churches considerably strengthened in Antioch and Iconium." Michael, obviously satisfied of a job well-done, sat down.

His smug self-satisfied manner was almost more than Barnabas could bear, especially when he remembered the grief and anguish these men had left behind.

The next person to rise was Enoch. "I greet you my brothers in the name of the Lord Jesus. As you know, Joshua, Daniel and I were requested to visit the brethren in Antioch two years ago to try to clarify the relationship between the church in Antioch and the church here in Jerusalem. You will remember we were seriously disturbed by reports that our brothers in Antioch had sent out missionaries to take the message of the Gospel to Cyprus and Lycaonia. While we recognized the sincerity of their intention, it seemed strange to us

that they should take this mission upon themselves without consulting the elders in Jerusalem.”

The manner of his speaking showed his confidence that his view was the majority one and that if anyone disagreed with his account it was of no significance.

“Our concern was that a different Gospel would be preached in these areas, and so the seeds of division would be sown and not the Gospel of Peace which we received from our Lord. Indeed as we heard from brother Michael, this is sadly the case. When we arrived in Antioch we were alarmed to discover that the church there apparently felt themselves under no authority from Jerusalem. They have introduced many changes, especially the baptizing of Gentiles without circumcision, and giving them places of authority in their community. While we were troubled concerning our brothers in Antioch, it was only when they appointed missionaries to take their corrupted version of the teachings of the Lord Jesus to other places, that we felt the authority of the elders in Jerusalem must be asserted.”

Barnabas looked at Paul, but he seemed far away. For himself, he knew how efforts had been made for many years to bring control over the activities of the brethren in Antioch. Had not he himself been delegated to just such a role? And was it not exactly to deal with the problem of uncircumcised Gentiles that he had gone to seek out Paul in Tarsus? Suddenly without any doubt whatsoever he saw the hand of God in his fetching of Paul and Paul’s subsequent teaching. Only someone brought up in the strictest pharisaic tradition could possibly have testified to the uniqueness of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

‘Dear Lord,’ thought Barnabas, ‘I never really understood just what you were saying through my brother Paul. I could see that the Holy Spirit brought new life to people, but not that by your life, death and resurrection, you are God’s living Torah.’

Suddenly he reached out and gripped Paul’s arm. Paul opened his eyes and looked at him in surprise. There was no doubt that he had been listening to Enoch. His face was filled with sadness. Barnabas’s eyes danced with joy and he grinned at his friend, before whispering, “You may think me slow, but at last I understand what you’ve been saying all these years!”

The grief left Paul’s face and slowly a smile of great joy and sweetness filled his face, he murmured, “Thank you, Lord.”

Thereafter they sat out Enoch’s discourse, hardly hearing what he said.

There were several other speakers who reiterated the general theme that Gentiles must be circumcised and brought under the Torah, until finally there came an expectant pause. Barnabas made to rise, but he was forestalled by Peter who lifted his hand and received a nod from Joseph.

Peter said, “My brothers, you know that a long time ago God chose me from among you to preach the Good News to the Gentiles, so that they could hear and believe. And God, who knows the thoughts of everyone, showed his approval of the Gentiles by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he had to us.”³¹⁴

Peter’s intervention at this point surprised many of his listeners, Paul and Barnabas exchanged looks and smiled. Truly the Holy Spirit was at work!

“He made no difference between us and them; he forgave their sins because they believed. So then, why do you now want to put God to the test by laying a load on the backs of the believers which neither our ancestors nor we ourselves were able to carry. No! We believe and are saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they are.”

Peter sat down. There was dead silence. No one looked at his neighbour or spoke.

Joseph of Arimathea turned to Paul and Barnabas and said, “Brother Joseph, perhaps it is time to hear your account of your missionary journeys.”

Barnabas nodded and rose to his feet. He was as tall as any man present and his thick curly beard and hair, framed his large face, which radiated kindness and good humour.³¹⁵

“It was about seven years ago that you, my brothers, first sent me to Antioch to find out about the church of which reports had come to us concerning the baptism of large numbers of Gentiles. Even then we were concerned lest these people were being accepted into fellowship without understanding the special responsibilities laid on our people concerning the Law.”

Barnabas paused a moment as he thought back to his amazement that such large numbers of Gentiles, many totally ignorant of the requirements of the Law were yet so filled with love and understanding of the Lord Jesus.

“As brother Peter has testified, when I came to Antioch, I discovered that indeed God had made no difference at all between Jews and Gentiles, they were all united in the one Holy Spirit, and obeyed the One Law of God, even when they had never heard of the Torah!”

Barnabas smiled at the sceptical looks he was receiving from the pharisees.

“I was not content to leave matters there! I knew there was one person who could explain to the brothers and sisters in Antioch whether they needed to live under the Law, or whether they had truly heard and received the Living Word from God himself, through Jesus Christ.”

³¹⁴ Peter: Address Jerusalem Council – Acts 15:7-

³¹⁵ Council of Jerusalem: Barnabas & Paul’s missionary report – Acts 15:12

Barnabas suddenly saw John looking at him intently. He wondered what he had said that had obviously touched him.

He continued, "I thus went to seek our brother Paul in Tarsus. When he arrived in Antioch, he gave proof from the scriptures that it was indeed God's plan, that through Jesus, he was bringing us all, Jews and Gentiles into a New Covenant. After we brought you the special collection made to help you through the drought and had returned to Antioch, the Holy Spirit revealed to our brothers that Paul and myself were to take the message of salvation to Cyprus and Pisidia."

Barnabas looked round at his listeners. Certainly he had their attention, but did they understand that they had been acting under the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

"This mission was not lightly undertaken. Some of the brethren had been praying and fasting and it was only then that the Holy Spirit revealed that we were to go. Everywhere we went we preached the same Good News of salvation to all who would listen to it. Wherever we went we found the people, both Jews and Gentiles, were filled with the Holy Spirit and having confessed their sins, were baptized into the fellowship of the Lord Jesus. We left each group with a copy of the 'Sayings of the Lord Jesus'. It was only when we came to Antioch in Pisidia that we encountered serious opposition from the leaders in the local synagogue. It would seem they were jealous of the response amongst the Gentile community to the message we brought. For while a few of the Jews accepted the message but many Gentiles received it with joy. The local Sanhedrin stirred up the Gentile women who attended the synagogue and got the authorities to evict us from the city.

"We visited Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. This last city had no Jewish population, yet these strangers received the Good News of salvation and were transformed in exactly the same way as the rest of us. They spent time in praise and worship together, they cared for one another; they cared especially for us, although they were poor in this world's possessions, they became rich in spiritual power and grace.

"When it came time for us to return, we decided to appoint elders in each group, as we visited them again. We found they had remained strong in faith with many people joining them.

"I would testify to the grace of Jesus Christ which works through brother Paul when he teaches those who are in total ignorance of the Torah and the traditions of our people. He brings them to a new spiritual birth and teaches them that they can no longer live according to the demands of their sinful

human nature, but that they are raised to life with Christ and so must be clothed with the very nature of Christ himself.”³¹⁶

Barnabas could see that even the Pharisees were listening to his account. He felt that it was time to let Paul speak to the assembly. He turned to smile at Paul and then returned to his seat.

Joseph of Arimathea looked at Paul and said, “Would you care to address the meeting, brother Saul?”

Paul nodded and rose to his feet. Compared with Barnabas’s bulk, he seemed small, frail and insignificant, but as he began to speak he seemed to grow in stature, until there was no doubt that here was someone uniquely empowered by the Holy Spirit.

“My brothers in Christ, fellow-Israelites, descendants of Abraham, may God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace. You all know how I was devoted to our religion, and how I persecuted without mercy the church of God and did my best to destroy it. I was ahead of most of the people of my age in my practice of our religion, as many of you will remember.

“But God in his grace chose me even before I was born, and called me to serve him. He decided to reveal his Son to me, so that I might preach the Good News about him to all who would listen.”³¹⁷

“We who are Jews by birth, know that a person is put right with God only through faith in Jesus Christ, never by doing what the Law requires. I speak as one who obeyed every last requirement of the Law and still was held in bondage by sin. It was only when I was put to death with Christ on his cross, that it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. This life that I live now, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave his life for me.”³¹⁸

Paul was not a particularly impressive speaker, but the power of the Life that was in him, and the grace which his words conveyed, gripped even those who fundamentally disagreed with him. They conceded what he was saying was true, but they were dealing with the practicalities of the political situation and they knew that Paul’s activities were undermining the considerable progress they had been making in getting the authorities to accept the Gospel of Jesus.

Paul remembered what he had written in his letter to the Galatians and shared it with them. He had to make them understand the freedom Jesus had won for them all.

³¹⁶ Col 2:20 and Col 3:12

³¹⁷ Galatians 1:3, 11-15

³¹⁸ Galatians 1:3, 11-15

“What I say is this: let the Spirit direct our lives, for the Spirit has given us life: he must also control our lives.”³¹⁹

Could they not see that in Christ they were a new people? That human passions were replaced by Christ’s spirit?

“Our life in Christ makes us strong, and his love comforts us. The Spirit has brought us into fellowship with one another, he reveals himself in the kindness and compassion we show for one another. In Christ, we share the same love. We are one in soul and mind. The attitude we should have is the one that Christ Jesus had...”

Paul was suddenly filled with ecstasy and in quite a different voice he proclaimed, “He always had the nature of God, but he did not think that by force he should try to remain equal with God. Instead of this, of his own free will he gave up all he had, and took the nature of a servant. He became like man and appeared in human likeness. He was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death – his death on the cross. For this reason God raised him to the highest place above and gave him the name that is greater than any other name. And so, in honour of the name of Jesus all beings in heaven, on earth, and in the world below will fall on their knees, and all will openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”³²⁰

Paul sat down – unaware of his surroundings, unaware of the impact of the words that had come out of his mouth, only caught up in a sense of wonder and thanksgiving.

Paul’s speech and the concluding prophecy had made an impression on all those present.

After a period of intense silence, James, the brother of the Lord rose and said,³²¹ “Listen to me, my brothers! Simon has explained how God first showed his care for the Gentiles by taking from among them a people to belong to him. The words of the prophets agree completely with this. As the scripture says, ‘After this I will return, say the Lord, and restore the kingdom of David. I will rebuild its ruins and make it strong again. And so all the rest of mankind will come to me, all the Gentiles who I have called to be my own. So says the Lord who made this known long ago.’”

James went on, “It is my opinion, that we should not trouble the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead, we should write a letter telling them not to eat any food that is ritually unclean because it had been offered to idols; to keep themselves from sexual immorality; and not to eat any animal that has been strangled, or any blood. For the Law of Moses has been read for a very

³¹⁹ Galatians 5:25

³²⁰ Philippians 2:1-11

³²¹ James, brother of Jesus: Council of Jerusalem Speech – Acts 15:13

long time in the synagogues every Sabbath, and his words are preached in every town.”

The fact that it was James who stood up and spoke in such a way, was not lost on anyone present, because it had been on his initiative that Enoch and his party had visited Antioch,³²² although the more harmful visits to Galatia had not been at his instigation.

No one dissented from this suggestion and James, together with Peter and Nicodemus were appointed to draft a letter to be read to a gathering of the whole church in Jerusalem the following First Day.

When the first day of the week arrived, the whole church assembled on the Mount of Olives, which was the only place able to accommodate the more than five thousand people that flocked to hear the decision of the apostles and elders.

There was intense interest in the outcome. This matter had been argued over for years, dividing families and causing acrimonious debates. Mostly people agreed that since the Lord himself had never condemned circumcision and commitment to the Torah he was obviously in favour of them. After all he had never chosen a Gentile amongst the twelve, nor amongst the seventy-two he sent out, so why all the fuss? Surely it was obvious that the nations of the world would be saved through the Jews so it was self-evident that this meant obedience to the Torah and circumcision?

Not everyone was satisfied with this simplistic argument. Some people pointed out the number of Gentiles Jesus had healed, who subsequently became his followers. And what about brother Simon Peter’s vision and experience in Ceasarea with Captain Cornelius and his household?

So the arguments had raged with various degrees of heat and light, and today the whole issue was about to be resolved for good. No wonder everyone who could walk, turned up!

There was a time of praise and worship, then Simon Peter rose and addressed the whole congregation, explaining the background and the final decision of the meeting of apostles and elders that a letter should be sent to Gentile believers.

Peter added, “While we were drafting this letter, we felt it should be delivered by some of our number and not just sent back with our brothers Paul and Barnabas. After you have heard the letter, we suggest two or three members of our group should be chosen by the whole assembly.”

There was a murmur of excited expectation.

Peter then turned to James, “Will you read out the letter, my brother?”

³²² *Galations 2:12*

James stepped forward and read in a loud voice, ³²³ “We, the apostles and the elders, your brothers, send greetings to all our brothers of Gentile birth who live in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. We have heard that some men who went from our group have troubled and upset you by what they said; they had not, however, received any instruction from us. And so we have met together and have all agreed to choose some messengers and send them to you. They will go with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul, who have risked their lives in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ. We send you, then, ...”

James stopped and looked up, “We have left a space to include the names of whoever is chosen.”

He looked back to the letter in his hand and continued, “..., who will tell you in person the same things we are writing. The Holy Spirit and we have agreed not to put any other burden on you besides these necessary rules: eat no food that has been offered to idols; eat no blood; eat no animal that has been strangled; and keep yourselves from sexual immorality. You will do well if you take care not to do these things. With our best wishes.”

Paul looked at Barnabas in amazement and whispered, “What an odd collection of strictures to lay on Gentiles. I could think of many things that would be more important and portentous to share with their Gentile brothers!”

Barnabas grinned at him. “I’m sure you could, but this letter represents a tremendous concession and you can’t blame them for including some token of our dietary laws! Be thankful they said nothing about eating pigs, rabbits or camels!”

Paul looked at him and smiled. Barnabas had a point!

There were several questions and some suggestions about including other matters, but in fact the real opposition to the whole issue, represented by Michael and the men who accompanied him to Galatia, were a mixed group for whom the restoration of the kingdom to Israel was of prime importance. Their clique included Zealots, also many of John the Baptist’s disciples, also some conservative pharisees such as Simon of Bethany and others. They were not naturally a cohesive group. The decision represented by the letter they had just heard, shocked them, but except for a token protest the mood of the whole assembly was against them, and they remained undecided how to counter the situation.

Peter had asked for names of men to deliver the letter. Several people were suggested but for one reason or another were unable to undertake an extended journey at this time. Finally after a period of prayer two names were mentioned, Judas called Barsabbas and Silas. There was an immediate and

³²³ *Council of Jerusalem: Letter to Gentiles – Acts 15:23*

positive response for these two. Both were known and liked for their prophetic ministry. They were respected by everyone. Then the whole assembly broke into songs of praise and worship.

As Paul and Barnabas walked home to Mary's house, they were filled with feelings of deep thankfulness. Barnabas marvelled, "How wonderful are the ways of the Lord, who would have thought that this would be the outcome?"

Paul looked at Barnabas in surprise, "If it is the Lord's will, why should the outcome be surprising? Do we not pray the Lord's prayer, 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven?'"

Barnabas looked at Paul with affection, "You must have known that when we came no one in the whole of Jerusalem doubted that Gentiles must be circumcised except perhaps for Simon Peter. The decision seemed a foregone conclusion to most people."

Paul grunted. Might-have-beens were no part of his thinking. If it was the will of the Lord Jesus, then it must be done, and he had had no doubt what was the mind of Christ in this!

CHAPTER 17: THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

CE 50

ACTS 15:36-ACTS 16:40

Silas was worried about Paul. He could see how depressed and uncertain he was about where to go. In fact they had had practically no choice of their direction since they left Pisidian Antioch.

They had encountered unexpected problems all along the way. Paul had told Silas they would re-visit all the groups he and Barnabas had established to reassure them and convey the decision of the Jerusalem brethren.³²⁴ This they had accomplished to the joy of all those they met. After Antioch it had been Paul's intention to go straight on to Ephesus, only the news that the phenomenal winter rains had caused wash-aways on the road had turned them north. Paul then thought they could visit some of the Bithynian converts and they had proceeded to the border of Mysia, where once more the weather turned them back, forcing them to keep on the road which was taking them to Troas.

Silas could see that Paul was exhausted. His friend plodded along with his head down, withdrawn and silent. He had long since stopped his informal instruction of Timothy, who walked beside Silas commenting happily on all they saw.

Paul thought yet again of the horrendous row he had had with Barnabas and felt it was the basis of their lack of success during this journey.³²⁵ After the triumph in Jerusalem it was in the hearts of both Barnabas and Paul to personally take copies of the letter written by James, to the scattered groups of believers.

Paul remembered uncomfortably it was he who had said it was time to make this return visit, and found to his shocked amazement that Barnabas intended to take John Mark along as well. He could not remember when he had been so angry. Mark had no commitment to the Lord. He had betrayed them before...

His sense of righteous anger quickened his step. Then grief overcame him as he thought how Barnabas had tried to embrace him before he left, and how he had refused to be reconciled. No wonder this mission had turned out a

³²⁴ Paul & Silas 2nd missionary journey CE 50 – Acts 15:40

³²⁵ Paul: Quarrel with Barnabas over Mark – Acts 15:37

failure. He had begun it by betraying the very teaching of the Lord he claimed he served. 'Forgive one another'. Paul thought never again would he let the sun go down without seeking reconciliation. What if he never saw Barnabas again?

He plodded on, switching his traveller's bag onto the other shoulder.

It was not as if the separation was a bad thing when he came to think about it. Barnabas was as concerned about the brethren in Cyprus as he was about those in Galatia and by splitting they covered twice the amount of ground.³²⁶

When Barnabas left, Paul wondered who to take with him. Silas and Judas had been welcomed with open arms by the brethren in Antioch and it was only when he was discussing with them who might accompany him back through Galatia that he discovered to his joy, Silas would be a willing companion. He proved to be a man after Paul's own heart. Tall and robust, he had a simple and direct way of teaching which was amply reinforced by his whole manner and attitude. If only he had not let Barnabas go with his angry denunciation of John Mark ringing in their ears.

He jerked his mind away from the pain of that parting and thought of his visit to his family at Tarsus with a mixture of sadness and joy. His father had died and his mother was very frail. It was Edna who surprised and delighted Paul. Not long before his death, his father had given Nicogenes his freedom and after circumcision he and Edna had married with Jonathon's blessing.

Edna's marriage and her new status as a married woman, had changed her for the better. She left the running of the business to Nicogenes and Demetrius, who had also received his freedom. And even more to Saul's delight, their first child had been due. He thought with pleasure, it must be already born. The fact that he had forfeited his inheritance dismayed him not at all. He knew that he himself was bound for all eternity to the Great Master and he was content.

Before leaving home he had asked his mother for the diptych which contained a certified copy of his birth registration.³²⁷ He felt there could come a time when proof of his Roman citizenship might be required. He carried it now in his purse containing his money and a set of leather-working tools which Edna had collected for him.

Paul's wandering thoughts skimmed over the happy reception he and Silas had received through the cities of Galatia. He thought briefly, with pleasure of Lois and Eunice and their request that he take Timothy with him

³²⁶ Barnabas: Goes to Cyprus with John Mark – Acts 15:37

³²⁷ Each child of a Roman citizen had to be registered within (it appears) 30 days. In the provinces a declaration was recorded in the official register and the father received a copy in diptych form, properly certified by witnesses. This was a two-leaved hinged tablet for writing on with a stylus. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* Vol III.

as a ‘disciple’.³²⁸ He knew their concern that Timothy learn his Jewish roots. This had prompted Paul’s decision to circumcise the boy, but he perceived too the kindness which made them to send a much-loved only child to minister to his needs on his journey.³²⁹ Remembering them he prayed for them.

It was after leaving Antioch that things really seemed to go wrong. Paul longed to preach in Ephesus, but the spring flooding forced them northwards. They wandered through the Jewish farming community in Phrygia. They had been received well enough, but the unseasonable rains and the difficulties of the agricultural season had made people less than willing to hear of some dead prophet. Every plan Paul had discussed with Silas had come to nothing. Paul thought sourly, it was almost as if they were driven north westwards by the weather. They were nearly at Troas, then what? Praying brought no answers. How he wished he had not parted from Barnabas with anger and harsh words....

The day wore on and gradually they began to get glimpses of the sea. In spite of being tired, the sight brought new life to their steps. The sun was low in the west when they came to the gates of the city and passed through the customs post with no taxable items found on them. They entered the crowded main street which led down the hill to the magnificent double harbour filled with ships.

Paul was exhausted. Silas insisted he should rest. They found a tavern with benches outside and he murmured to Timothy to order something for Paul to eat and drink while he went to look for lodgings. The benches were crowded as people came to sit and talk at the end of the day. Timothy found a space at a table and thankfully Paul sat down.

Timothy ordered wine and figs and then sat beside the silent Paul wondering where they would go next. He remembered the first time he had met Paul some two and a half years before. Then his father had still been alive. He could see how much his mother and grandmother were impressed by their visitor and the message he had brought, but he had seen his father had not succumbed to the teachings of the little Jewish rabbi although he welcomed him courteously enough into their home.

It was only when news that his father had died while away on one of his business trips, leaving his mother well-provided for, that he became aware of the depth of their anxiety for his spiritual future. He knew he was half Jewish, but since he was uncircumcised he would not be accepted by the Jews. Timothy, himself had been attending the local gymnasium on Paul’s first

³²⁸ Timothy: Joins Paul on 2nd missionary journey – Acts 16:3

³²⁹ Paul: Circumcises Timothy – Acts 16:3

visit. When his father died, his mother and grandmother held anxious discussions about the need for him to learn of his Jewish heritage. They had even discussed leaving Lystra and returning to Palestine, but since they had no living family there, it had not seemed feasible.

It was therefore with great joy that Lois and Eunice welcomed Paul and Silas's arrival that cold night. The two women insisted their visitors stayed for the winter and it was during this time that a solution to the problem of Timothy's future was worked out. He had been circumcised, an operation which left Timothy feeling very ambivalent, now he was neither Greek nor Hebrew and his friends laughed at him in the gymnasium. When his grandmother begged Paul to take Timothy with him, it seemed an ideal solution.

He had enjoyed a happy summer staying on the farms and attending meetings in the local synagogues. It was during this period that he began to understand the difference between the teaching of what Paul called 'The Old Covenant' and the new message of salvation which all could receive through the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Timothy saw that Paul's teaching caused controversy. His own mind grew confused when he discovered the opposition they received from some quarters. It had been Silas who gave him reassurance and finally brought Timothy through the crisis of faith, although it was Paul who finally challenged him to accept or reject Jesus Christ.

It had taken them more than three months to travel from Antioch to Troas. Timothy himself now felt tired of the constant moving, for they had mostly walked. The roads were wet and muddy when they started, and late rains had often delayed them. Then the summer heat began and the roads became dusty and filled with travellers.

Timothy's reflections were ended when he became aware of a young Greek man greeting Paul. To his surprise Paul rose and hugged the stranger warmly, saying, "Luke! What are you doing in Troas?"³³⁰

The man laughed and said, "I might ask you the same thing?" Then his face grew serious as he said, "I am taking Agariste home to Philippi. She is very ill and longs to see her parents."

Paul asked, "Where is she and where are you staying?"

"We have a room above the tavern here, and we wait for a ship to sail for Samothrace. I have left Agariste resting, for she is exhausted by the journey. He broke off, "But what brings you to Troas?"

Paul turned and said, "It is a long story, sit down if you can spare the time. This is Timothy from Lystra, we are waiting for Silas, who has gone to see if

³³⁰ Troas: Paul meets with Luke – Acts 16:10

there is a synagogue where we can stay. Timothy, this is Luke from Antioch. He was one of the brethren there.”

Luke joined them at the table and with a nod from Paul, Timothy went to fetch another beaker and more wine.

Paul asked, “How did you leave the brethren in Antioch?”

Luke smiled, “They were well when I left, they gave me their blessings and some copies of the ‘Sayings of Jesus’, but I am no preacher as you know, and I know we shall miss the fellowship of the brethren.”

His sensitive face was sad. Paul looked at him and asked gently, “What is wrong with Agariste?”

Luke answered, “She is very thin and coughs blood. I was worried the journey was going to be too much for her, but she longs to return to her mother, and there are days when she seems stronger.”

Silas returned and his face lit with pleasure, “Luke, my friend, how good to see you.” Luke rose and the two men embraced.

“Where are you staying?” Once again Luke explained about Agariste and their journey home to Philippi. He asked, “Have you found somewhere to stay?”

Silas turned to Paul, “There is a synagogue nearby and I have booked a room for us.” He turned to Luke, “Brother Paul is tired, I would like to take him to our lodgings, will you be staying here long?”

Luke shrugged, “It depends when we can find a ship sailing across to Samothrace. There’s a vessel unloading but it must also take on goods, so I don’t expect it will be ready to sail for another two days.”

“Then we will see you tomorrow, my brother,” Silas said and firmly propelled Paul to his feet.

The synagogue was nearby. Small rooms, many of them with occupants, backed onto the surrounding wall. The hazzan was talking to two other travellers, but he broke off when he saw Silas, and came to show them a vacant room.

Timothy put their travelling bags in their room and then went to prepare their supper. Silas took Paul to wash off the dust of their long journey before persuading him to lie down and rest until evening prayers.

Practically everyone, except those preparing the food, joined the hazzan for evening prayers. Paul found the words were spoken without passing through his mind. He longed for sleep but feared the long hours of darkness would be spent yet again in worrying about what the Lord wanted him to do.

The service ended, Paul felt too tired to eat. But Silas insisted he ate something. Finally he went thankfully to their room, rolled himself into his cloak and fell asleep instantly. Silas said to Timothy, “That is the best thing

for him. He is filled with anxiety and uncertainty, yet I believe it was the Lord's planning that brought us here to Troas."

Paul slept deeply for several hours, suddenly he jerked awake. There was someone in the room! The faint light from the window, showed him Timothy and Silas asleep. Then he was aware of another figure standing in the doorway. Astonished he saw it was Luke who said, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" Paul started up and then saw that except for Timothy and Silas, the room was empty.³³¹

Paul lay and puzzled. He recognized Luke, but surely it must have been his angel? There was no way Luke could know where they were sleeping. Suddenly Paul saw the hand of the Lord, and in wonder and gratitude he rose and went outside into the shadowed courtyard where he knelt. With a full heart, he began to thank God for this divine message. Suddenly everything fell into place. Once more he was filled with wonder. When nothing seemed to be happening, when all his own plans failed, he was yet being moved forward to fulfil God's own plan.

The sun rose over the hills and Paul was still caught up in prayer and praise. Silas and Timothy woke to find his bed empty. They rose anxiously to look for him and found a revived and restored Paul.

Gradually the occupants of each room emerged and went to wash before joining the hazzan in morning prayers, Silas, Timothy and Paul among them. It was after this that Paul said, "We are to go to Macedonia!"

Silas looked at him in amazement. "Why there?"

Then Paul related the events of the night. "We must go to find brother Luke quickly and tell him we will come with him."

The three men packed their travelling bags and walked back through the early morning streets to the tavern where they had left Luke. After enquiring from the inn-keeper, they were directed to Luke's room. A gentle knock, brought him to the door.

His tired face lit up when he saw them. "Come in my brothers, Agariste rests."

They saw Luke's wife lying on a bed, looking pale with dark rings round her eyes. She smiled and said, "Forgive me for not rising to greet you. I seem weaker than I thought."

Paul said, "Blessings on you my sister." Then turning to Luke he said, "Brother Luke, when you have finished here, we will be waiting for you on the seats under the trees." Then going to Agariste, he laid his hand on her head and said, "May the Lord Jesus give you strength to complete your journey."

³³¹ Paul : Vision in Troas – Acts 16:9

Presently Luke came to where they were sitting and Paul looked at him for a long moment before saying, “My brother, last night I woke to find your angel standing in our room. You beckoned to me and said, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us!’”

A look of disbelief crossed Luke’s face. For a moment he was speechless and then he said, “Blessings on you Lord Jesus for answering my prayer! Last night, when Agariste could not sleep, and I thought of us going home with no group of believers to encourage and support us, I prayed that the Lord would send you.” He eyes filled with tears, “How wonderful are the ways of the Lord!”

The other three men said a heartfelt, “Amen.”

Later, Luke’s servant, Nicias took Silas and Timothy down to the harbour to book their passage on the ship going to Neapolis via Samothrace.

When Silas returned he said, “The ship sails first thing tomorrow.” They spent the afternoon buying food for the journey. Paul had recovered his sense of purpose and energy. Timothy, too, felt excited at the prospect of crossing into Macedonia, the home of Alexander the Great!

Two days later the ship drew near to Neapolis. Agariste’s pale face flushed with pleasure. She lay on cushions under a tarpaulin and her eyes took in the shining temple of Venus set at the top of the sea encircled rock on which Neapolis was built. The white houses rose in dazzling terraces, with the wild mountains of Macedonia rising in the background.

Luke pointed far to the west, where Mount Athos lay in a long mountainous silhouette, almost lost in the haze. As the ship came closer, what looked like an island, proved to be joined to the mainland with a neck of land. Both sides of the promontory provided anchorage and the ship sailed into the western harbour to drop anchor. A gangplank onto the sand enabled them to disembark among the wagons and donkeys crowding the beach.

Once more Nicias saw to their baggage while Luke engaged a litter for Agariste. The procession passed the fish market and started up the slopes of Mount Symbolium. The road twisted back and forth up the mountain. Every ox-cart and every traveller moved along with an accompanying cloud of brown dust. Hot and thirsty they finally reached the top of the mountain to see before them an immense plain, green with crops and brown with marshland. The walled city of Philippi was below them.

Luke explained, “When Octavius defeated Brutus and Cassius near here, he founded a Roman colony at Philippi and because of its status we are immune from taxation!”

“Is this your home town?” Asked Silas.

Luke³³² nodded, “My father was a doctor before me, as was his father. My grandfather trained in Alexandria, where he learnt Erasistratus’ teachings, although this school teaches that an excess of blood is often the cause of many illnesses, yet we do not believe in blood-letting. We favour wholesome food, exercise and vapour baths to promote healing.”³³³

Silas looked surprised, “But don’t you ever use blood-letting? My father is bled regularly.”³³⁴

Luke’s eyes twinkled, “Faith in your doctor is half the cure and nature is the other half!”

Paul said repressively, “If that is so, why do people die?” Then he wished he had held his tongue, as he thought of Luke’s distress and concern for Agariste.³³⁵

Silas bridged the awkward moment by asking, “How did you come to be in Antioch?”

“My father received an appointment to the Roman army, and when I was considered competent to practice, Marcus Clodius, a local officer, was to be transferred to Antioch while Vitellius was Governor of Syria. He had a large household and he asked my father if I would go with him to attend it. I had just married and it seemed a good opportunity. He is a fine man and I have prospered in his service.” Luke’s face looked sad. “Agariste was not able to have children. She had three miscarriages. She became depressed and began to lose weight. When it became clear she was not getting better, Marcus Clodius insisted I brought her home to her parents.”

When their party arrived at Agariste’s home, Luke told his companions to wait while he settled his wife with her mother. Presently he returned and they walked along the street which led them upwards towards the Acropolis. Luke stopped outside a house, the door was set in a blank front wall with a niche on either side, in the one stood a statue of Apollo the healer and the other of Hermes the giver of good things.

As they approached the front door, an older man came from the other direction and Luke quickened his pace, “Father!”

The man stopped to look at the group of men coming towards him. Suddenly he saw Luke and his face lit up, “Luke! My son! Where have you sprung from?”

³³² Luke: Returns to Philippi CE 50 – Acts 16:12

³³³ The ‘we’ sections in Acts imply that the writer was with Paul. Scholars identify the writer as Luke. Careful examination of Acts shows that Luke must have remained in Philippi until Paul left for Jerusalem some six years later – cf Acts 16.11 and Acts 20.7

³³⁴ Silas: Arrives in Philippi CE 50 – Acts 16:12

³³⁵ Paul: Arrives in Philippi CE 50 – Acts 16:12

He warmly embraced Luke and for a moment they thumped each other affectionately. Then the older man said, "What brings you home to Philippi. Where is Agariste?" His face grew sombre, "Not bad news, my son?"

Luke answered, "Yes and no. Agariste is grievously sick and I have just taken her to her mother's house. I need to consult you about her condition, also as you see I have three companions with me and I am hoping that mother can find a space for them for a few days."

Luke's companions could see that his father was an older version of their friend. He had grave, friendly eyes, set in a narrow, sensitive face. His hair was grey and cut short in the Roman manner. Luke introduced the three men and he greeted them. Nothing in his courteous manner disclosed his surprise at the strangeness of his son's companions.

They entered the house together, Lucian calling as he entered, "Eulalia here is a surprise for you," he grinned at Paul and Silas, and murmured, "More than one!"

There was the sound of laughter from the back and as Lucian shouted, "Come on, woman, it's not every day I bring a surprise home!"

A voice said, "I'm coming, I can't think what you have brought that makes you shout." And then Luke's mother came from the courtyard. She stopped in the archway, bewildered by the strangers and not seeing Luke for a moment. Then her face looked unbelievably at her son, tears came to her eyes and she ran to him.

"My dear son," she kissed him, "Are you well?" She stood back, "Yes, you look well, but too thin. Where is Agariste?"

And so Luke repeated the sad story. When Eulalia realised he had brought home three strangers for her to feed and house, a brief shadow crossed her face before she courteously greeted Paul, Silas and Timothy. Then she nodded to Nicias saying, "You know where my son's room is, you can take his things and put them away."

Later in the evening after they had eaten, Lucian turned to his guests and asked, "What brings you to Philippi? If I am not mistaken you are Hebrews, there are few of your people here."

Paul looked at Luke and said, "We first met your son in Antioch and then we bumped into him again in Troas." Paul remembered how difficult it had been to tell his own father of his new faith, and he sensed that Lucian and Eulalia would have little sympathy with their son's mystical experience, nor the community which he had joined.

It was uncharacteristic of Paul to be at a loss for words, and Silas smiled to himself before he asked, "How much do you know of the Jewish faith?"

Lucian looked puzzled, “Not much except you are atheists, having no faith in the gods.”

Silas replied gently, “We believe in the One God, the Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth. It was to the Jews that God gave his sacred teaching, which we call ‘The Torah’. He made a Covenant with the people of Israel and told them that if they were faithful to it, through them the nations of the world would be blessed.”

Eulalia was spinning as she listened. She remarked, “It seems a heavy burden to lay on one people. What of the gods of the Greeks, Egyptians and Romans? Don’t they have anything to contribute to the welfare of humankind?”

Silas gave a warning look to Paul. There was nothing to be gained by a head-on confrontation, but Paul’s eyes were closed and it was obvious he was praying. Once again Paul realised that here was a Gentile who had no meaningful understanding of the Jewish Law. He realised how much he had relied on the Jewish tradition of welcoming a visiting rabbi, and how even the Jewish community had rejected the message. He thought the initial opening had to be enough to build a little group of the faithful. Here was an educated man with a trained mind, but no religious understanding. He felt a great gulf between them. How to find enough common ground to reach these kindly people?

Paul finally opened his eyes, looked at his host and hostess and found them regarding him curiously. He smiled and said, “Our children begin to learn the books of our Law when they are five. They then learn the other books until they are about fifteen years of age. A man of thirty may be considered proficient enough to be ordained a rabbi or teacher. So you can see there is no way we can explain what it means to be a Jew in just a few words.”

Lucian nodded, “Yes, it is one thing to say you are a Stoic or Epicurean. It is another matter to try and explain their philosophies in a single sentence.

Paul’s eyes lit up. “This was just what was asked of two of our great teachers.”

“Oh, and how did they respond?” Lucian was interested.

“A Gentile went to the first teacher and said, ‘I will become a convert if you can teach me the whole of the Torah,’ – this is the great teaching given by God to our people contained in five books – ‘while I stand on one leg.’ The teacher, a man called Shammai was furious at his impertinence and struck him with the stick he was holding. The Gentile then went to Hillel, another great teacher with the same question. Hillel responded, ‘What is

hateful to yourself, do not do to your fellowman. That is the whole of the Torah and the remainder is but commentary. Go learn it.”³³⁶

Lucian laughed, “I like that. Of course Epicurus summed up his teaching in much the same way, ‘pleasure is to be the beginning and end of the blessed life; for we recognize this to be our first and natural good, and from this we start in every choice and avoidance, using feeling as the canon by which we judge every good.’”

Paul was shocked and looked across to where Luke was sitting. Luke’s eyes were on the floor and he appeared unconcerned by this statement. But Paul suspected he was embarrassed and nervous that Paul would wade in with a characteristic denunciation of such an outrageous viewpoint. Instead Paul smiled and said, “We all come to faith in different ways.”

Lucian looked puzzled and it was a relief to all concerned when they could go to bed.

The next morning Luke took his father to see Agariste. Paul, Silas and Timothy were left to wander around the city. Lucian’s house was halfway up the hill to the Acropolis, below them they could see the Market place and the Forum around which the new Roman city was built. They wandered down and sat near one of the fountains, watching the crowds milling around the stalls.

Silas asked the question that was uppermost in all their minds, “Where do we begin preaching the Gospel to this pagan city?”

Paul replied slowly, “I think we should wait for the Sabbath, if there are any Jewish families here, they will surely meet near the river outside of town.”

Timothy said hesitantly, “After listening to Lucian last night, I can see why my father couldn’t accept the Gospel. His mind worked along practical lines. If he couldn’t feel, see or touch a thing, it didn’t exist.”

Silas looked at young Timothy with surprise, “I suppose for some Greek scholars that might be true, but many of them work with abstract ideas, especially the mathematicians.”

Timothy nodded, but said slowly, “That’s true, but they seem to work with their minds and not their spirits.”

Paul remarked, “Then why are there so many Greek-speaking converts to Judaism?” He answered his own question, “Because even the most brilliant of scholars, find something is missing.”

“What about the Romans?” Asked Silas. “How do we reach them?”

³³⁶ *Everyman’s Talmud* by Rev. Dr.A.Cohen published Dent and Dutton 1932

Paul said, “We do not try to ‘reach’ anyone. The Lord Jesus Christ will bring those who hunger and thirst for salvation and all we have to do is preach the Gospel we have received.”

“But,” said Timothy, “How do you start with people who know nothing of the Covenant and the Torah?”

Silas replied, “I think we have all seen how when the barbarians have heard the Word and received it, even they are changed by their baptism into the life of Christ.”

Paul remarked, “I will ask Luke tonight if he knows of a gathering place where the Jews might be meeting.”

With that the three men rose from where they were sitting watching the market and wandered back up the hill to Lucian’s house.

When the Sabbath came, Luke took them up the Egnation Way out of the city, past the colonial arch which signified the special status of Philippi as a Roman colony, and on down to where the road crossed the Gangites river. Sure enough a little way from the bridge in the shade of some huge old trees, they saw a collection of women with their children and servants.³³⁷

Luke approached them and said, “May we join you?”

The women looked suspiciously at the four strange men. Then one of the older women examined Silas and Paul more closely and asked, “Are you travelling rabbis?”

Paul smiled and said, “I sat at the feet of Gamaliel for many years.”

“Then,” said the woman, “You are welcome. We meet here to remember the faith of our ancestors and to try to teach our children the Torah, but we have no rabbi, and there are no Jewish men.”

Paul sat down on a fallen tree, and the women and children gathered round. “You who are gathered here this morning, hear me!”

Paul’s face was filled with light and his eyes held his listeners as he recounted once more the history of Israel and the promises God had made in time past concerning the coming of the Saviour.

“Now,” Paul went on, “Since our message is that Christ has been raised from death, we now proclaim to you God’s way of putting people right with himself. It has nothing to do with law, even though the Law of Moses and the prophets gave their witness to it. God puts people right through their faith in Jesus Christ.”

He had their full attention and inspired he continued teaching them, telling them how Christ frees them from the power of sin and renews them from within.

³³⁷ *Philippi: Paul & Silas teach on river bank – Acts 16:13*

He ended, "If you believe in Christ Jesus, you become God's dear children. Then you must try to be like him. Your life must be controlled by love, just as Christ loved us and gave his life for us. And if you are God's people, it is not right that any sexual immorality or indecency or greed should even be mentioned among you. Nor is it fitting for you to use language which is obscene, profane or vulgar. Rather you should give thanks to God. If you are the Lord's people, you must live like people who belong to the light, for it is the light that brings a rich harvest of every kind of goodness, righteousness and truth."³³⁸

He stopped and no one spoke for a time.

Then a young woman asked, "How do we become disciples of this Lord Jesus?"

Paul looked at Silas who answered, "By baptism, it is through baptism that you die to your old self and just as Jesus was raised from the dead, so you rise from the water into a new life. Then you can live in fellowship with God through his son Jesus Christ our Lord."³³⁹

"But how can this be?" a snub-nosed young matron asked, "When I bath, I may be clean on the outside, but it doesn't make me any better tempered!"

The other women laughed, for they knew the speaker's sharp tongue, but they also knew how kind she could be.

Silas looked at her seriously, "Jesus told his disciples before he died, that he would send the Holy Spirit."³⁴⁰ We can testify to you that to all who come to the Lord Jesus, also receive the Holy Spirit, so they can walk in the way that Jesus walked."

A fashionably dressed young Roman matron asked, "What about my slave-girl? You speak as if anyone can be baptised into being a follower of this Lord Jesus."

Paul looked seriously at the woman and then said, "It is through faith that you can be baptized into union with Christ Jesus. Then you will be clothed, as it were, with the life of Christ himself. Once this happens there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free, between men and women. You all become one in union with Christ Jesus."³⁴¹

A young woman jumped to her feet, "When can I have this baptism?"

Suddenly nearly the whole group was clamouring and laughing.

³³⁸ *Ephesians 5:1-9*

³³⁹ *Romans 6:1-23 (Condensed)*

³⁴⁰ *John 16:13*

³⁴¹ *Galatians 3:26-28*

Paul raised his hand, “There may be those of you who have doubts. Do not be afraid, God rejects no one who can say from their hearts ‘Jesus is Lord’, but if you cannot say this, then do not come forward for baptism.”

There were two or three women who held back. Luke could see they were Greek women and walked over to them.

In the meanwhile, most of the group was taking off their outer robes and sandals amidst much excitement and laughter. Mothers helped their children, most of whom only had one garment, and the slave girls giggled shyly as they made themselves ready.

The young Roman matron called her maid and stalked off, no one made to stop her, although Silas felt a moment’s anxiety, wondering whose wife she might be and what report she might make when she reached home.

Luke in the meantime seemed to have reassured two of the young women with whom he was speaking, but the third one, called two young girls and also walked away. Luke said to Silas that she was a priestess in one of the shrines on the Acropolis.

Soon the whole group was lined up on the bank of the river and with the help of Luke and Timothy, they went into the water to where Paul and Silas baptized them.

The women were collecting themselves to make their departure when the older woman who had seemed to be leading the group when they arrived, came over to Paul, “Come and stay in my house if you have decided that I am a true believer in the Lord.”

“What is your name my sister.” Paul asked.

She smiled, “I’m known by everyone as ‘that woman from Lydia’. But my real name is Euodia.³⁴² My home was in Thyatira and my husband’s family trades in purple cloth. Our business with the Romans in Macedonia grew, so he decided his brother should keep the Lydian side of the business, while we came to Philippi. When he died, God rest his soul, two years ago, I have kept the business going. Do please come and stay. My house is the meeting place for all those who love the true God, blessed be he forever.”

Paul looked at Silas and they both turned to Luke, Silas smiled. “It seems the Lord has met all our needs.”

Luke nodded, “I’m sure my father will be sorry to lose his philosophical discussions with you, but the Gospel message will probably find a more fruitful home with this sister from Lydia.”

The woman smiled, “Just call me Lydia! Everyone else does.”

³⁴² Lydia: Invites Paul & Silas to stay – Acts 16:15. From Philippians 4:2 it seems that at least one of these women, Euodia or Syntyche would be the proper name for Lydia. Especially as Paul stayed in her house. Yet when he sends greetings to Philippi he does not mention her by the name Luke uses in Acts.

Paul said, “Then my sister, we will accept your invitation.” Paul could not bring himself to call her Lydia. It would be like calling him ‘Cilicia’.

Immediately Lydia became practical. “If you will come with me, I will send a slave with a hand cart to fetch your luggage.”

Paul raised his hand, “No, no, we have little enough, and that we can carry for ourselves. Just send one of your maids to guide us to your home.”

The group walked back to the road and climbed the hill into town before breaking up to go their separate ways.

The move was a relief to everyone. Lydia’s house was near the market place in the lower part of town. They found that not only was she an excellent business woman with a flourishing business, but she was a remarkable teacher of the Jewish Law and had drawn many influential Greek and Roman women into her circle.

Paul discovered he only had to mention something and Euodia, as he studiously insisted on calling her, arranged it. And so the next evening on the first day of the week, Lydia called all those who had been baptized to come to their first Christian fellowship meal.

Luke also joined them and was able to say that Agariste seemed rested and in good spirits. His father had made several suggestions regarding a special diet, and Luke seemed less anxious for his wife.

The meeting was an opportunity for Silas and Paul to give them practical teaching on the implications of their new life in Christ. A large number of women arrived, many of them bringing their husbands and friends, so that the main room of the house was soon overflowing, and the whole group went into the courtyard, there Paul and Silas sat on a couch at one end, with their listeners grouped on couches or cushions around them.

At the end of the evening, Paul turned to Lydia and nodded, and she motioned to two servants, one brought forward a platter containing a loaf of bread and the other a silver jug of wine with a large silver goblet. They placed them on the table in front of Paul.

He began, “On the night that Jesus was betrayed, he took a piece of bread, gave thanks to God, broke it, and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you. Do this in memory of me’” Paul broke the bread and the plate was handed round the room.

Then he poured some wine into the goblet and continued, “In the same way, after the supper he took the cup and said, ‘This cup is God’s new covenant, sealed with my blood. Whenever you drink it, do so in memory of me.’”³⁴³ After taking a sip, Paul handed the cup to Silas, who also drank from it and handed it on.

³⁴³ 1 Corinthians 11:23ff

Those who had not been baptized watched as their wives, slave-girls and children shared the bread and the wine. They found it a deeply moving occasion and the sense of loving unity grew when one of the women began to sing softly and the others joined in.

When all had shared from the bread and the wine, Paul stood up again and raising his hands, said, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

Silas, Luke and Timothy said, “Amen,” and were echoed by the others.

There was then a great hubbub of talking and exclamations. Two of the men came up to Paul and a cluster of women surrounded Silas and Luke, all asking questions. Many of them wanting baptism. There was so much interest that Paul and Silas agreed to hold a further meeting the next evening.

The days that followed were blessed with many people who came to the Lord. Paul and Silas were invited to many homes to preach and teach the ‘New Way’. One of the more influential of the converts, Clement, suggested that they hire a room near the market-place where they could meet daily for prayer.³⁴⁴ These meetings attracted many more people.

One day as Luke, Paul, Silas and Timothy were walking down the Egnation road to the place of prayer, a slave-girl started screaming,³⁴⁵ “These men are servants of the Most High God! They announce to you how you can be saved.” Her hysterical behaviour was embarrassing, and they were thankful to reach the building where they were hidden from her frenzy.

The next morning this same girl followed them again, shouting and screaming. This became a daily occurrence and they began to dread encountering her. Luke discovered she made money for her owners by prophesying the future for people.

After many days of enduring her unwanted attention, Paul could bear it no longer, he turned round to the girl and said to the evil spirit that possessed her, “In the name of Jesus Christ I order you to come out of her!”³⁴⁶

There was a moment of astonished silence from the girl, and then she began to weep quietly, all hysteria and signs of possession had left her. Paul and his companions turned to continue to the meeting with the girl quietly following.

Her owners at first noticed nothing unusual, until they also became aware the hysterical screaming did not begin again and they went over to see what was happening. One of the men spoke to the girl, who answered quietly and rationally. He turned to his partner and shouted, “You realise what these

³⁴⁴ Clement: Convert in Philippi – Philippians 4:3

³⁴⁵ Slave girl with evil spirit: Healed by Paul – Acts 16:16

³⁴⁶ Paul: Heals the mad slave girl in Philippi – Acts 16:18

charlatans have done? They've taken away the spirit of prophesy from Abrotonon. Quick catch them. They've done enough damage with their damned preaching to the women of this town."

In a few minutes Paul and Silas were surrounded by some rough-looking men.³⁴⁷ There was some argument as to whether to take Luke and Timothy as well, but since they looked Greek, they decided to leave them and just take the 'blood-drinking Jews'.

The two owners of Abrotonon directed the toughs to take Paul and Silas to the Forum where they found the magistrates. Roughly Paul and Silas were thrown to the ground. One of their accusers said, "These men are Jews, and they are causing trouble in our city. They are teaching customs that are against our law; We are Roman citizens, and we cannot accept these customs or practise them."

There was a growl of agreement from the crowd that had been growing at the first sign of some excitement.

Their accuser knew very well that some of the Roman wives had been attending the meetings and that there were many homes where relatives were uneasy at the resulting changes in wives, daughters, and slaves. The problem was that those affected by the new teaching seemed nicer people, but there was also an underlying awareness of a new sense of purpose and strength in these women which could only cause trouble in the future.

Without more ado, the magistrate nodded towards his two lictors. Paul and Silas were grabbed, stripped of their clothes and handed over to the soldiers for beating.

They were beaten with rods, which raised red welts across their backs. Paul, weakened by his previous experiences fainted before the soldiers had finished, but Silas took the punishment stoically. When it was finished, with Paul still unconscious, the jailer had them dragged to the prison where they were taken to an inner cell. There he fastened heavy blocks of wood between their feet, these were securely chained to the floor. The manner of their chains meant they had to lie on their raw and torn backs. Time passed, and slowly Paul recovered his senses and became aware of their desperate situation. The outer cell was full of rough men chained by their necks to the wall.

Later in the day, Luke and Timothy brought food and wine for them and Luke asked if he might minister to their injuries, but the jailer refused him entry.

Towards evening the two men slept and then much later they woke. Paul began to pray in tongues and Silas joined him. Suddenly they were filled with great joy and their quiet prayers turned to songs of praise. The cursing and

³⁴⁷ Paul: Arrested in Philippi, beaten & jailed – Acts 16:21 -

fretfulness of the other prisoners was stilled in amazement. In the dim light they peered to try to see these two strange men, who had obviously received a beating and were probably due for further special treatment if their leg-chains were anything to go by.

Suddenly there was a sense of unease. The ground seemed to dissolve and with a massive roar it undulated and heaved beneath them. The prisoners screamed in terror as blocks from the building crashed down and the doors were wrenched from their locks. For several terrifying seconds the noise and shaking continued until it faded away, leaving men huddled on the ground crying like children.

In the darkness, for the torch flickering from the wall-sconce, had fallen from its holder and fortunately gone out, no one could see that the doors were open and the chains had been sprung from the walls.

The jailer came out of his house and by the dim light of the stars, saw the prison gates wide open. He was filled with fear. It was obvious the prisoners had escaped and with a resounding clang he pulled his sword from its sheath and crying to the gods, he was about to fall on it.

Paul realised what the man was about and gave a loud shout, “Don’t harm yourself, we are all here.”

The jailer shouted for a light and rushing into the jail fell trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas. (His wife had been one of those who had attended the public meetings round the corner until he had forbidden her to go, and to his surprise, without any argument she had obeyed him, merely saying, “I shall pray for your salvation!”)³⁴⁸

The jailer, Epaphroditus, was terrified. The gods were after him. He and his family had escaped the earthquake by a miracle, for part of the roof of their house had fallen: by another miracle the prisoners hadn’t escaped leaving him to suffer punishment for not securing them better, and now these prophets had saved him from suicide.

Epaphroditus led Paul and Silas out of the dark, rock-strewn cell and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

As one, Paul and Silas said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your family.”

Epaphroditus called his wife and the rest of the household, slaves and children, Paul preached the word of God to them there and then.

Epaphroditus’s wife said, “What can you be thinking, letting these poor men stand, covered with blood. Take them and clean their wounds.”

³⁴⁸ *Jailer in Philippi: Converted by Paul – Acts 16:29*

The jailer took them and washed them, and then Paul and Silas baptized them amidst much joy and laughter. Meanwhile, his wife prepared them some food. It was almost dawn when they finally lay down to sleep.

About the third hour of the morning, the lictors arrived and said to Epaphroditus, “You can let those men go.”

Epaphroditus came to where Silas and Paul were asleep and woke them, “The magistrates have sent the lictors ordering your release. You may leave and go in peace.”

Paul sat up, “Not likely! Are the lictors still there?”

Epaphroditus looking surprised said, “Yes.”

“Well,” said Paul, “Don’t let them go. I want to speak to them.”

Silas asked, “What’s wrong? They are releasing us? Why do you want to see them?”

Paul struggled to stand up and put on his outer robe, he said, “Wait, you’ll see.”³⁴⁹

Rather uneasily, Silas followed Paul who said to the officials “We were not found guilty of any crime, yet we were whipped in public – and we are Roman citizens! We were then thrown into prison, and now they want to send us away secretly. Not likely! The magistrates themselves must come here and let us out.”

The two men looked at each other and then said, “Where is your proof of what you say?”

Paul had his pouch in his hand and he took from it the diptych he had brought from home and handed it to one of the men. After looking at it a moment he said, “We will report this to the magistrates.”

Silas asked, “Is that wise to provoke them?”

Paul looked astounded, “You agree with the way we were treated? There was no trial. The authorities assumed we were two powerless aliens and did not bother with even the trappings of legal proceedings. What they have committed is a serious breach of Roman law, punishing Roman citizens without a trial, and having us beaten.”

Silas still looked worried, “But I have no diptych with me to prove what you say.”

“I don’t think you need worry,” answered Paul with airy assurance, “They are going to have trouble to explain away even one Roman citizen, they are hardly likely to increase their problems by making sure you are also one!”

³⁴⁹ Paul: Refuses release from Philippian jail – Acts 16:35

Paul was right. In a short time the magistrate who had given the nod for their beating came and apologized. What pleased Paul not at all was his courteous request that they should also leave the city.³⁵⁰

He said, “I see you are a citizen of Tarsus in Cilicia, you realise I cannot have riots occurring here in Philippi. Your activities have been noted for some time and I have had many complaints that your teachings are undermining the Emperor’s authority.”

With this rather sinister remark, he left. Paul and Silas made their way back to Lydia’s house where they found a number of the believers. They sent a message to Luke to say they would be leaving and he came hurrying down to see them. He examined their bodies and was surprised to find how little damage had been done. He applied some salve and handed the rest of the jar to Silas in case they needed further treatment.

Before they left, Luke spoke to the believers, “My brothers and sisters, we cannot let these brothers continue their journey without some provision. Let us collect what we can now so they have something to see them on their way.” He turned to Paul and said, “I suggest you leave Timothy here then we will make a further collection. You cannot take the Good News to new places unless you are properly provided for.”

The brethren willingly gave what they had with them, agreeing with Luke that a further collection would be made as soon as possible.

There were tears in Paul’s eyes as Luke embraced him before handing over the bag of mixed coins. “Go in the name of the Lord,” murmured Luke.

“And may the Lord be with you and Agariste, my dear brother,” replied Paul. The others hugged and wished them well.

Lydia said, “There is a synagogue in Thessalonica. I think you should make for there first.” Then she said, “Don’t forget, you will always be welcome here, and don’t worry about Timothy. I will see he comes to no harm.”

Finally Paul gave his blessing to Timothy and said, “We will be waiting for you in Thessalonica, my son.”

³⁵⁰ Paul: Ordered to leave Philippi – Acts 16:35

CHAPTER 18: TO THESSALONICA

CE 50 MID SUMMER

ACTS 17:1-9

Lydia provided Paul and Silas with horses together with a slave to accompany them on their journey.³⁵¹ Without Timothy to help them she felt they needed assistance.³⁵² Her kindness was endless, they knew she had already given a substantial sum of money, but she made sure they had enough food for their journey as well.

With the horses and their guide, they reached Thessalonica three days later and found the city built on a hill overlooking a brilliant blue bay. Far to the south they could see the snow-covered summit of a mountain, which the slave told them was Olympus.

After a few enquiries, and a search through the crooked streets. They located the synagogue and were able to arrange rooms for themselves in its courtyard. As in so many other places, the presence of two illustrious visitors was warmly welcomed by the president of the synagogue and they were invited to speak on the following Sabbath.

Lydia's slave returned to Philippi the next morning with messages of thanks to 'sister Euodia and the brethren'.

Two days later Silas and Paul attended the synagogue which was a large one and not only had many Jewish families, but a substantial attendance from amongst the Greeks of the city. Paul had given much thought as to what to say to this community. He knew how the message they brought deeply offended the conservative element in every Jewish community. He understood the rigidity of their mind-set, but he longed to reach them. He felt saddened that the Gentiles could embrace the Gospel message more easily than the Jews. And yet, even that was not altogether true, especially with Gentile converts to the Jewish faith. Some of them, thought Paul were worse than the Jews. He sighed and prayed for guidance.

On that first Sabbath morning, Silas began, "Fathers, brothers and all you Gentiles who fear the Lord, I bring you warm greetings from our brethren in Jerusalem. We have been commissioned to share with you the Good News of Salvation which was given to us by one, Jesus of Nazareth. A man who lived when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea. He was a man sent by God to

³⁵¹ Paul & Silas: Travel to Thessalonica – Acts 17:1

³⁵² Timothy: Remains in Philippi CE 50 – Acts 17:1

deliver us from our sins. He is the one who was promised to our forefathers.” Silas gave the outline of the life, teaching and death of Jesus.

When he had finished the president of the synagogue turned courteously to Paul and asked, “Would you also like to say a few words?”

Paul’s face was radiant and the message he preached reached the hearts and minds of his listeners until, with tears of joy and repentance, many indicated they were ready to accept this Gospel of salvation they had heard.

The synagogue service came to an end. The president came across to Paul and Silas and said, “Perhaps you would like to preach again next Sabbath.”

But not all of the leadership in the Jewish community were so thrilled with what they had heard, and while a crowd followed Silas and Paul into the street, some went off to discuss the matter with their closest associates.

In the meantime a member of the congregation came up and introduced himself, “My name is Jason, son of Mishaël. I come from Hierapolis. Will you come home and share our Sabbath meal?” He then introduced his wife, Mosina, a fat, cheerful woman, their son and three younger daughters. She smiled her welcome at her husband’s invitation.

As they walked to his home, Jason told them, “My family are weavers of rugs in Hierapolis, my father sent me to Thessalonica to manage this end of the business. When I receive a consignment of rugs from our agents I see they return with mixed goods, so the business prospers, thanks to the Holy One, blessed be he for ever.”

They came to a large house which seemed to occupy all one side of a small shady square. Mosina sent them a slave to help them wash for the meal and bustled around to see their guests were provided for.

In the afternoon, a string of visitors called to ask Paul and Silas questions about their teaching that morning. Just before the Havadah was said to end the Sabbath, Jason invited them to stay.³⁵³ Paul and Silas were thankful for the invitation. They could see they would be much occupied with teaching and to have Mosina prepare their meals and look after their needs would help them greatly. However, since their travelling bags were at the synagogue, they decided to move the following morning.

Later as Paul and Silas walked back to the synagogue through the darkened streets Paul said, “My brother, if we are to stay here for some time, we will need to support ourselves, for we cannot be a burden on these people.”

Silas grunted agreement, and added, “What do you propose to do? You can hardly set up a tent-making business and I am weaver by trade, I can

³⁵³ Jason: Invites Paul & Silas to stay – Acts 17:7

hardly expect to find a job without some proof of my competence, what do you suggest we do?"

Paul thought a moment, "I could repair sandals. I have my leather-working tools and for that I would not offend against the local guild regulations. Talk to Jason, maybe he knows where you could work without your guild papers."

Jason was pleased to employ Silas himself. His own children were still young, and while the eldest boy helped in the market-place, Jason could not always leave him alone. His own agents were often out and Jason found the assistance of another man a real blessing.

Paul found immediate customers in Jason's own household for his sandal repairs. He borrowed a bench and sat under the plane tree in the square. Soon the whole neighbourhood were bringing him broken straps and other repair jobs. He became a popular figure. All sorts of people could be found standing talking to him while he patched and stitched a variety of sandals and boots.

Surprisingly the children of the neighbourhood could be found asking him questions and listening intently to his answers and to the stories he would often tell them from the old testament. For these Macedonian children brought up on the tales of Alexander and ancient Greece, Paul's stories were foreign and strange. Like all good teachers, he let the curiosity of his listeners draw what they thought they wanted from him.

In the warm summer evenings people came to listen to Silas telling more about the life of Jesus, while Paul explained the significance of his death and resurrection, and what this meant for those who accepted Jesus as Lord. Soon they began to baptise those who they felt were ready for it. These early converts brought their friends and relatives and each evening a group gathered to hear more about this Christ.

One of their most regular evening visitors was a local Jew called Aristarchus.³⁵⁴ He was inclined to be argumentative and on one occasion asked sardonically, "And what am I supposed to do with people that cheat and steal from me? I have a neighbour who does everything he can to abuse my good name and destroy me."

Paul looked at him for a while and then said, "Tell him Silas, what the Lord said when the soldiers were nailing him to the cross."

Silas's eyes filled with tears. "There were two thieves who were crucified on either side of our Lord. They were screaming and cursing as the soldiers raised their crosses and set them into the ground, but Jesus said quietly, "Forgive them, Father! They don't know what they are doing."³⁵⁵

³⁵⁴ *Colossians 4:10 & 11*

³⁵⁵ *Luke 23, 34*

Aristarchus was silent for a while, then he said, “But that doesn’t tell me how I should deal with the crook next door.”

Paul said, “The Lord taught, ‘Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who ill-treat you.’³⁵⁶ If someone has done you wrong, do not repay him with a wrong. Try to do what everyone considers to be good. Do everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody.”

Paul was speaking slowly, as if he was listening to an inward voice, “Never take revenge, but instead let God’s anger do it. For the scripture says, ‘I will take revenge, I will pay back says the Lord.’ Instead, as the scripture says: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for by doing this you will make him burn with shame.’”

Suddenly Paul’s eyes lit up and he looked directly at Aristarchus, “Do not let evil defeat you, my friend; instead conquer evil with good.”³⁵⁷

Aristarchus sat quietly for a while and then picking up his cloak, he walked to the door saying, “That is very difficult, I must think about it.”

It was three days after the Sabbath that Timothy arrived with Ephaproditus one of the converts from Philippi, two slaves from Lydia’s household accompanied them. They went first to the synagogue, where the hazzan’s son was delegated to show them where Jason lived. Shortly before sunset the sound of horses coming along the street made Paul look up from his seat under the plane tree. When he saw who it was he jumped up and hugged Timothy, “Are you well, my son?”

Timothy laughed and said, “Yes, I am well. The brethren in Philippi send you loving greetings.”

Ephaproditus hugged Paul, saying, “I was asked to give you special greetings from Lydia and Clement’s wife Syntyche.”

Timothy added, “Luke also sent special blessings. He has ordered copies to be made of the ‘Sayings of Jesus.’ Several families want to read them at home as well as on the first day meetings. Luke wonders if we don’t need a longer account of Jesus life and teachings as people ask questions and no one can tell them the answers.” He laughed in embarrassment at the tumble of words.

Paul grunted. He did not think an account of the earthly life of Jesus was any substitute for a living relationship with the risen Christ. He asked, “How is Agariste?”

Timothy’s faced clouded, “She does not seem very well.”

³⁵⁶ Luke 6:28

³⁵⁷ Romans 12:17-21

Jason came bustling out and was introduced to the new visitors. He took them into his house, shouting to Mosina to make extra food for the evening meal. He ordered his slave to take the horses to the stable and feed them.

The happy pandemonium of their arrival was prelude to a joyful evening. Mosina produced a marvellous meal, and Jason broached a new skin of wine for the occasion. When the blessing had been said and the dishes had been cleared away, the men settled down to hear the news from Philippi.

Ephaproditus brought out a pouch of coins and said, "The brethren collected this for your needs."

"May God reward you for your generosity," said Paul.

The following Sabbath, the synagogue was packed. Not only had those who had been baptized come bringing their relatives, but those who had felt uneasy by Paul's unorthodox message had made sure their friends who had been absent from the previous week, came to judge for themselves how far this stranger was leading the people astray. The additional people squashed into the synagogue, filling every available space. What displeased some of the leading Jews even more was the number of high-born women who arrived to listen.

The prayers and benedictions were said. The passages from the Torah and prophets were read and listened to with reverence and then the president indicated that Paul might speak.

Once more Paul gave an inspired address. He preached much as he had done in the early days at Antioch, giving proofs that Jesus was indeed the Anointed One promised from the beginning. He dealt with the difference between living under the Law, condemned by the Law because of sin, and living by faith in Jesus Christ, who had delivered us from the punishment due to everyone because of their breaking of the Law. Then he showed how through Christ, everyone has access to the very nature of God, himself.

His argument commanded respect and even those most offended by his teaching of the previous week listened attentively. He concluded, "When anyone is joined to Christ, he is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come. All this is done by God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into his friends and gave us the task of making others his friends also. Our message is that God is making all mankind his friends through Christ. God does not keep an account of our sins. He has given us the message which tells how he makes us his friends."³⁵⁸

The service ended and Silas told those who pressed round them outside the synagogue wanting to learn more, they could come the following evening

³⁵⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:19

to Jason's house. Some of the Jews who had opposed Paul the previous week found their way to Jason's house the next evening.

There were many members of the synagogue who felt extremely threatened by this dangerous new teaching.³⁵⁹ They particularly deplored the open acceptance of Gentiles without any restriction. As one old man said, "If we don't stop it now, they will be introducing pagan worship into the synagogue."

The following evening after a period of praise, Silas rose and said, "My brothers and sisters, every group of believers needs elders appointed to deal with practical matters in your community. You should make provision for the poor amongst you, and brother Paul suggests that each first day when you come to share the fellowship meal, you should make a collection. Then those widows and orphans amongst you can be helped. In addition, you may want to send some of your members to take the message of salvation to the surrounding countryside, you will need to provide them with money for their travels."

A time of prayer followed and three names were put forward of responsible men to act as elders. Paul then rose and said, "My brothers, it is our custom to appoint seven men. There will be times you will have persecutions, some of your people may turn from the Way of the Lord, and you will have to exercise discipline. Then you will have to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to enable you help restore the unity of Christ's body among you."

However no further names were forthcoming and it was agreed that the matter should be held over until the next first day.

During the week they met with small groups of believers all over the city, both in the crowded homes of the poorer section of town, and amongst the artisans, and also the wealthier Macedonian families. Lives were changed at these meetings, there was a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the people.

News of these developments added fuel to the growing opposition amongst the conservative elements in the Jewish leadership. They met at the home of one of their number to devise a plan to put an end to the activities of Paul and Silas once and for all. The plan was simple and although it cost them something, they felt it was money well-spent.

The following Sabbath, Paul and Silas once more preached to a full synagogue. There was no indication of the opposition, and no warning that anything was about to happen.

The next day, Paul, Silas and Timothy left Jason's house early to baptise new converts. They spent the morning by the river, teaching and answering

³⁵⁹ *Jewish opposition: In Thessalonica – Acts 17:5*

questions from those who came. Finally, around midday they were invited to the home of a Macedonian woman, Danae, for a meal, and they spent the afternoon talking with her husband and their household.

Thus they heard nothing of the crowd that hammered on the door of Jason's house and then dragged him out along with some other believers. Mosina kept her head and soon after Jason and the other believers were taken from the house, she sent the slaves out to look for Paul and Silas and warn them not to return.³⁶⁰ After searching all over town, they found someone who had been at the baptism in the morning and was able to tell them where to find Paul, Silas and Timothy.

The slave, also a believer, hurried to the villa where the three men were being entertained. There he delivered the message to the freedman who served the family. In due course the slave was brought up into the room where the family were just finishing their midday meal.

Mosina's slave said, "My mistress has sent me to find you and tell you not to come home. My master has been arrested and taken before the magistrates. "

Danae's husband asked, "On what charges."

"I have no idea what charges," the man replied. "It seemed to me those who came to the house were made up of worthless loafers and drunkards from the streets." He turned to Paul and Silas adding, "They were looking for you, my masters."

The slave was obviously distraught.

Danae looked at her husband and said, "Can we send Apelles to this man's house and find out what can be done?"

Her husband nodded and ordered the freedman to accompany the slave back to Jason's house to see what plan could be made for Paul and Silas's safety.

Paul was not at all pleased that these arrangements were made without consulting him. "We will go with you." He rose, Silas and Timothy got up as well.

Mosina's slave looked at him and said, "My mistress particularly asked that you should not attempt to come home, my master. There are men lying in wait for you."

Danae said, "Apelles is not known to those people and he will see what your people feel. It would be the best plan for your safety."

³⁶⁰ *Jason In Thessalonica: Beaten up by mob – Acts 17:6*

Paul began to protest but Danae's husband said, "You do not even know what the charges are or who has organised this attack on you. You would be very foolish to walk into a trap set by your enemies."

Paul's grim face broke into a smile, "You are quite right, my friend. Thank you, and if it will not inconvenience you we will wait to hear what is going on."

Silas and Timothy gave sighs of relief. Neither doubted Paul's courage since he always met trouble head on, they had not entertained very happy thoughts of their reception if they returned to Jason's house.

It was some time later that Gaius and Secundus, two converts and two of the men recommended to be made elders, returned with Apelles. They heard that Jason and the others had been released on the payment of a fine. They further had news of who had organised the whole incident.

Gaius said, "It seems some of the Jewish men have been offended by your talks and the great following you have amongst us Macedonians. They paid some of the local roughnecks to create a riot and get you arrested."

Danae's husband asked, "On what charges?"

Secundus said, "They said that you have caused trouble everywhere and you are telling people there is another king, named Jesus. They say you are disloyal to the Emperor and are preaching revolution."

Danae's husband looked extremely grave, "You could be executed if they find you guilty."

Gaius nodded his agreement, "Yes, we all agree you must leave the city tonight, before they find you."

"Where do you suggest we go?" Silas asked anxiously.

Paul said firmly, "We can prove these are trumped up charges and completely untrue."

Silas looked at Paul and with a faint smile said, "The Lord himself often said, 'My time has not yet come,' and went out of his way to avoid a confrontation with the authorities. Do you think this is our time?"

Paul's fierce scowl suddenly lightened, and like the sun breaking through the storm clouds, he smiled, "No, brother, you are quite right. Our job is to take the Gospel to the whole world, even to Rome itself." He turned to Gaius, "What do you suggest we do?"

Gaius said, "Secundus and I will take you to Berea tonight. We have friends there who would welcome you."³⁶¹

Silas asked, "What about our things?"

³⁶¹ *Thessalonican Believers: Take Paul Silas secretly to Berea – Acts 17:10*

Apelles replied, “That has been taken care of, we decided if those watching the house saw us taking your travelling bags, they would follow us here. So Jason has arranged to have them sent secretly to Aristarchus’s house. You will pass it on your way out of the city.”

When it was dark they left the city that same evening.

CHAPTER 19: ATHENS

CE 50 AUTUMN

ACTS 17:10-15

1 THESS 3:1-6

2 CORINTHIANS 11:7-9

Just over a month later, Paul was sitting alone on the deck of a ship sailing south to Athens.³⁶² With his eyes on the mountains running alongside the ship to the west, Paul reflected sadly that whenever he preached the ‘Good News’ it seemed to end in riots and hatred. The events of Philippi and Thessalonica had been repeated in Berea.

Paul sighed. Things had gone so well to begin with. The Jews in the synagogue had welcomed the message they preached and in fact there had been only an eagerness to test the scriptures to see if what Paul was preaching could be confirmed.

It was, he thought bitterly, his enemies in Thessalonica that stirred up the trouble.³⁶³ When they heard he was preaching in neighbouring Berea, they sent people over to stir up a mob similar to the one in Thessalonica. It was Paul they were after, and after some agonized discussion with Silas and Timothy, they decided to split.

Paul was hurried to the coast with Sopater, son of one of the new elders in Berea, and Eudoxus, another new convert. They had been sent by the brethren to take him safely to Athens. They were to introduce him to Eudoxus’s relatives where he could stay until Silas and Timothy could catch up with him.

“Why?” Thought Paul, “Is it always me that gets thrown out? From how many cities have I fled like a hunted animal?” He started to count them off, “Damascus, Jerusalem, Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra- “ A bleak smile flitted across his face, “Not Derbe!” His eyes grew sad, because the list continued. “Philippi, Thessalonica and now Berea.” He gave a deep sigh for there had been trouble in other places too.

The ship was crowded and noisy but suddenly he needed to pray, to receive reassurance from the Lord that he was not mistaken about his mission. He clambered up a stack of timber and perched himself on the top. But pray as he might, there came no reassurance and no peace. It was as if he had been abandoned.

³⁶² Paul: *To Athens CE 50 – Acts 17:16*

³⁶³ Jews from Thessalonica: *Stir trouble up in Berea – Acts 17:13*

Paul hardly noticed the intense heat, nor the little harbours they put into each night to off-load goods and take on more. Sopater prepared their food, but Paul scarcely touched it. The ship passed Marathon and approached a rocky headland as they rounded the point, they could see high on the crest of a cape the Temple of Poseidon.

Eudoxus came to Paul, who was once again perched on the pile of timber and after regarding his sad look of defeat for a moment, said, "If you look along the hills, you should see the sunlight flash from the gilded point of the spear of Athene, which towers high over the Acropolis."

Paul looked to where Eudoxus was pointing. The ship was crossing Phaleron Bay, away to the right on a brown hill, turned rosy in the clear evening light, stood the far-famed Parthenon.

The sight of so many, Paul had to admit it, beautiful temples, deepened his depression. They approached the harbour of Zea, one of the three safe harbours in Piraeus, and he saw the teaming crowds thronging the wharf-front, he felt overwhelmed by the difficulty of how to share the message of salvation in such an alien atmosphere.

They disembarked, joining the congested traffic that flowed between the Long Walls which joined Piraeus to Athens. Eudoxus explained the city was particularly full at this time of year with people coming to the Eleusian mysteries. After several inquiries they made their way to the Synagogue. Sopater wanted Paul to spend the night with him at his uncle's house.

"Do you think you will be safe here? What if you get attacked by the Jews?" He asked anxiously.

Paul smiled, "I shall be discreet, and the Lord, himself, tells me I have nothing to fear. Besides it is nearly time for the Day of Atonement, and I would feel more comfortable with the Jews, than the unbelievers of Athens!"

Early the next morning Sopater and Eudoxus came to take their leave of Paul. He hugged them both and said, "Tell Silas and Timothy to join me as soon as possible."

After they left, he decided to walk down to the market place. As he pushed his way through the crowded streets, he could see the Acropolis before him. He entered the agora on the north side and found it surrounded by colonnades lined with shops. He was struck by the large number of statues. They were between pillars of the colonnade, in niches on the walls; on plinths surrounding the square market place. Paul was quite accustomed to the usual gods of the market place and crossroads, but here in Athens every conceivable place had a statue to some god or famous man.

In the shade of the colonnades, along with the shoppers, were groups of students, many of them Roman youths. Some were clustered around teachers. Paul found the scene reminiscent of the rabbis in the Temple, only the subject

matter was vastly different and the method of teaching varied. One particular philosopher had attracted a large crowd.

Suddenly Paul's attention was caught by hearing him say, "That which accounts for the reason of things is not some external end to which they are tending; it is something acting within them. There is that which is, as it were a seed in the heart of each separate thing that exists. It is from this that everything grows and develops. This soul exists before the body and it holds the body together."³⁶⁴

One of his listeners asked, sceptically, "If it exists before the body, what happens to it when the body dies?"

The speaker turned to his questioner and said, "The soul comes up for judgement and is sent to eternal bliss or eternal damnation."³⁶⁵

An older man said derisively, "When life departs, the atoms fall apart and return to the Cosmos. The soul ceases to exist."

Paul found himself asking, "And who created the cosmos?"³⁶⁶

Everyone turned to look at the stranger some recognizing him as a Jew.

The man looked contemptuously at Paul, "No one 'created the cosmos', it has always existed. It is composed of an infinite number of atoms, which combine to form bodies of various sorts and when they fall apart, their atoms remain."

The teacher said to the older man, "Glaucón, if people want to hear the Epicurean philosophy, they can follow you and listen." Then raising his voice he continued, "Zeus created the world, and what Zeus is for the world, the soul is for man."³⁶⁷

Paul shifted round the crowd to get nearer to the man called Glaucón but he lost him in the crowd.

Later, when he returned to the synagogue, he asked the hazzan whether anyone could teach under the colonnades in the market place. The hazzan looked amused and replied, "If you can get anyone to listen to you. In Athens you can say what you like!"

So Paul spent the next few days in the market place.

It was now the ninth day of the month the Athenians called Boedromion, the Jews called Tishri and the Romans called September, although the solar month did not agree with the lunar months. The hazzan, named Jotham, at his wife's instigation, invited Paul to join the family for the late afternoon meal

³⁶⁴ *Encyclopaedia Britannica 1959 ed Vol 21 see article on Stoic Philosophy*

³⁶⁵ *See Plato's Republic*

³⁶⁶ *Paul: Discussions with philosophers in Athens – Acts 17:18*

³⁶⁷ *Encyclopaedia Britannica 1959 ed Vol 21 see article on Stoic Philosophy*

which preceded the Day of Atonement. His wife, a fat, jolly-looking woman appropriately called Hephzibah³⁶⁸ was mother to a brood of children.

As she said to Jotham, “The poor man looks half-starved, and we don’t want him dying on us over the fast.”

Paul was truly grateful at their kindness and enjoyed the good-natured joking of the children. The two youngest would not observe the fast, but the middle boy, Ephraim, had turned nine that year and would fast the full period without food or water for the first time. The elder boys were teasing him that he better fill up if he was to survive.

The sun was still shining when the meal was finished and the hazzan went to open the synagogue. The family all retired to put on their white garments for the evening service. The hazzan fetched a white robe to lend to Paul. It was customary for people to borrow their robes for Yom Kippur, so that those who were too poor to have them should not be shamed, and Paul was happy to accept the loan. Unlike the preparation for the Sabbath, no one washed, and no one put on special scented oils. Furthermore no one wore their leather shoes, they went bare-foot to the synagogue to say the prayers and read the scriptures throughout the night.

The children fell asleep leaning against their parents, and many of the older people cat-napped during the long hours of the night. The sun rose and the prayers and readings continued.

Since no one ate or drank for the full period, there were only short breaks for people to go to the latrines at the back of the synagogue.

The light faded and the long day came to an end with the final prayer and the people went wearily home to have something to eat before they fell into bed.

The next day was the Sabbath and all work was suspended.

The day following the Sabbath, the men went out of the city to cut willow, myrtle and palm branches in preparation for the coming Feast of Tabernacles. The hazzan took his two elder sons to go to cut the trees along the river. There were other guests in the courtyard of the synagogue, but only Paul was alone without a servant to care for him, the other guests sent their servants off to gather palm branches. Paul was thankful to Jotham that he was included in his family’s preparation.

When the men left, Paul walked down to the Market place, which he found even more crowded than usual. There was a subdued sense of joy in the people around him. Suddenly there was a shout, “They’re coming,” and Paul saw a procession of young students dressed in their short white tunics, with cloaks flung over their shoulders and flat black hats placed horizontally

³⁶⁸ *‘My delight is in her’*

on their heads. There seemed to be several hundred of them beginning the descent from the Acropolis.

An elderly man standing near Paul shook his head sadly and said, "It's not how it was in the old days! Then only Athenian youths of good family could march in the procession. Nowadays any rich youth can join, even Romans." He spat out the word in disgust.

Paul looked at him surprised. The old man sucked his teeth and said, "Yes, you may look at me, but in the old days, these youngsters were under military discipline, now they are riotous and undisciplined university students."

Paul watched the procession as it passed through the market place and on to the road leading to the Dipylon gate and so along the Sacred Way to Eleusis. The old man said, "They return tomorrow carrying the sacred statues, which will be washed and made ready for the beginning of the Mysteries on the sixteenth of Boedromion."

When Paul returned to his lodgings, he found the hazzan and his sons had returned with two donkeys, one loaded with willow branches and the other with myrtle. The little girls were laughing and chattering with excitement, and the baby was caught just as he began to climb up the back legs of one of the donkeys. A pile of willow branches and another lesser one of myrtle branches were stacked in the courtyard. The other party also returned and palm branches was deposited alongside.

The next day Paul helped Jotham and the boys to build their tabernacle. They dug holes for the corner posts and tying the branches together made a structure over which more branches were laid to make a shelter large enough for Paul and the whole family to sit. To save on building materials, the other visitors used the corner poles of Jotham's booth to anchor their own, and gradually one large structure began to cover the courtyard.³⁶⁹

The men had finished erecting the booth and the boys were decorating it with vine leaves. They then hung pomegranates amongst the leaves. When the women returned from the market carrying basketsful of their purchases, they fell on the basket of citrons and added some to their artistic work. They completed their handiwork with a decorated length of papyrus on which they had written, "Ye shall dwell in booths seven days."

Before the midday meal, the men and boys went to the synagogue carrying myrtle, willows, palm branches and citrons for decoration. Presently they returned to a light midday meal. Hephzibah and the girls, together with the other women and servants from visitors staying in the lodging rooms in the courtyard, were busy preparing the dishes for the evening meal. They had decided to make one big party, and Hephzibah was preparing the special

³⁶⁹ For details on Feast of Tabernacles see *Encyclopaedia Britannica* Vol 21, 1959 ed.

wheaten loaves. There would be pickled fish, followed by chicken cooked with herbs. There was a stew to make of savory lentils with raisins and there was a mint salad to make with the lettuce. Finally there would be fresh melons and sweet pastry made with nuts and honey.³⁷⁰

The previous day the girls had washed their white robes and when the food was nearly ready, Hephzibah sent them off to wash and prepare themselves. Later that evening was the young maidens dance. There was much giggling and laughter as they experimented with Hephzibah's kohl round their eyes and also pinked their cheeks with the beetroot skins.

Jotham and the men carried the tables out and placed them under the booths, along with benches and chairs for the guests. Presently all was ready. The men also went to wash, anoint themselves with perfume and put on clean clothes. The sun disappeared, shortly to be replaced by the full moon. It was nearly time!

The setting of the sun signified the beginning of the new day and the whole Jewish community began gathering at the synagogue. Each man carried a palm leaf, sprigs of willow and myrtle and a citron. Torches were lit and a procession was formed as the last of the sun's rays faded from the Acropolis across the city. With a shout of joy, the procession set off, the men singing and dancing, waving their sprigs and some carrying torches. The elders of the synagogue led the procession as they paraded round the outside of the synagogue, watched by the women and girls. It was a time for rejoicing. After the procession, they entered the synagogue for the evening prayers and special readings for the Feast of Tabernacles.

After the service everyone returned to the booths to eat the evening meal together. When they were seated, Jotham began with the solemn sanctification. First he took a cup of wine and said, "Blessed are thou, O Lord, Who hast commanded us to dwell in a booth," everyone said "Amen." And then the cup was handed round for each to drink.

Then he said the blessing over the special wheaten loaves of bread which Hephzibah had baked, and which were placed in front of him on the table and covered with a cloth. Jotham cut them up into pieces and these were also handed round.

It was a joyful meal with much laughter and story-telling. Paul thought of his long journey through Asia and how everything had seemed to go wrong. In a way it had been his own journey through the wilderness.

The meal was concluded when Jotham said, "May it please Thee, O Lord my God, and God of my fathers, that in like manner as I have this time obeyed

³⁷⁰ See 'The Good Book Cook Book.' Recipes from Biblical Times by Naomi Goodman, Robert Marcus, Susan Woolhandler published Dodd, Mead and Company 1986

thy command and have been sitting in the booth, so in the coming year I may be counted worthy to sit in the booth of Leviathan.”

Paul was saddened as he thought this reference to the legend that the flesh of the monster would furnish food for the righteous at the Messianic banquet and of how little the message of the true Messiah he had hoped to share with these people, had impressed them.

Now the tables were cleared, the dishes were stacked and suddenly the young girls, who had disappeared to fetch their tambourines, came running back into the courtyard. This was their special moment. They stood in a circle and then began to sing and dance.

Eyes sparkling with excitement they sang, “Young men, raise your eyes and see whom you are going to choose. Do not look for beauty, but for good family.” The music was catching and the mothers, remembering when they had sung the song hoping to catch the eye of some young man, were tapping their feet to the rhythm. The song changed and the dancing continued.

The older men were sitting talking in groups. Paul had been in Iconium for Passover where he had heard Gamaliel had died. He pricked his ears when someone asked one of the visitors, “How is Gamaliel’s son, Simeon shaping up as Nasi?”

“Oh, haven’t you heard? The Sanhedrin refused to let Simeon replace his father as sole leader and insisted on a return to bipartisan leadership of the Pharisees, as it was before Gamaliel’s time.”

One of the men who had been in Jerusalem for the Passover said, “The reason they couldn’t stomach Simeon as sole Nasi was because of his patrician sympathies. Unlike his father he favoured the Shammaite party, so they chose Johanan ben Zakkai, a tradesmen turned scholar, and the acknowledged leader of the Hillelites.”

Paul remembered Johanan. As a young student not yet ordained, he had defended a man about to be convicted of murder. His ingenious cross examination of the witnesses persuaded the Sanhedrin to acquit the man. Paul also remembered Simeon from his student days as an arrogant young man. He had a taste for luxury, and showed signs of being both vain and pompous. In marked contrast to his courteous, self-effacing father. Paul remarked, “Simeon can’t have been too pleased with that decision.”³⁷¹

The previous speaker grunted, “You can be sure he was angry, but he chose his moment to assert his power and throw the whole of Jerusalem into uproar by handing down a decision that in his opinion, no one had to offer more than a single pair of pigeons to fulfil their sacrificial obligations.”³⁷²

³⁷¹ Akiba; Scholar, Saint and Martyr by Louis Finkelstein Published Meridian Books and the Jewish Publication Society P.60

³⁷² Ibid P51

Paul could not believe his ears. Often pilgrims needed several pairs of pigeons for various purification sacrifices, especially if it had been several years since a family had been to Jerusalem. At Passover when there were huge numbers of pilgrims the shortage of pigeons sent the prices rocketing. “How could he account for such a decision? Didn’t the court have something to say about it?”

The man said, “It appears he consulted no one. I can tell you I wish we had waited to buy our birds. I paid top prices for the three pairs I bought. They were then costing a golden dinar a pair. By the evening of the day he made known his decision they were costing half a silver dinar!³⁷³ He brought total disaster on the pigeon dealers and the many poor families whose livelihood depend on supplying them to the Temple. I can tell you there was nearly a riot.”

The full moon showed it was half way to dawn by the time the dancing and singing had ended and families took themselves to bed under the branches in the courtyard.

When the influx of visitors to the Eleusian Mysteries had left and the Jewish community was also back to normal after the celebration of Tabernacles, Paul, longing for the coming of Titus and Timothy, walked as had become his custom to the market place and began his now familiar exchanges with the teachers under the colonnades. Some days there was sufficient interest among the bystanders for Paul to form a group of his own. It was such a morning, and Paul was telling them of the death and resurrection of Christ with some good-natured interjections from his listeners. Suddenly he was approached by two city officials who said to him politely enough, “You are required to come with us and give an account of your teaching before the Council.”³⁷⁴

Paul was taken by surprise, “What now?” He asked.

The one official said, “Yes, you are to come with us now.”

He followed the officials up the road to the Acropolis and then taking the fifteen or sixteen steps leading up to the separate hill of the Areopagus, or seat of the Council, they arrived at the council chamber where the fifty or so counsellors for the month, met daily. The Archon sat on a special chair, flanked by two heralds. On either side were seated his predecessors in the office, which was an annual appointment, and they constituted what Paul took to be a kind bench of elders.

Men were standing in groups talking and laughing. Paul was brought to stand in front of the assembly. It was very different from the Sanhedrin since

³⁷³ Akiba: Scholar, Saint and martyr. A biography by Louis Finkelstein 1932. In this the author gives the relative value of a golden dinar as 6 dollars and half a silver dinar as 12 cents!

³⁷⁴ Paul: Before Athen City council – Acts 17:19

the hall where they met was plain and unadorned, this council chamber was of white marble, generously endowed with statues. The place where Paul stood was in front of a statue of a winged maiden of serious aspect, carrying a torch in one hand and a scourge in the other.

The Archon called the meeting to order and the men took their seats. Paul became aware of his shabby old robe as he watched the elegantly dressed men take their seats. He felt strange and out-of-place.

When the company had come to order, the Archon said, "It has come to our notice that you have been talking of foreign gods. We would like to know what this new teaching is that you are talking about." The man was speaking politely enough, but Paul sensed there was an underlying intellectual arrogance and contempt for the little man in front of him.

"Some of the things we hear you say," the Archon continued, "sound strange to us, and we would like to know what they mean."

Paul looked round at the men in the hall. Most of them seemed to be regarding him with some amusement, some were serious and some were sharing whispered conversations with their neighbours. How could he reach them? Where to start?

"Lord Jesus, my weakness is your strength," he prayed silently, "Use me as you will." Suddenly he remembered the statue the day he had walked from Pireus. Paul began ironically, "I see that in every way you Athenians are very religious. For as I walked through your city and looked at the places where you worship, I found an altar on which is written, 'To an Unknown God'. That which you worship then, even though you do not know it, is what I now proclaim to you."

He paused, "God who made the world and everything in it, is Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in man-made temples. Nor does he need anything that we can supply by working for him, since it is he himself who gives life and breath and everything else to everyone."

There was a mutter as his listeners took his point. His style of address and the way he introduced his subject did not impress his listeners, who were all trained in philosophy and logic, and at least expected him to establish a sound basis of his arguments.

Paul raised his voice, "From one man he created all races of mankind and made them live throughout the whole earth. He himself fixed beforehand the exact times and the limits of the places where they would live. He did this so that they would look for him, and perhaps find him as they felt about for him."

Paul could see he was losing the attention of his listeners. "Yet God is actually not far from any one of us; as someone has said, 'In him we live and move and exist.' It is as some of your poets have said, 'We too are his children.' Since we are God's children, we should not suppose that his nature

is anything like an image of gold or silver or stone, shaped by the art and skill of man. God has overlooked the times when people did not know him, but now he commands all of them everywhere to turn away from their evil ways. For he has fixed a day in which he will judge the whole world with justice by means of a man he has chosen. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising that man from death!”

If Paul hoped to regain their attention by this, he was sadly disappointed. There was a titter of laughter from several quarters and men turned away from him to talk of more important things with their neighbours.

The Archon also felt enough was enough, he said to Paul, “We will hear you speak about this again,” and dismissed him. One of the officials indicated that he should leave.

He felt humiliated by his reception and this was increased when he overheard someone say, “What a babbler!”

His neighbour replied, “A real seed-picker!”

The first man nodded, “He has no system of thought. He is without culture.

Paul left the council chamber more depressed and lonely than he had ever felt in his life. What a wonderful opportunity he had missed! He began to descend the steps, a voice said, “Wait a moment!”

Paul turned and saw one of the council members hurrying after him. “Your way of teaching is strange to us, but I see you are a man of conviction and sincerity. I would like you to explain what you meant that God has fixed a day in which he will judge the whole world with justice. Who is the man of whom you spoke?”

Paul revived like a wilting plant receiving water. “Friend, there is much to tell, where can we go?”

The man replied, “My name is Dionysius.³⁷⁵ There are one or two other men who want to ask you questions, Let us go to my house, we can talk there.”

Paul gave them the message of salvation. Afterwards one man asked if he could bring his wife to listen and they arranged other meetings. It was not much and apart from Dionysius, and a woman named Damaris, there was no mass baptism.³⁷⁶

Paul’s depression left him abruptly when two days after the beginning of the new month he saw the dear familiar faces of Timothy and Silas.³⁷⁷ How

³⁷⁵ *Dionysius: Convert in Athens – Acts 17:34*

³⁷⁶ *Damaris: Convert in Athens – Acts 17:34*

³⁷⁷ *Timothy & Silas: Arrive in Athens – 1 Thessalonians 1:1*

joyfully they greeted one another. Paul, after assuring himself they were well, begged them for news of the brethren in Berea.

Silas said, "They are well. After you left and the Jews from Thessalonica returned home. The believers in Berea remained firm in their faith and continue to meet in the synagogue since many of the Jews became believers and those who are not convinced, at least are not antagonistic."

Paul introduced them to Jotham and his family, that evening they shared a meal with them, but Paul said, "Now my companions have arrived, I will not burden you, my sister with feeding us all. Young Timothy, here is a good provider!"

Later that evening, they exchanged news and Paul told them of how difficult it was to preach the good news of salvation to a city which took up any passing new thing without making a commitment to it. He finally shared his humiliation before the city council.

Paul then asked, "Have you had any news from Luke or the brethren in Thessalonica?"

Silas replied, "Nothing. I am worried about the brethren in Thessalonica because the Jews who came after you seemed so determined to destroy anyone who held to the Way."

Paul looked worried, "We left no one of experience to guide them."

He looked distraught, "What if they have fallen away through persecution?"

Timothy prepared their meal while Paul discussed his deep concern for the Thessalonians with Silas. "I think we should return to see if all is well with them."

Silas looked shocked. "My brother, you know how vigorously the Jews oppose you there. Not only would they like to see you dead, they would welcome your return so they could dispose of you."

Paul gave Silas a long look, and then said, "My life is in the hands of the Lord."

"Yes," replied Silas, "But he does not expect you to be foolish. You must know that even Jesus did not rush into Jerusalem where he knew death awaited him. He waited until 'his time came'. Besides, if you return to Thessalonica and they arrest you, there will quite likely be persecution of the brethren as well."

Paul grunted. It was true. This had been an aspect which worried him.

He said, "Perhaps if you and Timothy returned together, you could stay there for a while and make sure all is well."

Silas could hear the depression in Paul's voice as he thought of staying on alone in Athens. Silas was well aware that these last weeks had been difficult

for Paul and knew he must have been short of money. The trouble was, they had little to spare. He asked, “Have you decided where we should go after Athens?”

“We must go to Corinth,” replied Paul. “It is the seat of government, and the main city of Achaia.” He spoke without any hesitation or doubt.

“Then why not send Timothy back to Thessalonica, and let him bring you news. You and I can strengthen the believers here, and prepare for moving on to Corinth.”³⁷⁸

Timothy brought the meal he had prepared and Paul proclaimed the blessing, then said, “My son, would you be willing to return to Thessalonica to see how the believers are faring?”

Timothy was about to eat, stopped and looked at Paul, his eyes wide with surprise. “You want me to go back alone?”

Paul looked at him over his mug of wine, “Does it worry you?”

Timothy grinned back, “No, but I did not think you would trust me to bring comfort to the brethren.”

Paul was pleased with the young man’s astuteness, and acknowledged to himself that he had a hesitation about trusting him. He thought, ‘Why don’t I send Silas, and keep Timothy with me?’ And then he knew that Timothy would benefit by being entrusted with this mission, and he could use Silas’s wisdom and experience here in Athens while they waited for Timothy’s return.

Paul’s hesitation was brief and he said, “You are young, but by your conduct you will be an example for the believers in your speech and in the way you conduct yourself.³⁷⁹ You are well able to testify to the faith and love which are ours in union with Christ Jesus³⁸⁰ and so I want you to see the believers in Thessalonica and make sure all is well with them.”

When the decision had been made, Paul was anxious that Timothy went immediately. He said, “Do not delay your return to Athens, but make sure that the elders were able to guide and teach the faithful. My son, encourage them to endure present sufferings in the sure knowledge that the day of the Lord is coming and they should be prepared and live like people who belong to the light.”

Silas and Paul walked with Timothy to Pireus to find a ship sailing up the coast. Silas made sure Timothy had enough money to travel to Thessalonica and back, and then embracing him. They committed him to the Lord and returned to Athens.

³⁷⁸ Timothy: Returns to Thessalonica – 1 Thessalonians 3:6

³⁷⁹ 1 Timothy 4:11

³⁸⁰ 1 Timothy 1:14

The days dragged by after Timothy's departure. Even Silas found it difficult to keep his attention on the little group of believers that gathered for teaching. The weather turned cold and the winter rains set in.

Paul became more and more anxious as it seemed the winter weather would delay Timothy's return. Increasingly, their stay in Athens was depleting their funds. Paul was unable to set himself up in his trade, not being a citizen. He and Silas discussed their future plans. If they went to Corinth they could not arrive as penniless beggars in such a city.

Silas remarked, "If Luke knew, he would surely help." Paul agreed but there seemed no real answer to their problem. In the meantime they waited for Timothy and prayed for guidance.

Finally in the month the Romans called December, Timothy returned. Paul's depression lifted and he was filled with joy at the evidence he heard of the Thessalonian brethren's growing faith.

However Timothy's return brought their financial problems to a head. The churches in Berea and Thessalonica had sent a small sum of money with him. It was much smaller than Paul had expected and they realised that they would be greatly hampered if they tried to start off a new mission in Corinth with so little money.

"I think Timothy or I should return to Philippi and ask the brethren there to make a collection to help us³⁸¹," said Silas.

"It's the wrong time of year to be travelling," Paul observed, "But without additional money, we shan't even manage to winter here in Athens."

"Why don't I come with you to Corinth, and Silas can go back," remarked Timothy. Truth to tell, the thought of travelling back through Thessalonica held no attractions, and he longed to move forward to new places.

"I don't think there are sufficient funds to see two of us through in Corinth," Paul was pessimistic.

"Also I don't think it is such a good idea for a single person to travel alone through Macedonia, carrying a lot of money with them. In spite of the Roman patrols, there are robbers who make a living watching out for travellers," Silas said thoughtfully.

Paul became decisive, "You can both return to Philippi and I will carry on to Corinth and try to become established so when you return in the spring, we can start our mission straight away."

Timothy pulled a face, but accepted the inevitable.

"If you go back to Thessalonica, you can take them a letter. I want them to know how much I miss them," Paul added.

³⁸¹ See 2 Corinthians 11:9

Early the next day found Paul pacing up and down, while Timothy fetched papyrus, prepared his pens and made up some ink. When he was ready Paul began, “From Paul, Silas and Timothy – To the people of the church in Thessalonica, who belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: May grace and peace be yours.”

It was a short letter. Paul wanted them to know he cared for them and reminded them of his teaching. He ended with a warning to be ready for the Day of the Lord.

Later they attended the evening prayers at the synagogue and afterwards some of the new believers from Athens joined them. Paul asked Timothy to read back the letter for them all to hear. At the end he repeated the instructions, saying, “Please see this letter is read with all the new brethren in the surrounding countryside.”

Early the next day they went to see about hiring horses. Then with much hugging and last minute messages, Silas and Timothy collected their bags and rode off. As they turned to ride away Silas thought how small and frail Paul looked.³⁸²

³⁸³Paul returned to the synagogue to gather his possessions. He took leave of Jotham and Hephizibah before walking for the last time through the city and out through the Dipylon gate onto the road to Eleusis.

As he walked along carrying his travelling bag across his shoulders, he thought of the uncertain future. He and Silas had divided the money, and he knew that until he had established himself in Corinth and had begun to earn enough to live on, he would not be able to preach. He offered a prayer for guidance and walked on, a short but determined figure.

³⁸² *If Paul leaves alone for Corinth (See Acts 18.1) and yet Silas and Timothy's names are part of the greetings in both letters to Thessalonica, then it seems highly likely they returned together to Macedonia.*

³⁸³ *Paul: Leaves alone for Corinth CE 50 – Acts 18:1*

CHAPTER 20: CORINTH

WINTER CE 50 TO SPRING 52

ACTS 18:1-17

Paul spent the second night on the road in Megara and then followed the road along the cliffs overlooking the sea. The weather was closing in as he came down from the hills to see Corinth lying before him. For a while he walked along the diolkos³⁸⁴, watching with amazement the sight of a ship, its sails furled, moving across the land on rollers, hauled by slaves straining on ropes.

Paul was aware of a bustle and excitement which grew as he came nearer to the young and pleasure-mad city of Corinth^{385;386}. He saw the port of Lechaëum filled with the masts of ships sheltering safe from the winter storms off to his left. Then the road forked to the right to take him up to Corinth. Behind the gleaming city rose the immense steep-sided mountain of Acro-Corinth. As he reached the outer walls of the city, the rain began to pour down and he was grateful to climb the steps through the great gateway and take shelter under one of the many colonnades lining the streets.

He climbed up to the second terrace to enter the agora. In spite of the rain, the gaily painted stoas kept the weather at bay and were filled with people. Paul enquired for the Jewish synagogue and was finally directed to a street off the Agora and to a fine building with an inscription on the front stating ‘Synagogue of the Hebrews’.

Thankfully he knocked on a door alongside the synagogue. He had been on the road since before dawn, and it was now dark. Flaming torches placed at regular intervals gave light to the city’s streets. In a short while the door was opened by a fat, good-humoured man, who welcomed him and took him through the enclosed courtyard at the back of the synagogue.

“You’ve chosen a wet evening to come to Corinth, teacher,” he commented. His bright, worldly-wise eyes had seen this was no rich merchant wanting the best of his rooms and expecting he and his wife to come running to do his bidding. He walked him to the one side of the courtyard to a row of smaller rooms. He threw open the door of one of them and commented, “You can’t see much in this light, I will fetch a lamp for you.”

³⁸⁴ A stone tramway for overland transport of ships which crossed the 6 kilometre isthmus between the Gulf of Corinth and the Gulf of Aegina. Nero had a try at cutting a canal, but this was finally achieved only in 1893.

³⁸⁵ Corinth: Paul arrives CE 50 Winter – Acts 18:1

³⁸⁶ The Romans had destroyed the city in 146 BC. Julius Caesar re-established it with Italian freedmen and dispossessed Greeks in 46BC. It rapidly recovered its commercial prosperity. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* Vol 6 1959 Ed.

Paul followed him towards his own quarters on the other side of the courtyard which adjoined the back of the synagogue, where he waved his arm and said, "Kitchen and baths." Paul waited in the shelter of the open door for his return.

He soon came back carrying a lamp, and said, "There's wood for your fire near the stove, call me if you need anything."

Paul asked, "Is there anywhere I can buy bread?"

His host laughed, "Yes, yes, you'll find the shops don't close until late in Corinth. If you turn right out of the gate and walk back towards the Agora, you'll soon find one of our people where you can purchase all you need." With that he left Paul for the warmth of his own house.

The next day the rain had stopped and a watery sun shone through the clouds. Paul attended early morning prayers and afterwards asked the hazzan if he knew of any tentmakers in the community. The hazzan looked shrewdly at the little man in front of him, and then turned to one of the men rolling up his tefillan and said, "Joseph, was there not a tent-maker amongst the newcomers from Rome?"

The man, Joseph, turned and said, "Yes, they have set up shop in that vacant site in Weavers street," he looked at Paul and waved his arm to the hill which rose behind them, "You'll find them up there if you ask around."

Paul thanked the hazzan and asked if he might leave his travelling bag until he found accommodation. The hazzan smiled broadly and said, "Leave it as long as you like," and then added, "I wish you success in your search." Paul nodded and turned away to follow where Joseph had indicated.

Paul entered a maze of small streets, each dedicated to its own craft. The people willingly directed him to Weaver's street, and once there he walked along it, looking for signs of a newly constructed workshop. He nearly missed it since he had been looking for a new building, but it was obviously an old house that had collapsed in one of the earthquakes. He saw the walls had been recently reconstructed out of mud bricks and a new roof covered the building. A young slave was giving the outside wall a final coat of whitewash and then Paul saw the mezuzah on the door frame.

He stopped and asked the young slave, "Is your master inside?"

The young man gave a cheerful grin and said, "You will find him at the back in the workshop."

The boy then deposited his brush and led Paul through the front door and out into the courtyard. There Paul saw a man of about his own age, conferring with a woman. They were examining a batch of tanned skins, while a man stood waiting for their decision. They looked up on Paul's approach.

Paul said, "I am Paul, son of Jonathon, of Tarsus, of the tribe of Benjamin, a tent-maker by trade."

The man replied, "Greetings brother, I am Aquila,³⁸⁷ son of Abiel of Pontus, also of the tribe of Benjamin. This is my wife Priscilla, daughter of Phineas of Pontus."

Paul turned to greet a woman of medium height, with bright intelligent eyes, who gave him a smile, and said, "You are welcome to our home brother."

Aquila invited Paul to sit, he murmured something to his wife before joining Paul on the bench.

For a moment there was silence between them, then they both spoke together, "You are a tentmaker..." "I am wondering.." They broke off and laughed. Aquila nodded to Paul to speak.

Paul said, "I am a tentmaker by trade and I need work to support myself. I am under a special commission from the Lord to spread the Good News of Salvation to the whole world."

Aquila looked startled, "Good news of salvation...? Do you mean you are a follower of Jesus Christ?"

Paul was astonished, "You have heard of Jesus the Nazarene?"

Aquila replied, "It was because of the trouble between the Jews and Christians that we left Rome!"

"You mean that there are believers in Rome?" Paul felt a pang that he had not been the one to take the Gospel there.

"There is a strong group there, they worship in the Jewish synagogues. There must be over eight thousand Jews in Rome and there are many synagogues. However some of the Jewish elders objected to us using the synagogues for teaching about the Lord Jesus."

Paul was so amazed he did not know what he wanted to know first, "How did you become believers?"

"Priscilla and I were in Jerusalem for the Passover when Jesus was crucified. At that time we were still living in Pontus, but my father wanted me to start up in another city, so we stayed on until Pentecost following up business contacts, and so it was we heard Simon Peter preach that morning after they had received the Holy Spirit. Priscilla and I were baptised along with about two or three thousand other visitors!"

Paul shook his head in wonder, "How did you go to Rome?"

"As I told you, we were looking for contacts to establish a partnership in some other centre. The one that seemed most likely came from Rome. Of

³⁸⁷ *Aquila: Tentmaker in Corinth – Acts 18:2*

course we returned home to Pontus and discussed the thing with my father. He felt the capital city offered a good place to expand and he was satisfied with the letters we brought back with us giving financial guarantees and so on. It was some time after this we packed up and left Pontus.”

Priscilla returned and Aquila said, “My dear, this man is not only a tent-maker by trade but also a follower of the Lord Jesus!”

Priscilla raised her hands and said, “How mighty you are O Lord, you know our needs before we do!” She turned to Paul, “Has he told you we are desperate for an experienced tentmaker to help us get established here?”

It was Paul’s turn to look amazed, “You need a tentmaker...?” He laughed, “My sister how right you are, the Lord knows our every lack and if we trust him he puts all things together for our good!”³⁸⁸

He then asked, “Is it easy to become a member of the local tentmakers guild?”

“Corinth welcomes anybody so long as you have money and can pay your way. I only had to produce my Master’s certificate from Rome and I was granted immediate membership of the guild.”

Paul said, “You couldn’t do that in Tarsus!”

“Nor in Pontus.” replied Aquila, smiling.

There was a pause and Paul felt in his pouch and brought out his own certificate proving his completed apprenticeship and was registered as a master-tentmaker from Tarsus. Aquila read it and said, “There would be no difficulty in having you registered here.”

Priscilla smiled and said, “Have you left your luggage anywhere? If you care to fetch it, I will show you a room where you can sleep.”

The room Priscilla showed Paul was hardly more than a cupboard. She said, “You will see we are still getting ourselves organised. The house was very broken down and we needed to make the workrooms ready first. Come, I will show you.”

She led Paul from the tiny room in the corner of the yard. There was so much builder’s rubble, the place could hardly be called a ‘courtyard’. Skirting the rubbish she took him to a group of rooms on the other side. Here there was order and industry. Paul saw the man who had been standing with Aquila and Priscilla when he arrived was busy laying out tanned hides, marking them for cutting, a young man was watching.

Priscilla introduced Paul, “This is our old friend and helper, Josiphiah and this is Neophron, he is the son of the chairman of the tentmakers guild for this year.”

³⁸⁸ Paul: Joins Aquila as Tentmaker – Acts 18:3

Paul greeted them. He realised that Priscilla and Aquila had not come to Corinth without some strong recommendations from somewhere and felt happy that they had accepted him.

Seated on benches were two other men of indeterminate ages, stitching material. They hardly looked up from their work. Aquila came over and said, "In here is our storeroom." He opened the door and Paul saw shelves of different coloured canvas, heaps of treated leather and balls of thread. He was surprised that they had so much stock if they had only been here a short time.

Aquila sensed his thought, "You wonder about the stocks – we brought a great deal with us, but I can tell you we are going to need it. The orders have been piling up. When you have settled in, we can maybe employ extra labour. At present Josiphiah and myself are the only cutters. Neophron is keen to start but he is inclined to act first and think later. If he makes a misjudgement in cutting, as you know, it can be expensive."

Paul remarked, "Let me return to the synagogue and collect my things. It will be good to start working again."

Aquila stopped him, "We have not agreed on your terms of employment."

Paul replied, "I will accept whatever is the local rate for a man of my status." Aquila nodded and they shook hands.

Later, when Paul had returned, Aquila showed him an order from the local Roman governor for ten standard army tents, these must be made from leather according to regulation. Aquila asked Paul if he would take over this order and he was glad to be trusted with such an important job.

Soon Paul became part of Aquila's household, not only as a colleague, but as a friend. The hours of daylight were totally occupied with their work, but after their evening meal with the rest of the resident staff, Aquila and Priscilla would take Paul into their private room where they could talk. Then they shared their faith in the Risen Lord and the wonder of his guiding presence.

On the Sabbath, the wind was blowing in gusts and the rain had turned the unpaved roads to mud. The whole household, except Neophron who had gone home, wrapped themselves in their cloaks and walked precariously through the mud down to the synagogue. Thankfully they left the unpaved streets and entered the colonnades. It was a day for staying near a brazier and the streets were not so crowded as usual.

The synagogue was built of white marble, with a portico in the front. Steps led up to the open doors. Priscilla and the other women climbed one of the two wooden staircases on each side of the porch which led to the women's galleries. These ran three sides of the main room. Two rows of marble pillars supported the gallery above. The Ark, containing the scrolls was also of marble, and richly carved to resemble a smaller version of the synagogue

itself. It stood just inside the door, and people entering the door had to walk round it. On the far side, facing the Ark stood the chair of Moses. It was made from a massive block of marble with a small footstool in front of it. The bema from where the scriptures were read was of finely carved stone, consisting of three steps to the small platform. A portable lectern was standing before this. Alongside stood a fine seven branched lampstand, each branch held a lighted oil lamp.

Paul noticed nothing had been spared to make this building equal of any of those around it. Aquila, Paul and Josiphiah found seats along the wall. The other workmen sat on mats on the floor.

The room was almost full. There were many Gentiles of every class, some sitting on the benches and some on the floor. Paul noticed several Romans, one man in particular caught his eye, for he was a Roman of high status. The people here, thought Paul, were unlike those of any synagogue he had seen before. Many of them were sophisticated and rich in worldly terms, how could he reach them? What should he say? His experiences in Athens had left him full of self-doubt. He prayed for guidance and immediately heard 'speak to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.' A feeling of peace came over him as morning prayers began.

Later as Paul was leaving the synagogue with Aquila, the president of the synagogue came up to him and said, "I am Crispus son of Joel, I see you are a learned man, from where do you come?"

Paul introduced himself adding, "I sat at the feet of the Rabban Gamaliel." "Would you preach to us next Sabbath?"

Paul's face broke into a smile and a look of intense joy made his eyes sparkle. The change in his appearance surprised Crispus, and he found himself smiling back before saying with satisfaction, "Well, that's arranged then."

Paul's address the following week was well received and thereafter it became his custom to return to the synagogue each afternoon to answer questions and teach more about the Lord Jesus. Many of the Jews argued with him, but there grew a group of both Jews, Greeks and even a few Romans who were genuinely drawn to the Lord. One man, Stephenas begged to be allowed to be baptised together with his whole family³⁸⁹. Shortly afterwards he baptised Crispus, the leader of the synagogue and a close friend of his, Gaius.

When spring arrived, so did Silas and Timothy.³⁹⁰ There was much hugging and back thumping when the three friends were re-united. The two

³⁸⁹ 1 Corinthians 16:15

³⁹⁰ Silas & Timothy: Arrive in Corinth CE 51 – Acts 18:5

travellers brought good news from Macedonia. The churches there were prospering and they had brought a substantial sum of money donated by the brethren, especially the church in Philippi.

There was no room for the two to lodge with Paul, the yard had long since been cleaned up, but the premises was crowded, so they stayed at the synagogue. It was there later that evening that Paul walked round to hear their full report.

Paul asked, "How is Luke and Agariste?"

Silas looked sombre, "She is very weak, and does not leave her couch. Luke is filled with grief. He had such high hopes of her recovery with her mother's nursing and his father's medical knowledge. I think myself that the journey home took too much out of her."

Timothy added, "But Luke sent his warm greetings, and so did the other brethren, especially Lydia." Timothy's usually serious face looked animated, "They made a wonderful effort to collect money for our mission in Corinth."

"What about the other churches?" Paul asked.

After a pause Silas said, "We were a little disturbed by the way the brethren in Thessalonica interpreted something you wrote in your letter to them."

Paul looked astonished, "Whatever do you mean?"

"Well," said Silas slowly, "They seem to think you said the coming of our Lord was imminent and we would all be gathered together with him. When we passed through Thessalonica on our return journey we found many of them have given up working. They expect the brethren with money to support them and when anyone complains, they say that Day of the Lord has come and everyone must share."

Paul's eyes blazed with anger, "Why do they think I spent my time working when we were with them?" Then he looked at the two men, "I'm sorry my friends, you are tired, but this is a perversion of the teaching we gave them."

Silas nodded, "I know. Timothy and I told them that each person should earn their own living so that they can help the widows and orphans. I could see the elders were ashamed that they were unable to contribute anything to our collection, but the whole church is struggling now."

Paul rose, "We will decide what to do after you have had a good night's sleep. Also now you have come, we will need to plan our mission here in Corinth. Bless you my brothers," with that he left them.

Paul prayed long and late that evening and finally when he rose early the following morning, he said to Aquila as they washed, "My brother, now that Silas and Timothy have come, I feel the Lord is calling me to give my whole

time to preaching the message of salvation. Can you manage without me now?"

Aquila gave him a half smile, "I could see that your heart is not really in tent making. I told Priscilla your preaching is more important."

Paul dried his hands and feet, "You helped me when I needed it. I would not leave you now, if you need me."

"My friend, you helped us when we needed it, and now you can see we are better organised, thanks to you and we have enough slaves and apprentices to do the work. You must feel free to go whenever you want. But you may use your room as long as you need it."

Paul embraced him as they went out to the workshop for another day's work. Halfway through the morning Silas and Timothy arrived and Aquila nodded to Paul to go with them. The yard was too small and cluttered for them to sit and talk quietly, so they walked to the nearby square and sat under a great plane tree to discuss their plans.

"First tell me about each of the churches we established. Are they really flourishing? How do the Elders guide the people? Are they suffering from persecution?" Paul stopped and laughed, "If I don't stop asking questions, you will never get to answering them."

Silas and Timothy then gave a full report. They reassured Paul that they were all flourishing, that the persecution had died down and the brethren met in private homes. All the groups had grown and people had gone out to the surrounding villages.

The news gladdened Paul's heart, then he came back to the problem of the idle brethren in Thessalonica. Paul said, "Maybe I should write them another letter."

Silas's face brightened. "They would welcome that. Your earlier letter is still read regularly on First Day worship, along with readings from the 'Sayings of Jesus.'"

Paul was shocked at this news, "It was not meant to be read during worship."

Timothy smiled, "Maybe not, but they value your teaching and it reminds them of other things you said, so it has become an aid to building their faith."

Paul turned to the matter nearest his heart.³⁹¹ "Now you have come, I need to teach full time. There is a great hunger here amongst the people for the Good News of Salvation, but this city is full of distractions and wickedness and it is hard for the Gentiles to be different from their neighbours. We need to build a wall of faith round them."

³⁹¹ Paul: Preaches full time in Corinth – Acts 18:5

“Have you thought from where you could teach?” Silas asked.

“I am sure that Crispus³⁹² would let us use the synagogue, and I think it might be the best plan if I moved back there with you. There are many who are also ready for baptism and you and Timothy could finish their instruction and baptise all those whom you consider ready.”

“Have you baptised anyone yet?” Timothy asked.

“Only Crispus, Gaius³⁹³ and Stephanas’ family,³⁹⁴ but there are many more who are ready.”

Once his belongings had been fetched from Aquila’s house, the first thing Paul did was to ask Timothy to prepare his wax tablets to take a letter for the church in Thessalonica.³⁹⁵ Silas suggested they should bank the money they had brought for safety’s sake, so he left them sitting in the courtyard of the synagogue, while he took the directions from the hazzan concerning a Jewish merchant who acted as banker for the community.

Paul began dictating his usual greetings, and then he commended them for their faith and encouraged them to be faithful under sufferings, reassuring them that the Lord would give them relief.

When he had finished the introduction and Timothy had caught up, he began, “Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to be with him: I beg you, my brothers, not to be so easily confused in your thinking or upset by the claim that the Day of the Lord has come.”³⁹⁶

Paul dictated all through the morning until finally he turned to Timothy, and said, “There, I think that is enough for today.”

They all three struggled with the letter that afternoon and the following morning. Its rather jerky style showed their joint efforts were not entirely satisfactory, but finally Paul said, “Let me add my own message.” Paul then wrote, ‘With my own hand I write this: Greetings from Paul. This is the way I sign every letter: this is how I write.’ Pauls’ handwriting was large and untidy. He often felt ashamed he could not write a fair script. Then he added, ‘May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.’

The next day Silas and Timothy walked to Cenchraea to find a ship going to Thessalonica. They found a merchant who intended to trade in Thessalonica and paid him to deliver the letter to Jason.

During the weeks that Paul worked with Aquila and taught in the evenings, he had kept his teaching to proofs that Jesus fulfilled the prophesies

³⁹² Crispus: Leader of the synagogue – Believer – Acts 18:8

³⁹³ Crispus & Gaius: Baptised by Paul – 1 Corinthians 1:11

³⁹⁴ Stephanas & family: Baptised by Paul – 1 Corinthians 1:16

³⁹⁵ Thessalonica: Paul’s 2nd letter – 2 Thessalonians 1:1

³⁹⁶ 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2

concerning the Messiah. Paul had avoided the more controversial aspects of the Gospel message and there had been no real opposition to his teaching.

Now that Silas and Timothy had come, he had announced that they would be teaching daily in the synagogue following on from the early morning service.

Those members who might have some hesitation about this kept their unease to themselves. They recognized Paul's erudition and felt he could do no real harm.

Only a handful of people stayed that first morning. It was of course a busy time of day for women, slaves and business people. Those who did stay included Stephanas, a Greek and Titius Justus, a Roman, who lived next door to the synagogue. They were all 'God-fearers' and regular attenders at the synagogue, Crispus stayed and a few of the normal regular Jewish members, including Daniel the hazzan.

They had decided to take Jesus's ministry from the beginning and so Silas started with the teaching of John the Baptist. Some of the Jews had heard about him. Silas, who had once heard John preach said, "People trembled when they heard John's words. He looked just like the prophets of old, with his long uncut hair, clothes made of roughly woven camel's hair, his piercing eyes and deep thunderous voice. Day after day, the people came from all over the country to hear him and be baptized. When people began to ask, 'Is this the Messiah,' of whom John had said to them, 'I baptize you with water, but someone is coming who is much greater than I am. I am not good enough even to untie his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.'"

Silas looked round the room and said, "John's words were fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost after the resurrection of our Lord, for on that day, when we were altogether in a large room. Suddenly there was a noise like a strong wind which filled the house where we were sitting and we saw what looked like tongues of flame touched each one of us and we were all filled with the Holy Spirit."

The remembrance of that wonderful day filled Silas again with overwhelming joy and he began to praise God in another tongue. Paul and Timothy joined in and suddenly all those present felt a wonderful sense of God's presence as they joined in the beautiful, unearthly harmonies. Time seemed to stand still. They were filled with a sense of peace and joy, until suddenly an intense silence fell on them.

Paul rose and said quietly, "I am glad, my brothers that you have shared this experience with us. You heard the words of John the Baptist that God is able to make descendants for Abraham from the very stones themselves." Paul gave them his teaching concerning the significance of Abraham's faith.

As he spoke he was filled with the inner fire of his conviction and those who heard him were also caught up in his message.

“Now we know it was God’s plan that not only we, who are Jews by birth, but also the so-called ‘Gentile sinners’, are all put right with God through faith in Jesus Christ.³⁹⁷ When you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, you become part of the body of Jesus Christ, and as part of Christ’s body you must now leave behind your old life where you satisfy the desires of human nature. For what our human nature wants is opposed to what the Spirit wants, and what the Spirit wants is opposed to what our human nature wants. These two are enemies, and this means that you cannot do what you want to do. If the Spirit leads you, then you are not subject to the Law.”

This statement caused all those Jews present to stiffen in their seats for this was totally unacceptable, especially when spoken to Gentile God-fearers and converts.

There was a moment of silence and then Jacob, an older member of the synagogue, asked, “What exactly did you mean when you said ‘If the Spirit leads you, you are not subject to the Law?’

Paul, who was reluctant to engage in a bitter argument so early in their teaching, replied, “We read that God made his promises to Abraham and to his descendant. The scripture does not use the plural ‘descendants’ meaning many people, but the singular ‘descendant’ meaning one person only, namely, Christ. What I mean is that God made a covenant with Abraham and promised to keep it. The Law, which was given four hundred and thirty years later, cannot break that covenant and cancel God’s promise. For if God’s gift depends on the Law, then it no longer depends on his promise. However, it was because of his promise that God gave that gift to Abraham.”³⁹⁸

This explanation seemed to satisfy the old man and no one else asked a question. Silas then announced that they would be speaking again after evening prayers, and the meeting dispersed for the day.

Some time before the winter storms abated, Silas said to Paul, “My brother, if you can spare me, I would like to return to my family in Jerusalem. It is over two years since I have seen them.”

They were washing. Paul stopped pouring the water for Silas and looked up in dismay. Silas mistaking the look of anguish said quickly, “Of course, if you need me...”

Paul interrupted, “My dear brother, how selfish I have been. Of course you must return. You have been my prop and stay and without you we would never have come so far.”

³⁹⁷ Galatians 2:15

³⁹⁸ Galatians 3:16-18

“Then you don’t need me still?” Silas asked anxiously.

“Go home in peace, my brother. You have more than fulfilled your mission. If the Lord wills, I hope to stay here in Corinth. Timothy, as you can see for yourself, has matured in the last year. He will also benefit from more responsibility.” He stopped and suddenly clapped Silas on the shoulder, “We can make a collection for the brethren in Jerusalem and you can take it to them and be home in time for Passover!”

Silas looked up, a smile of happiness smoothed out the anxious expression that Paul suddenly realised had often been on Silas’s face these last few weeks.

After Silas left, Paul continued his daily teaching. There were those in the Jewish community who were increasingly unhappy about the large numbers of Gentiles attending the synagogue to listen to Paul. These made no attempt to attend the synagogue services, and the collection for the brethren in Jerusalem had not gone unmarked. It was Daniel, the hazzan who first mentioned this to Crispus. Crispus did not seem unduly alarmed. However Daniel was not to be put off and he spoke to Jacob, one of the founder members of the present synagogue.

He caught him just after morning prayers and said, “I am worried by the falling off in synagogue revenues.”

Jacob said brusquely, “Well, talk to Crispus, he’s the leader for this year.”

“I have,” replied Daniel, “but he does not seem concerned.” He looked at the older man for a moment and then added, “It is since Paul of Tarsus has come with this new teaching. Many of the Gentile ‘God-fearers’ have gone over to his group and have stopped coming to the synagogue altogether.”

Jacob looked surprised, “I haven’t heard him telling people not to be faithful to the synagogue.”

Daniel looked grim. “He doesn’t have to. They meet on the first day evenings and the Gentiles go there. Those who use to come for instruction as proselytes have all gone over to the Nazarene group. What is more, the man Silas has returned to Jerusalem, and they took a collection before he left. It was a very considerable sum of money and there was a significant drop in our own collection to send to Jerusalem for Passover.”

Jacob grunted, “All right, I’ll look into it.”

Jacob got together four of the more conservative members of the synagogue that same evening. He outlined the problem and immediately Jethro, from one of the priestly families said, “Yes, I have always said no good would come from letting these fancy sects start teaching.” He was definite and ponderous in his opinions, a follower of the Sadducee party, and not open to changing his mind once it had been made up.

A man called Caddis, who had links with the Essenes, glowered at Jethro, "It is from these 'fancy sects' as you call them that the faith is kept pure and the true Messiah will come."

Jethro said repressively, "You people have lots of wild ideas and rules which you would foist on those who obey the teachings of Moses."

Caddis looked furious and began, "It is you people who have corrupted..."

Jacob interrupted, "I have not invited you here tonight to quarrel with one another. What are we to do with this Paul of Tarsus and his friends?"

Jarib, a dealer in precious stones, who supported the synagogue generously but had little interest in the finer points of the Law, said, "I have not paid much attention to him. He seems a fanatical little man, but I have spoken once or twice with the man, Silas, who seems reasonable enough."

Jacob said gently, "You may have noticed that Silas is no longer here. I hear from Daniel they made a collection for their members in Jerusalem and he has left Corinth."

There was a thoughtful pause. This could have serious implications.

"It seems to me that if this Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, then his followers should become children of the Covenant. The scriptures are clear that this was the Holy One's intention, Blessed be He, when he gave Abraham the promise and later the Law to Moses." The speaker was a devote Jew, Judas by name, a man respected by all.

After prolonged discussion the five men agreed that Paul would be examined on exactly what he was teaching to the Gentiles about the Law, and when he intended they should be circumcised and become full members of the synagogue.

It was agreed that the questioning should be left to Judas, who said, "The best time would be in the afternoon next Sabbath. He is always there then."

Jacob nodded, "Then we could meet here after Sabbath, assess his response and make our plans."

The following Sabbath, the moment Judas spoke, Paul realised there would be trouble. He felt the familiar sinking feeling in his stomach and his hands suddenly became clammy and cold and for the first time in months he felt a tightness in his head.

Judas's tone was mild as he asked, "How do you read the scripture where God said to Abraham, 'You also must agree to keep the covenant with me, both you and your descendants in future generations. You and your descendants must all agree to circumcise every male among you. From now on you must circumcise every baby boy when he is eight days old, including slaves born in your homes and slaves bought from foreigners. This will show that there is a covenant between you and me. Each one must be circumcised,

and this will be a physical sign to show that my covenant with you is everlasting.”³⁹⁹

Paul sent a swift prayer for help and guidance. He began slowly, “Not all the people of Israel are the people of God. Nor are all Abraham’s descendants the children of God. God said to Abraham, ‘It is through Isaac that you will have the descendants I promised you.’ This means that the children born in the usual way are not the children of God; instead, the children born as a result of God’s promise are regarded as the true descendants. For God’s promise was made in these words: ‘At the right time I will come back, and Sarah will have a son.’”⁴⁰⁰

Paul paused to collect his thoughts, Judas was listening intently because he was genuinely interested. Many of the Gentiles who had been proselytes were also listening because they had been troubled with a guilty feeling that they should have gone through with circumcision and up to now, Paul had said nothing about it.

“This is not all,” Paul continued, “Rebecca’s two sons had the same father, our ancestor Isaac. But in order that the choice of one son might be completely the result of God’s own purpose, God said to her, ‘The elder will serve the younger.’ He said this before they were born, before they had done anything either good or bad; so God’s choice was based on his call, and not on anything they had done.”⁴⁰¹

Again Paul stopped and looked round the synagogue. He knew he could not avoid the issue, so he said a silent prayer and began, “If you obey the Law, your circumcision is of value; but if you disobey the Law, you might as well never have been circumcised. If the Gentile, who is not circumcised, obeys the commands of the Law, will God not regard him as though he were circumcised? And so we Jews will be condemned by the Gentiles because we break the Law, even though we have it written down and are circumcised; but they obey the Law, even though they are not physically circumcised.”

There was a mutter that went round the synagogue. Paul knew he was loosing many of his Jewish listeners. Suddenly he felt he would never convince those who were satisfied with the outward demands of the Law.

His voice strengthened and took on a tone of authority, “Who is the real Jew, truly circumcised? It is not the man who is a Jew on the outside, whose circumcision is a physical thing. Rather, the real Jew is the person who is a Jew on the inside, that is, whose heart has been circumcised...”

There were cries of outrage from many of his listeners, but he raised his voice and finished, “This is the work of God’s Spirit, not of the written Law.

³⁹⁹ *Genesis 17:9-13*

⁴⁰⁰ *Romans 9:6-9*

⁴⁰¹ *Romans 9:10-12*

Such a person receives his praise from God, not from man.”⁴⁰² But his words were lost in the angry shouts from most of the Jewish members of the synagogue.

Caddis was beside himself with rage, “You viper!” He screamed, “You perverter of the Scripture.”

Judas put his hand on the young man’s arm, “Softly, my friend.” But Caddis was beyond reason, and his anger was infecting some of the other members.

The hazzan was also enraged and shouted, “You need not think you can use the facilities of the synagogue if you abuse the faithful.”

The shouting and anger was so familiar to Paul, he knew he would meet with nothing but increasing opposition from them. He shouted, “If you are lost, you yourselves must take the blame for it! I am not responsible. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”⁴⁰³

With that he nodded to Timothy and left the building. They went round to their room and while Timothy gathered their belongings together, Paul lay weeping on the bed. The tightness in his head intensified.

Timothy had just finished when there was a knock on the door. Cautiously he opened it and looked out to find Titius Justus standing there. Timothy opened the door to let him in.

“I think you should stay with me.” He looked with pity on Paul’s prostrate body lying across the bed.⁴⁰⁴

Paul wiped his eyes on the back of his hand, sniffed and tried to sit up, but the pain in his head made him shut his eyes and hold his head. Titius⁴⁰⁵ looked at Timothy and said, “Come on, help him up, I think you must leave before the Jews come looking for you.” He nodded to a young slave who had accompanied him, to bring their bags.

With difficulty Timothy and Titius got Paul to his feet. They left the courtyard by the side gate and entered the door to Titius’ home which was not far from the synagogue.

That night Paul’s headache was as bad as it had ever been. He was deeply depressed. Why had he let Silas go? Why did this always happen just when things seemed to be doing so well? Why couldn’t the Jews see the truth? The thoughts chased each other endlessly. What should he do now? In a state of exhaustion he fell into an uneasy sleep.

During the night Paul woke up. He was aware there was a Presence in his room and he heard the words, “Do not be afraid, but keep on speaking and do

⁴⁰² Romans 9:25-29

⁴⁰³ Paul: Leaves Corinthian synagogue – Acts 18:6

⁴⁰⁴ Paul: Stays with Titius Justus in Corinth – Acts 18:7

⁴⁰⁵ Titius Justus: Invites Paul to stay – Acts 18:7

not give up, for I am with you. No one will be able to harm you, for many in this city are my people.” Peace filled Paul and he fell into a deep sleep.⁴⁰⁶ The next morning, all doubts and fears had gone. His first thought were the words of the psalm, ‘Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.’⁴⁰⁷ He rose invigorated and renewed.

Paul and Timothy took up the teaching and visiting of the various groups of believers. The Jews did nothing to challenge them. Crispus, was replaced by Sosthenes as leader of the synagogue, he told them that many of the members of the synagogue were furious that Paul was continuing his activities next door to the synagogue.

Crispus said, “They are planning something, but since they know I am a believer they don’t tell me anything.”

In the meantime the head of the city’s treasury, a Roman known as Erastus and a close friend of Titius Justus, had also been baptised. He was a serious-minded man who had recently been appointed to his post. He found the frivolity of the Corinthian way of life unattractive, and had been invited by Titius to listen to Paul one evening. He had come back several times before asking for baptism.

It was this friendship, and it being the year of the Isthmian games⁴⁰⁸ that took Paul and Timothy to the opening of the games. As a city official, Erastus sat in the seats reserved for the city council and other dignitaries.

For days, heralds had proclaimed the coming games from the bema in the centre of the agora. Early in the morning, of the first day, the priests of Poseidon headed the procession from Corinth to the Isthmus, leading two black bulls, garlanded for sacrifice to Poseidon, the earthshaker. With the notorious earthquakes which often shook Corinth, even the most irreligious honoured the god. The priests were followed by the city officials, and thereafter by the various groups of competitors, from the athletes to the musicians and the owners and riders in the various chariot and horse races.

Titius and his party, including Paul and Timothy did not attend this opening ritual. Even so, when they set out, the road to the sanctuary of Poseidon, where the games were staged was packed with a large and excited crowd. All around the sanctuary were the tents of the visitors. Titius explained the competitors were housed within the sanctuary under the close scrutiny of the judges.

“The athletes train here in preparation for the contest, and the judges make sure they share the same diet in their preparation.” Titius informed them.

⁴⁰⁶ Paul: Reassured of Corinth mission – Acts 18:9

⁴⁰⁷ Psalm 30:5 King James Version

⁴⁰⁸ Held on the first and third years of each Olympiad. Encyclopaedia Britannica 1959

Timothy asked, “Why is that?”

“Oh,” said Stephanas, who was amongst the party, “To ensure no athlete has an unfair advantage.”

Jugglers and acrobats were entertaining the slow moving spectators. Street vendors were selling all kinds of foods from sticky sweet meats to bread rolls, portions of roasted meats, wines, or just plain water. And in the heat and dust raised by the thousands of feet, the water carriers were doing a thriving trade.

Finally they arrived at the stadium. Titius paid the entrance fee for his party and a marshal pointed to seats still vacant high up towards the centre. They passed along the walkways, then reached the steps and began to climb up to their seats.

“How many people does the stadium hold?” Asked Timothy slightly out of breath.

“Between 40,000 to 50,000 people,” replied Titius.

Timothy looked at the crowded seats around him and saw they were nearly full. In all that huge crowd there was not one single woman, for they were strictly forbidden to attend.⁴⁰⁹

Suddenly a trumpet blast silenced the crowd and a herald proclaimed the official opening of the games. The officials and priests were in the seats of honour in the front. A buzz of excitement went round the crowd, the herald began to proclaim the names of the competitors for the first footrace.⁴¹⁰

As he proclaimed the name and country of each runner, shouts from the supporters threatened to drown the herald. The runner came out stripped and oiled. One by one they lined up and waited at the threshold until all the names were called.

Then the herald proclaimed, “Let the runners put their feet to the line,” he then called to the spectators to challenge any who might be disqualified by blood or character. The judges waited at the far end of the stadium by the winning post.

Titius lent over to Paul and pointed out the two marble columns at each end of the stadium and whispered, “They run for that column. This first race is just the length of the stadium. This will be followed by two stadiums and more.”

A silence fell on the huge crowd. Suddenly the runners were away, streaking down to the far post. The crowd rose and screamed its

⁴⁰⁹ Encyclopaedia Britannica Vol 10 page 2. (1959 ed). *These facts refer to the Olympic Games.*

⁴¹⁰ Paul Speaks of athletes training, their prize which will not last, and of running straight for the finishing line. Also of boxer in 1 Corinthians 9.23-27 and again of ‘running the race’ in 2 Timothy 4.7. It seems likely he must have watched the events at some time.

encouragement, three runners led the field and the favourite, from Corinth narrowly lost to an athlete from Sardis.

Once more the herald's trumpet sounded for silence, one of the officials called out the name of the winner, his father and the city he represented. The winner then went forward to the judge, who lifted a garland of pine needles from the ivory and gold table, and crowned him amidst the shouts and groans from the crowd.

Paul turned to Stephanas, "Is that all their reward?" Stephanas nodded.

"How long have they been in training?" He asked.

"About ten months," replied Stephanas, "And if they break their training in any way, they can be disqualified. This morning when they attended the sacrifices at the temple of Poseidon they had to put their hands on the victims and swear they had duly qualified themselves by ten months continuous training in the gymnasium, and that they would use no fraud or guile in the sacred contests."⁴¹¹

Paul lapsed into reflective silence. He spent the rest of the day apparently engrossed in what he saw. After the foot races, there was wrestling followed by boxing.

The games lasted for five days, during which there were horse races and musical contests held at other venues. Corinth was packed with visitors, and in the evening they filled the streets and drinking shops or climbed the Acro-Corinth to visit the thousand priestesses dedicated to the temple of Venus on the top. The whole city was given over to pleasure and vice.

The young girls of the Christian families were kept close to home.

Hardly had the excitement from the Isthmian games died down and the city began to return to near normality, when the new Roman Proconsul was installed.

It was the month the Romans called July, and although Paul did not take much note of such appointments, He overheard Erastus telling Titius that he was Junius Gallio,⁴¹² one of his brothers was Seneca the philosopher. He had, said Erastus, apparently been adopted by his father's friend, Junius Gallio and he had taken his name.

The office of Proconsul would affect the whole administration of the city. Corrupt officials could make life extremely difficult for city administrators, to say nothing of the citizens. It was with relief that Erastus also was able to relate that the new governor was known for his charming and sweet disposition.

⁴¹¹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica Vol 10 Page 2 (1959 edition)*

⁴¹² *Gallio: Appointed proconsul in Corinth – Acts 18:12*

A few days later, without warning, Paul was arrested by the Jews after attending morning prayers. Timothy who was with him, managed to escape and ran quickly to alert Titius. The move was so unexpected that Paul was completely unprepared. By the time Daniel and his helpers had locked him in a small room at the back of the synagogue, Paul realised he was alone. He shouted as the hazzan walked away, "On what charge have you arrested me?" There was no answer.

For the rest of the Sabbath, no one came near him. He could not understand it. If they intended to put him on trial, they would have to read him the charges and bring him before a properly constituted court, but there was no sign that this would happen. There was a low wooden bed covered with a rough straw mattress. Paul removed the mattress and lay on the bed for a while. Then he rose and began to pray in tongues. Gradually he was filled with a sense of God's presence and peace filled his spirit.

Late that evening, the hazzan's wife brought him some soup and a chunk of bread. When Paul attempted to question her, she made no reply. Paul was more and more puzzled.

The next morning, the hazzan allowed Paul to wash, but refused to answer any questions. He was then put back into the prison cell. Later in the morning Daniel returned with Jethro, Caddis and Jacob.

Paul asked, "On what charges have you arrested me?"

Jethro said, "You will appear before the Roman governor himself and you will know the charges soon enough."

With that, Daniel tied Paul's hands in front of him and the party left the courtyard.⁴¹³ Paul then saw quite a sizable number of Jews had turned out to accompany him to the basilica, where the proconsul held court.

He did not have much time to see who was there, but suddenly he realised that Sosthenes, who had replaced Crispus as leader of the synagogue, had appeared and was shouting angrily, "What do you think you are doing with this man? Are you mad?"

Caddis yelled back, "Since you have refused to take action against this traitor, we have decided to have him tried before the Romans. Maybe he will suffer the same fate as that Jesus he tells us about. Then everyone will know he is a fake." There were cheers in support of Caddis's remarks. Boos and catcalls prevented Sosthenes's voice being heard. However Jacob went over and said something quietly to him. With that the whole crowd moved off to the agora, which they crossed to where the basilica stood at the far end.

Gallio was already sitting in the judgement seat, his lictors, their rods on their shoulders flanked him on either side. Roman soldiers guarded the

⁴¹³ Paul: Jews take him before Gallio – Acts 18:12

precincts. Gallio was hearing other cases and the crowd waited respectfully for their turn.

Finally the officer of the guard indicated Paul and his accusers should mount the steps and stand before the proconsul.

Gallio said quietly, “Who are this man’s accusers?”⁴¹⁴

Jethro stepped forward and said portentously, “This man,” pointing unnecessarily at Paul, “is trying to persuade people to worship God in a way that is against the law!”

Jacob sighed, they should not have let Jethro proclaim the charge, he looked imposing enough, being tall and upright, but there was nothing very criminal in the way he had accused Paul. They had agreed that if they could frighten the new governor with showing that Paul’s teaching was a threat to the Emperor....

Caddis, too saw that Jethro was an incompetent old fool and shouted. “This man is perverting our religion. He teaches things contrary to our Law.” There was a roar of agreement from the men surrounding Caddis.

Someone shouted, “Yes, he teaches that a dead man is the Messiah.” There were other shouted comments and the crowd looked like getting out of hand.

Gallio regarded the crowd calmly and then lifted his finger for silence. When all was quiet he said, “If this were a matter of some evil crime or wrong that has been committed, it would be reasonable for me to be patient with you Jews.”

Gallio knew very well how heated the Jews could get if there was any threat to their religion. Only a couple a years ago in Rome, the Emperor had expelled some of them for fighting about someone called Chrestus. At any rate he was not about to be sucked into something as tortuous as the Jewish religion. He continued, “Since it is an argument about words and names and your own law, you yourselves must settle it. I will not be the judge of such things!”

With that he nodded to his lictors, who drove Paul and his accusers down the steps into the square. Timothy ran to embrace Paul and with Stephanas and Fortunatas, they untied his hands. The Jews were furious, their plans frustrated, they turned on Sosthenes, who was begging them to leave and not create a disturbance.⁴¹⁵ Caddis and his friends suddenly grabbed him and began to beat him furiously. The captain of the guard started forward to restore order, but Gallio shook his head and watched impassively until the

⁴¹⁴ Jews: Charge Paul before Gallio – Acts 18:13

⁴¹⁵ Sosthenes: Beaten by Jews in Corinth – Acts 18:17

angry crowd began to break up and leave. Sosthenes, who had fallen to the ground, was helped to his feet by Jacob.

The whole incident had been a complete fiasco. The Jews had been made to look foolish in front of the new proconsul and Paul returned unharmed to the home of Titius Justus.

Paul went to discuss the events of the day with Aquila and Priscilla. He knew that the Jews would not rest until they had silenced him in one way or another. He and Timothy climbed up the hill the following morning to Weaver's street. The sun was already burningly hot, and with no wind, the smoke from the pottery kilns and bronze works rose in a thick column above the city before flattening out high above the Acro-Corinth.

Timothy said, "Corinth is a strange city, it is so beautiful and rich, and many of the people care only for pleasure, yet there are those who welcome hearing about the Lord Jesus."

Paul looked at him fondly, "It has been a fruitful time here. But we need to move on. You remember that until the Good News is preached throughout the whole world, the Day of the Lord will be delayed."

Priscilla was delighted to see them both and shouted through to the workshop to tell Aquila they had come. "What happened yesterday? We did not return to the synagogue in the afternoon, but we heard they arrested you? Is it true?"

Paul nodded and Timothy said, "It was a complete surprise, not even Sosthenes knew about it until the next morning."

"It was a group in the synagogue who have opposed us from the beginning. They seemed to think they could stampede the new proconsul into putting me on trial."

Aquila came from the back and embraced Paul, "What's that? They took you in front of the proconsul, on what charge?"

"I think they intended to make it a charge of disloyalty to the Emperor, but they got old Jethro to formulate it and he completely missed the point!" Paul grinned. He felt light-hearted. "At any rate, Gallio threw us all out of the Basilica. He refused to make a judgement on Jewish matters. He appears to know how tortuous this can be. Was he there in Rome during your troubles?"

"I can't say for sure, but his one brother teaches the Emperor's⁴¹⁶ adopted son, Domitus, so there is a good chance he knew of the trouble between the Jews and the Christians when we were there."

"That is the reason I have come to talk to you. Can you spare time now, or should we come back?"

⁴¹⁶ Nero

Priscilla said, “You will stay for our meal. Just let me tell the maids to make extra.”

“I’ll just tell Josophiah, he is perfectly able to take care of things.”

The two went to make arrangements and Priscilla came back carrying cups, a serving girl carried a pitcher of wine and another of chilled water. They set these on a table and when Aquila had returned they settled down to listen to Paul.

“I have been here for a year now. There are many believers, we have appointed elders and the group seems well-founded in the love of the Lord and in obedience to the Holy Spirit.” He paused and his three listeners looked at him, guessing what he was about to say.

“You all know that once the Jews are aroused against me, they stir up every kind of trouble they can devise and if they can’t get rid of me one way, they will find another. Furthermore persecution of me brings suffering to the church. It was my intention, when we first set out, to go to Ephesus, but as I have told you, the Holy Spirit prevented us. Now I feel that it may be time to go there, but I am not clear in my spirit over this. What do you think?”

His listeners sat quietly for a few minutes and then Priscilla said, “Do you know if there are any brethren in Ephesus?”

Paul shook his head, “I can’t be sure, there may have been some who came to Jerusalem for the feasts and became believers before returning home, but I am sure no one has been especially appointed to bring the gospel message there.”

Aquila looked at Timothy, “This young man has matured a great deal, and I see how much he helps you, but you would also need someone to replace Silas as a teacher to assist you.”

Paul looked fondly at Timothy. He was a thin young man in his twentieth year. He was devoted to Paul and could be relied on to carry out any instructions. But he was not a teacher. Paul nodded his agreement. He remembered how he had battled alone in Athens, and without the warm and loving support of Aquila and Priscilla in his early days in Corinth, he would have found it difficult to become established.

Priscilla exchanged a glance with Aquila and said, “I don’t think you should plan to leave just yet, but we will pray that the Lord’s will is revealed in this matter,” she smiled, “Maybe he has someone in mind to go with you.”

Paul acknowledged the good sense of this advice. Later that night he prayed earnestly for guidance and that God would raise up someone to go with him to Ephesus. Finally face down on the floor of his room he made a

promise that he would not shave until God had clearly shown him who should be his helper in Ephesus.⁴¹⁷

The next day he realised the significance of his promise to God. He was staying in a Gentile home, and wine was served at every meal! It was late summer and grapes were frequently on the table. Finally Paul knew that leaving his hair uncut and his beard untrimmed, would not endear him to the smooth-shaven Roman and Greek members of the church.

Quietly he spoke to Penelope, Titius's wife to explain his position and beg her forgiveness for causing her any inconvenience. She asked him what he could eat and drink, and Paul said, "Any fruit syrups except from the grape, and any fruit or nuts, as well as breads and meats."

Following the debacle in front of Gallio, the Jews seemed to accept Paul's continued ministry. The fact that Caddis and his fanatics had beaten Sosthenes, was condemned by the whole community. Sosthenes was a respected and fair-minded man and was certainly not an open member of the brethren. Then there was the way that Paul had been arrested and taken before the proconsul, the 'conspirators' as they came to be labelled had not brought the matter before the elders in the synagogue and the whole incident was felt to have undermined the dignity and respect of the Jewish community. So Paul was free to come and go and no one challenged him openly.

It was some weeks later when Paul was once more sharing a Sabbath meal with Aquila and Priscilla⁴¹⁸ that they sprang on him their suggestion. Aquila asked quietly, "How would you feel if Priscilla and I came to Ephesus with you?"

Paul had never been so surprised in his life. He half choked on the fish he was eating and had to be beaten on the back by Timothy. He took a sip of water before attempting an answer, then he said, "My dear brother and sister, what are you saying? You are willing to leave all you have built up in Corinth and start again in Ephesus," his voice dropped to a whisper, "for the Lord's sake?"

Aquila and Priscilla were smiling and Priscilla said, "Did not the Lord himself say, 'what profit is there if you gain the whole world and lose your own soul?'"

"We have prayed for some weeks now and it has become clear to us that the Lord wants us to go and establish ourselves in Ephesus to give you a base from which to start your ministry in that city." Aquila explained turning to

⁴¹⁷ *Corinthians 18:18 Presumably a Nazarite vow, which requires he does not cut his hair or beard, nor would he drink wine or eat any part of the fruits of the vine. For further details see the International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia Vol I p.992, Vol II p.597 & Vol III p.501*

⁴¹⁸ *Aquila and Priscilla: Go to Ephesus with Paul – Acts 18:18*

Priscilla he smiled fondly at her and added, “Priscilla seems to think you need home cooking to keep you fit and strong.”

Paul was speechless, tears filled his eyes. He tried to speak and could not for the emotion that gripped him. Finally he said over and over, “Bless you! Thank you Lord! Bless you both!” When he made his vow, never in his wildest imagination had he thought it might be these two dear people who would be chosen by the Lord.

Aquila rose and embraced Paul. “We know how much you have suffered to bring the message of salvation so far. You have given up home and family, status and wealth, and become poor for the Lord. We know you have been beaten and chased from many cities, but we know that the Lord has blessed your ministry with much fruit. He has shown us that the least we can do for him is to make sure your time in Ephesus is as fruitful as it has been in Corinth.”

Priscilla, always practical said, “We wanted to know your reaction to our suggestion so we can make the necessary arrangements to hand over the business here and obtain letters of introduction to the Guilds in Ephesus so we might start up again there.”

Paul was grateful to talk about practical matters and asked, “Who would take over the business? Would you be able to sell it?”

Aquila’s dark eyes twinkled, “You don’t think we would make a loss for the Lord, do you? Josiphiah would continue here as our agent and manager. Neophron has another six years of his apprenticeship to go, and his articles will be taken over by Josiphiah. At the end of that period, we would be prepared for Neophron to take over the business here and then Josiphiah would join us in Ephesus.”

“Have you discussed this with Neophron’s father?” Asked Paul.

“Not yet, we thought we had better see what you thought of the plan,” replied Aquila, “But there is not likely to be problems from that side. He would take over a successful business and all our contracts, and we would draw up an agreement to enable him to pay us for it over a period of years. I also have a cousin in Ephesus and although I have never met him, I will write to see if he can help us find suitable premises.”

Then Paul told them of his vow and again Aquila smiled, “Yes, we had wondered if you had, people kept asking us why you let your hair grow. We told them it was a sign you had dedicated every bit of your body to God and would not trim your beard or cut your hair as a token of your complete dedication.”

“When will you end your vow?” Priscilla asked.

Paul looked thoughtful and said, “I think when we have safely left Corinth and are on the way to Ephesus.”

In the days before they packed to leave, the friends discussed the future. Paul decided to return to Jerusalem and let them know of his plans, before returning through Galatia and visiting the churches. They all agreed it would give Aquila time to become established. Timothy decided it would a good opportunity to go home and visit his mother and grandmother, where Paul could pick him up on his way back.

CHAPTER 21: BETWEEN THE SECOND AND THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEYS

CE 52 Summer

ACTS 18:18-22

Paul was thankful to see the huge statues on two plinths outside Caesarea's harbour come into sight. His linen robe was torn and stained. He had no funds to buy another. All his possessions except his traveller's belt had been lost. A fellow passenger had given him a very old cloak and even his sandals were somebody else's well-worn ones. Paul felt and looked scruffy.

He had taken leave of Timothy in Ephesus. Since the friends agreed that while Aquila was getting established it was a good opportunity for Timothy to visit his mother and grandmother. Paul had established contact with the local synagogue before catching a boat to Caesarea. Unfortunately it sank on the way, which accounted for Paul's present scruffiness⁴¹⁹.

With nothing to delay him and nothing to carry, Paul disembarked as soon as the ship had tied up alongside the dock. Feeling conspicuous he fairly scuttled through the streets until thankfully he came to the door of Philip's house.

An elderly servant who answered Paul's knock was just about to tell the 'beggar' to wait while he fetched some bread, when he looked again and said in amazement, "Rabbi Saul!"

Paul smiled grimly, "You may well look surprised. Is your master in?"

The servant stood aside to let Paul enter and said gravely, "I will call him."

The house was not large, but the living quarters were upstairs from where Paul could hear the sound of female voices singing snatches of songs and laughing.

Presently Philip of Jerusalem came running down the stairs, "Brother Saul!" He threw his arms round him and hugged him warmly. Then he stood back and said, "But what has happened to you? You look ..." His voice died away as words failed him.

Paul smiled, less grimly than before, "Yes, your old servant thought that I was a beggar, and in fact he is right! The ship I took from Ephesus sank halfway between Rhodes and Patara."

Philip was full of concern, "Come in my brother. Thank God your life was spared. Did the ship founder in a storm?"

⁴¹⁹ See Galations 11.25

“No, in fact it was a hot, sunny day. It seems one of the planks in the hold gave way. I shared two spars with a woman and her children and used my robe to keep them together.” He gave a rueful laugh, “It rather shows, I’m afraid.”

Philip was greatly concerned and calling the same servant said, “Quickly, tell your mistress, brother Saul is here. Then fetch him something to eat and drink and bring it to the roof.”

Shortly a fat, good-natured woman came bustling down the stairs. “Brother Saul!” She exclaimed, “This is good news, welcome in health to our home!” She gave him a warm embrace and then noticed the condition of his clothes.

Before she could remark on them, Philip said, “Dearest, Brother Saul was shipwrecked and is in need of some new clothes. Do you think you could find a robe of mine that you could shorten, also my brown coat? Oh, and can you find a pair of sandals that will fit?”

His wife clucked like an anxious hen, “Are you all right brother? You have taken no harm?”

Paul smile reassuringly, “Only my possessions, and I have learnt that in everything, the Lord provides. The Gentiles who rescued us, poor as they were could not have been kinder. Only it will be good to wear clean clothes without holes all over them!”

Philip’s wife bustled away to look for something suitable. Philip led him to the roof, and the servant brought a small table with bread and fresh fish prepared with a sauce. One of Philip’s daughters brought a flask of wine and another of water which she set on the table together with beakers.

Paul gave a sigh and looked at Philip, “Bless you my brother, you have thought of everything. It has been many days since I have eaten anything but dried bread softened with water!”

That evening a revived Paul met with the brethren of Ceasarea. It was a time to catch up with the news.

Paul listened in shocked silence when they told him of events involving the procurator, Cumanus and the Samaritans the previous year.

Theudas, one of the older men said, “It started when some Galileans were passing through the village of Ginea on their way to Jerusalem. The Samaritans massacred them all. When their families reported this to the procurator and asked for judgement, the Samaritans bribed him and he obliged them by taking no action.”

Simon took up the story, “You can hardly blame the Galileans for being angry and they decided to take matters into their own hands.”

“The leaders in Galilee tried to prevent their people from doing anything unlawful, but many of their relatives had been killed and the people refused to wait while they petitioned Cumanus,” Theudas explained.

“So what happened?” Asked Paul, his heart sinking.

Philip said sadly, “Some of the rougher young men from Galilee joined forces with Eleazar, a notorious robber. They robbed and pillaged many Samaritan villages.”

“So then Cumanus took his soldiers and armed the Samaritans.” Simon’s voice told of his indignation, “He marched out against the Jews and murdered many of them and captured a lot more.”

Theudas took up the unhappy story. “When the news reached Jerusalem, the leaders of the people were appalled. They could see that if this situation continued the Romans would destroy the Temple. So they put on sackcloth and heaped ashes on their heads and went to those in revolt, begging them to consider the consequences to the nation. Finally their petition succeeded and the people laid down their arms and went home,” he gave a heavy sigh.

“Since then it’s not safe to travel through Samaria or in Galilee. Eleazar and his gang now rob and pillage unchecked.” said Philip.

“But you know what the Samaritans did?” Simon’s voice rose with indignation, “They went to Ummidius Quadratus, the president of Syria when he was visiting Tyre last year and accused the Jews of setting their villages on fire and plundering them.”

“But that was true,” remarked Philip fairly.

“Maybe,” replied Simon, conceding nothing, “The point is they pretended it was not themselves they were concerned about but the Romans!”

“How did they make that out?” Paul asked, astonished.

“Oh,” Simon sneered, “They said something about the Jews were in revolt against the Romans. They hoped to make Quadratus fight their battles for them.”

“When we heard what the Samaritans had done, some of our leaders went to Quadratus and explained the whole situation saying that Cumanus had received bribes from the Samaritans and had done nothing to punish the Samaritans for the original massacre of the Galilean travellers.”

“The long and the short of it,” Theudas concluded, “was that four Jews, who were identified by the Samaritans as being the leaders of a “revolt against Rome” were executed. Then Quadratus sent Cumanus back to Rome along with Ananias the High Priest and Ananus the commander of the Temple. Some Samaritans and other Jews went as witnesses to stand trial before the Emperor Claudius.”

There was a pause. Then Paul asked, “What was the outcome?”

“Well,” replied Philip “We’ve heard from one of our brethren at Caesar’s palace, here in Caesarea, that young Agrippa, son of King Agrippa, intervened by appealing to the Emperor’s wife, Queen Agrippina. She gave Claudius the true story and we hear the Samaritans were slain and Cumanus was exiled.”⁴²⁰

“So who is the new procurator?” Paul asked.

“Felix,” answered Theudas, ‘He is brother of Claudius’ favourite, the freedman Pallas. Young Agrippa now has the tetrarchy of Philip and was also given Trachonites and Abila. Perhaps when he is older the emperor will make him king like his father.”

“Now,” said Philip, “You have heard our news, what about you my brother, how have things fared with you?”

Paul looked at the gathered brethren and their wives. “Is this not time for your evening prayers?”

Philip nodded, “Yes, you are right, let us join in praise and thanksgiving for all the blessings we have received from the Lord.”

Later that evening Paul gave a full account of the churches he had founded through Asia and into Macedonia and Achaia. Of the faith and devotion of the mostly Gentile groups, of their problems and then of his future plans. If there were any doubts amongst the group, no one expressed them. The whole group ended in praise and thankfulness at the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of so many people.

There was little for Paul to get ready the following morning as he prepared to leave for Jerusalem. Philip pressed on him the results of a small collection he had made the previous evening and Paul hugged him gratefully. Then Philip said, “Be careful my friend. The Church in Jerusalem undergoes hard times. The orthodox Jews do not agree to the wholesale inclusion of uncircumcised Gentiles. The brethren work hard to keep the Peace of the Lord amongst them.”

Paul gave him a long look then nodded. He could indeed understand the problems between the conservative Sadducee and Pharisee parties who had become followers of the Lord. They wanted fellowship of the brethren and their traditional way of life. As he knew, there was One God, One Lord in the fellowship of the One Spirit. You could not combine the Old Covenant with the New.

Philip’s wife with the baby and their three young daughters came to wave him goodbye. And then Paul set off on the road to Jerusalem. He ignored the rest of the traffic that stirred the dust and filled the road. He was hearing One

⁴²⁰ *Antiquities of the Jews. Josephus Book XX Chapter VI.*

God, One Lord, One Baptism. We are One in the Spirit. We are One Body⁴²¹. The word kept time with his feet. His mind held onto One Body in Christ. Yes, but a body has arms and legs so we can be different from each other – we must be different from each other if we are like a body, because a body cannot all be made up of feet... or hands... or eyes, or ears. Paul's speeding thoughts made his feet stride over the ground.

The day drew to a close and he had not noticed hunger or thirst. When he became aware of his surroundings, he saw he needed to find shelter for the night. His confidence continued during the next two days of his journey and as he drew near to Jerusalem and saw the Temple, golden in the morning sun, his heart filled with joy. He entered the city and made his way to Mary's house.

Still full of a feeling of exultation, he knocked at the door. In a while, Rhoda, now a plump woman in her mid-thirties, opened the door and beamed with pleasure when she saw him. Immediately she called Mary, who came through from the kitchen wiping her hands. Mary greeted Paul with a warm hug and took him through to the courtyard, where she ordered a young servant to fetch water for Paul to wash, while Rhoda fetched him wine and water and something to eat.

When he was settled he turned to Mary and asked, "How are Barnabas and John Mark. Are they here?"

Mary's expression changed, "You have not heard?"

Paul was suddenly filled with foreboding, "Has something happened to them?"

Mary lent forward and took his hand, "Joseph was stoned to death in Salamis, soon after he and Mark landed there three years ago."

Paul half rose and then fell back. His face was white as death. He tried to speak but no words came. Suddenly he was shaken by terrible sobs as he remembered the anger of their last parting and his bitter regrets he had not been reconciled with Barnabas.

Mary looked on the crumpled, sobbing Paul with pity. Mark had told her all that had happened. She went quickly from the room and shouted for the young servant. She told him to run to fetch John Mark from the Temple. "Run", she urged as he left the house.

Presently Paul began to gain control and Mary said gently, "He forgave and understood, you know. You were both right and thanks to the Holy One, great good has come from your parting."

Paul groaned, "Good? How can that possibly be, when he is dead and I still live! If I had been with him ..."

⁴²¹ *Ephesians 4.4 and 1 Corinthians 12.12*

"If you had been with him, you would probably have died as well." Mary's voice was practical. "When you first arrived this morning, I could tell that the Lord has blessed your work, too."

"What do you mean 'too'?" Paul asked.

Mary smiled but did not reply.

"Tell me how he came to die?"

Mary thought a moment and then said, "I think you must wait to hear the story from John Mark."

"Mark!" Exclaimed Paul, "Is he here?"

"I have sent for him. He is coming."

They waited until Mary heard the door open and Mark's hurrying footsteps. "We are in the courtyard," she called.

Paul rose and stood puzzled for a moment. Who was this vibrant-looking young man?

Mark seeing his expression, laughed and went forward eagerly to embrace Paul, "My brother," he said, "How long have I waited for this moment!" Paul was once more shaken by uncontrollable sobs.

Mark held him and patted his back, looking at his mother, who just nodded her head and murmured, "Give him time."

Presently Paul straightened up and wiped his eyes on his sleeve. He sat down and looked at Mark, "You've changed!"

Again Mark laughed, "Yes, I know that the Lord Jesus lives!"

Suddenly the terrible guilt and grief that had filled Paul began to lift, "What happened?"

For a moment Mark was silent, then he said, "When we left Antioch, Barnabas was much cast down that you had left in anger. While we were on the ship for Salamis, he prayed for forgiveness for both of you. It was then that a great peace came on him and he said to me, 'This is in God's will. When you see Paul again, tell him all is well, we are brothers in Christ.' "

Tears once more overflowed from Paul's eyes and he sniffed.

"We arrived in Salamis and stayed with Mnason. Meetings were arranged and the brethren there were full of joy, especially when they received the letter from James concerning the Gentiles."

Suddenly Mark's voice became sombre, "You remember that magician, Elymas from Paphos?"

Paul nodded, suddenly filled with foreboding.

"He is living in Salamis now, and when he heard that Barnabas had arrived he stirred up trouble with his followers. The local Jews, although they do not like him, fear him. He does much evil. They caught Barnabas as we were walking to the synagogue one morning, a crowd of young trouble-

makers surrounded us and dragged Barnabas out of town, there was no formal trial or anything, they just stoned him.” Mark’s voice broke.

For a moment he could not speak. Then he said, “He knelt, while he still could and said, ‘Lord Jesus, forgive these men and receive my soul.’ He was gazing up and smiling as if he could see Someone. He half put out his hand in greeting before a rock caught him on the head and he collapsed. They continued to stone him long after he was dead.” Mark’s voice was bitter for a moment.

Then he looked up at Paul and said softly, “I knew he had seen the Lord. Then every doubt and fear that has haunted me since the night they arrested Jesus fell away from me. I knew without any doubt that Jesus lives and his Kingdom is amongst us. I ran forward and shouted at those men to stop.” Mark laughed, “They stopped! Then I knew the power of the Holy Spirit, because I was no longer filled with fear and indecision, but with love and a sure knowledge of what was required of me.”

Paul rose and embraced Mark, once more tears were streaming down his face, but he knew that in much the same way that Stephen’s death had finally opened a door in his own spirit for Christ to enter, Barnabas’s death had done the same for Mark.

Later that day Mark accompanied Paul on a visit to John, Peter and James. He was shocked to see how little they had. They told him of the problems they were experiencing amongst the brethren in Jerusalem. There were many factions who threatened to tear their group apart. And of course the political troubles of the past few years had affected the brethren as much as their neighbours.

Paul shared with them his joyous vision of One Body in Christ with many different parts. They listened to him glumly. James said, “You don’t understand how many of our brethren who proclaim that Jesus is the Way of Salvation, are convinced that this salvation can only come through the Torah. They refuse to accept any unconverted Gentile as a brother unless he is a ‘Brother of the Covenant.’ Then there are the pharisees amongst us who accept that Gentiles may be baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus, but insist they be properly instructed in the Law.”

Paul made an exclamation of anger, “What of the decision of three years ago?”

James shook his head sadly, “They don’t accept it. They say it was a rushed decision forced through by you.”

Paul became even angrier. He turned to Peter, “What of your testimony?”

Peter shook his shaggy head and said, “They know I am no scholar and they tie me in knots.” He suddenly grinned, “But they do not tie the Lord in knots, Jesus is Lord and when he returns he will sort this all out.”

Paul looked at John, “What do you think? Can we wait for the Lord’s return while we tear each other apart?”

John said quietly, “We can only preserve the seamless robe of Jesus through love for one another, in that way we fulfil all the Law and the prophets.”

Paul looked at him for a long moment and then smiled at him, “Love suffers long.”

John’s face lit up with a radiant smile and suddenly the little group were united in the joy and presence of their Master.

They asked what Paul had been doing and he gave them a full and joyous account of the success of his mission and the number of churches established. He told them of the appointment of elders in each group, of the reading of the ‘Sayings of Jesus’ and the celebrating of the events of the Last Supper. When he finished he asked, “How can we bind these scattered groups together?”

The three Apostles looked at one another. Finally James spoke, “Tell me my brother, how did the Gentiles receive our letter which we sent?”

“With joy and thanksgiving,” replied Paul.

James nodded, “Do they look to Jerusalem for leadership and guidance?”

Paul thought, “They see salvation has come through the Jews. They value the books of Moses and the prophets. Many of them were already attending synagogue as you know, but those who know nothing of Jewish Law, accept that God made the Jews a people to receive a special blessing for all humanity.” He paused thoughtfully, “But they don’t see any support coming from Jerusalem. They don’t have any commitment to Jerusalem as the Jews of the Diaspora have.”

“You seem to have shown us a way forward, my brother,” remarked James.

His companions looked at him in surprise, “What do you mean?” asked Peter.

James smiled at him, “How far have you taken the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ?”

“Well,” said Peter, a little defensively, John and I go regularly to the brethren in Judaea, Samaria and Galilee and when you sent me, I have been to Antioch.”

Still smiling James said, “You always told me that our Lord Jesus wanted the Good News of Salvation preached to the whole world. It is over twenty years since the Resurrection, and except for Thomas who went east, and our brother here, the rest of us have stayed in Judaea. What of all those who were converted that first Pentecost? Have we ever been to visit them?”

John remarked softly, “You forget brother Michael, Johanan and Jeshaiah visited all the churches in Galatia.” There was a twinkle in his eye.

Paul turned to him angrily, then saw the twinkle and smiled.

James said, “I think that underlines the problem. We have made no attempt to reach out and carry the message of salvation as our brother here has done. I know we have problems here in Jerusalem that have needed our attention, but we have already agreed that the Holy Spirit himself has shown us God makes no difference between Jew and Gentile. Who are we to argue with God?”

Peter said suddenly, “You are right! We should follow our brother Paul’s example and take the Gospel all over the world.”

“I think there is another side to this,” continued James, “We need to encourage the churches everywhere to feel part of us as well and what better way than sending money to the church here in Jerusalem just as collections are made in every synagogue and brought to the Temple at the festivals? It bonds all Jews together and if we encouraged the Gentiles to do the same, it would also be a sign to our more conservative brethren that the Gentiles accept that salvation has come from the Jews.”

Paul nodded. He knew only too well the problems James was talking about. He was not convinced that it would solve them, but at least it would help if the churches – the idea suddenly struck him, “Yes, we could tell each church to select stewards to bring the collections to Jerusalem from time to time. This would give those who hesitate about accepting Gentiles a chance to meet them and judge for themselves the Unity we have in Christ Jesus.”

John nodded his agreement, “People cannot love what they do not know.”

Before leaving Paul told them of his plans to visit the churches of Galatia once more before returning to Ephesus to begin a new mission there. He told them of Aquila and Priscilla who had left their business in Corinth to set up in Ephesus to prepare a place for him when he returned. Then Paul left James’s house and went to see his sister.

Hannah was overjoyed to see Paul. She was fatter and looked contented. They spent the evening catching up on family news. ‘Little’ Jonathon was now taller than his father and progressing very well with his studies. Merab was betrothed! Abiel was looking frail. He greeted Paul courteously enough and invited him to stay for their evening meal. It was here that Paul heard details of the horror at the Passover of two years earlier.

Paul had asked Jonathon to tell him about the Nasi’s decision over the pigeons. Jonathon gave a laugh and said, “That really caused a row!”

Abiel looked at his son frowning, “It nearly caused a riot, besides bringing many poor people, who make a livelihood from raising pigeons, to ruin.”

Jonathon became serious, “Yes, it was an amazing decision considering.”
 “But did you hear why he made it?” Paul asked.

“Oh, yes,” replied Jonathon with the ebullience of youth, “He had newly been appointed Nasi and he wanted to assert himself against the Sadducees. You know the profits the High Priest’s family make at the festivals.”

Abiel interrupted reprovingly, “You can’t be sure this was his reason.”

“Father, he waited until the prices reached their peak and then rendered his decision in the court. He consulted no one. I had it from one of Johanan’s disciples that the Nasi did not even consult his Ab Ben Din .”^{422; 423}

Abiel turned to Paul, “The result was not only an uproar and a near riot, but the next year with Cumanus newly appointed as Procurator, he was determined there should be no tumult in the city over Passover, so he ordered a regiment of the army to stand in the Temple cloister to ‘repress any attempts of innovation’ as the order was posted.”

For a moment Abiel was overcome by the memories of that fateful occasion. “At first all was well, but on the fourth day of the festival, a soldier...” his voice dropped and he could barely continue, “let down his breaches and exposed his privy parts to the multitude,” he stopped.

Jonathon took up the story, “There was a roar of outrage from those that saw and people shouted it was a reproach to God himself. As the news spread throughout the courtyard, people began to say that Cumanus had put the man up to it. Cumanus himself came out when he heard the uproar and tried to calm things down, but the crowd would not listen.”

“Where were you?” asked Paul.

“I was in the Court of Women, in attendance on Rabbi Johanan. He sent me to see what was happening. People saw that Cumanus had gone to the Antonia for reinforcements, and when the armed soldiers began to leave the fortress to enter the Court of Gentiles, the people panicked and started to run away,” Jonathon swallowed. “You know how narrow the passages are that lead out of the courtyard into the upper City – well, so many people tried to get through them that they were trampled and crushed.” He put his hands to his face to try and block out the terrible picture of those frenzied crowds. “When the Levite guards saw that many people were rushing up the steps into the Court of Women, they ordered the gates to be shut,” Jonathon shuddered. “I was back in the Court of Women and could hear the screams of those shut out as they were crushed and trampled on the steps.”

Abiel said, “Thousands perished in this tumult.”⁴²⁴

⁴²² Nasi – President of the Council; Ab Ben Din – His second in command.

⁴²³ For the whole story see ‘Akiba: Scholar, Saint and Martyr’ by Louis Finkelstein published by Meridian Books and the Jewish Publication Society.

⁴²⁴ Josephus records the number as 20,000 people. *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus Book XX Chapter V Paragraph 3.

“I was in Corinth at the time,” said Paul quietly, “We received news from those that returned, because some from Corinth had been amongst those killed.”

Abiel nodded grimly, “Yes, I think most of those killed were from the Diaspora, but it is our people who continue to suffer under the misrule of these Roman governors and their undisciplined soldiers. Why, it’s not safe to travel through Samaria any more.” He shook his head sadly, “Cumanus was replaced last year by Felix. He at least has tried to catch the robbers that have made the life of the villagers such misery.”

Paul left Hannah’s home deeply depressed by what he had heard. What with the disorders in the Temple and the divisions amongst the brethren, he could see no way forward to heal the wound dividing Jew from Gentile except through Christ, and even his name was becoming a source of division amongst the brethren. As he hurried down the narrow streets to Mary’s house, he decided he would leave as soon as possible for Antioch.

CHAPTER 22: THE THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

CE 53-54

ACTS 18:22, ACTS 19:1-10

The next few months Paul spent in Antioch.⁴²⁵ When it came to Paul's new mission, the brethren were concerned that he should not travel alone. Titus^{426;427} was chosen to accompany him and to minister to his needs. Paul was touched and pleased at their choice. Titus had matured into a serious-minded man of about thirty. He had married a local Syrian girl and they had three children. Titus's family were prosperous traders and imported goods from all over the Empire. They felt a journey with Paul would enlarge his contacts and might bring new business.

They set out in Spring the following year. Their first stop was Tarsus to visit Paul's family. Hannah had told him of their mother's death the previous year, and Paul wanted to offer prayers for her with the family. It was a happy re-union. Edna's firstborn was a boy and her second, only a few weeks old, a girl. Edna had turned from a hard and bitter young woman, into a smiling and gentle mother.

Nicogenes was a genial host. He made Titus feel welcome and walked him round the workrooms. The business was prospering. A great deal of its running was left to Demetrius and there were new faces in the workshops.

After the evening meal of his first day with them, Nicogenes, looking portentous, said, "Edna and I have some good news for you."

Paul looked surprised and repeated, "Good news?"

Edna, who was standing spinning, said, "You know that before her death, mother became a believer?"

Paul's face lit up, "A believer? May God be praised."

"After you left, she and Sebastian spent long hours talking, and it was he who finally brought your mother to the Lord," Nicogenes remarked. He smiled and added, "She insisted we were all baptised, otherwise she said, she would not die in peace!"

⁴²⁵ Paul: Antioch CE53 – Acts 18:23

⁴²⁶ Titus: With Paul during his 3rd journey – 2 Corinthians 7:6

⁴²⁷ Titus was with Paul during this period of his ministry. Paul left him in Crete. (Titus 1.5) He sent someone to fetch him from there. (Titus 3.12) It was Titus who had to return to Corinth and was so anxiously awaited by Paul (2 Cor. 2.12 and also 2. Cor. 7.3) Therefore it seems likely that Paul brought him from Antioch when he set out again for Ephesus.

Paul rose and embraced his sister and then Nicogenes. “Truly the ways of God are wonderful,” he exclaimed.

“Yes, well,” Nicogenes looked embarrassed, “We feel, that is Edna and I feel, that um...”

Edna looked at him fondly and finished it for him, “We want you to have your share of the inheritance.”

The happy expression on Paul’s face was wiped off, “My inheritance, but father would never have agreed.”

Nicogenes smiled. He was a strong man, with a strong face. “My brother, we know you gave it up freely because of your commitment to the Lord Jesus. This was something none of us, except good old Sebastian understood. But since we became believers we not only understand, we feel a great wrong has been committed and it is up to us to put it right.”

Paul sat in stunned silence.

The old impatient look came into Edna’s face, “Oh, Saul, you were always slow, but surely not that slow.”

Paul turned to look at his sister with affection. “My sister, I am overcome by what you and Nicogenes have said. There is no need for you to feel guilty about our father’s decision. He knew I would never stay at home to run the business and you have done it all these years. Of course I do not expect, what you call ‘my inheritance.’”

Nicogenes replied slowly, “We do not feel guilty, but the Lord Jesus has shown us that you need money for the work which you do and so we felt it only right you should have your share of the business.”

“And what would I do with it?” Paul looked even more horrified.

“What would you like to do with it?” smiled Nicogenes.

Paul looked at them both and saw they were serious. They wanted to do what was right, and to do it in the way that would help the work of the Lord. He remained quiet, thinking. Finally he looked up and said, “Could you send letters of credit to Ephesus? You are right that I need money for travelling and preaching the gospel. There have been times when I had to work day and night to support myself and my companions. In Athens, poverty was an embarrassment!”

Nicogenes laughed, “I’m sure it was. How did you survive?”

“Barely!” Paul replied, laughing with him.

“All right, we can easily arrange letters of credit to Ephesus through our local banker. Is there anything else you require?”

Paul shook his head, “What you have offered it more than enough. You cannot know how much this will help.”

When Paul left, Nicogenes insisted that Demetrius and some armed guards accompany them at least as far as Lystra where Paul intended to join up once more with Timothy. Paul argued against the guards, but Nicogenes was adamant.

“The outlaws in the Taurus mountains have been raiding the caravans and any unarmed traveller is likely to end up thrown down one of the ravines.”

Nicogenes provided good horses for the journey and mules to carry their baggage. Furthermore he arranged for them to join a caravan with additional armed guards to ensure their safety through mountains. Paul was overwhelmed and grateful at his thoughtfulness.

Nicogenes remarked, “It is not only for you, I have been looking to expand our markets and have been intending to send Demetrius inland for some time.”

Paul doubted whether it had been his intention to send him as far as Lystra, but was touched nevertheless.

Paul and Edna parted with more genuine affection than they had ever felt. Nicogenes too, hugged him and wished him God’s blessings.

Paul and Titus were re-united with Timothy, in Lystra.⁴²⁸ Timothy had taken the opportunity when Paul left for Jerusalem to return home, where he had seen his mother and grandmother settled into a smaller house. He was more than ready to accompany Paul back to Ephesus. Artemas had matured both in his service to Lois and his faith.

The journey to Ephesus took Paul, Titus and Timothy nearly six months.⁴²⁹ Titus was about ten years older than Timothy, but they had much in common, and Titus became like an affectionate elder brother to the younger man. They visited all the groups of brethren in Galatia and stayed with the communities of Jewish settlers that they had visited during their wanderings in Phrygia three years before.⁴³⁰ The warm and loving welcome they received, encouraged and reassured Paul that to those who believed in Christ, the Holy Spirit did indeed guide and teach. Paul gave further teachings on the appointment of elders and the kind of person they should choose. He also shared with them the desire of the brethren in Jerusalem that they make a special collection and appoint stewards to travel with it to Jerusalem, when opportunity arose. He told them a little of the difficulties the brothers in Jerusalem had experienced and the need for unity amongst those who loved the Lord.

⁴²⁸ Paul: *Visits Galatia and Phrygia* – Acts 18:23

⁴²⁹ Timothy & Paul in Ephesus – 1 Corinthians 16:10

⁴³⁰ Galatia: Paul CE 53 – Acts 18:22

They arrived in Ephesus late one hot autumn day and rode through the Magnesian Gate.⁴³¹ It was Titus's first visit to Ephesus⁴³² and he looked with interest at the statues lining Curetes Street. They went first to the synagogue to discover the whereabouts of Aquila's workshop. The hazzan recognized Paul and greeted him with respect. Then he explained where Aquila's workshop could be found and the companions rode on past the Agora and the temple of Serapis towards the harbour. After some difficulty they finally found the workshop and house up one of the side streets leading from the harbour.

What joy their arrival brought! Titus was introduced and made as welcome as Paul and Timothy. Quickly Priscilla ordered extra food. Their travelling bags were carried to a small guest room and their horses were taken round the back for stabling. A young slave brought water for them to wash and after changing out of their dusty clothes the five friends settled down to share their news.

Aquila said, "We found these premises after much searching, but as you can see they exactly meet our needs."

"You can imagine," added Priscilla, "That we have had little time to share the good news of salvation."

Aquila looked at her, "But we had never intended to start a mission, my dear. We were waiting for brother Paul."

Priscilla murmured, "Yes, but one always hopes to bring people to the Lord."

"Well," replied her husband, "What about Apollos?"

Priscilla nodded happily, "Yes," she turned to Paul and Timothy, "Apollos⁴³³ came from Alexandria and started preaching at the synagogue about repentance. He is a very eloquent speaker and soon many were coming to listen to him. He taught about Jesus's life and teachings, and told the people they must prepare for the coming of God's Anointed One."

Aquila took up the story, "We were puzzled. He knew all about Jesus, but not that he is the Anointed One and we do not need to look for another. So then we told him of the coming of the Holy Spirit and what this means. He accepted our teaching with joy and was baptised by the Holy Spirit. He speaks now with even more conviction and fervour."⁴³⁴

"Where is he now?" asked Paul.

⁴³¹ *Ephesus: Paul arrives CE 54 – Acts 19:1*

⁴³² *Titus: In Ephesus – 2 Corinthians 7:6*

⁴³³ *Apollos of Alexandria: In Ephesus – Acts 18:24-28*

⁴³⁴ *Priscilla & Aquila: Teach Apollos about Jesus – Acts 18:26*

“Shortly after this, he left to go to Achaia, so we wrote a letter to the brethren in Corinth asking them to welcome him.”⁴³⁵

Priscilla remarked, “He is truly under the power of the Holy Spirit. We told him about your plans to start a mission here and the next day he told us that God had revealed to him he should go to strengthen the faith of those in Achaia.”⁴³⁶

Aquila added thoughtfully, “He is a very powerful and convincing preacher.”

Paul wondered if this was an oblique criticism of his own preaching. He knew he did not have a commanding presence, and his voice was not powerful in the way of some preachers. He knew it was the message he brought not the messenger which drew people to Jesus Christ. He suffered over the anger and rejection he encountered but was unaware of the intense love many people had for him.

“What was the reaction of the Jews to Apollos’s teaching, after you instructed him in the Way?” Paul asked.

“It was strange,” replied Aquila, “It was almost as if the Holy Spirit did not want him to preach the full Gospel of Salvation, because he left almost immediately.”

“But up until then,” added Priscilla, “They flocked to listen to him. He is a very persuasive preacher.”

Paul nodded. He noticed they had both now mentioned his favourable manner of preaching. Paul looked forward to meeting this man from Alexandria. He was also glad that he was not about to build on another man’s foundation.

The next morning Paul, Timothy and Aquila took Titus with them to attend the morning service at the synagogue. One of the first people they saw was Rufus,⁴³⁷ son of Simon of Cyrene. The mutual joy of this encounter delayed their entry into the synagogue.

When they finally walked through the front portico the hazzan spoke to Paul, “Greetings, rabbi, may I ask the president to invite you to preach this coming Sabbath?”

Paul was pleased, “I would be willing.”⁴³⁸

The men put on their phylacteries and morning prayers began. When they were finished several of the men present who had heard Paul preach the

⁴³⁵ Acts 19:1

⁴³⁶ Acts 18:24-28

⁴³⁷ Rufus: In Ephesus – Romans 16:13

⁴³⁸ Paul: Preaches in Ephesus – Acts 19:8

previous year came up to greet him and ask if he would be speaking again.
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Rufus waited while those who remembered Paul spoke with him and then invited them home to see his mother. It was a happy day of looking back and catching up on their news. Since his father had died, Alexander had taken over the business in Cyrene and Rufus was expanding their contacts in Asia, having made Ephesus his headquarters. Tamar, Rufus's mother insisted they stay for a meal, and fussed happily over her visitors.

Three days later on the Sabbath, Paul addressed a large congregation. He had given much thought about beginning his mission in Ephesus. His painful experiences through Asia and Macedonia made him determined to reach the hearts and minds of his Jewish listeners. He had prepared his subject carefully and when the president nodded to the hazzan to invite Paul to speak, he rose and walked to the front.

The people present saw a small man, his legs and back were bowed from the many beatings he had suffered, but his eyes were clear and his thin bearded face with his beetling brows gave an impression of strength and character. Paul gave a reasoned and wide-ranging talk, giving convincing proof that Jesus was the long-expected Messiah.

At the end a group of men pushed their way through the dispersing crowd. One man introduced himself, "I am Herodian⁴⁴⁰, we heard of this Jesus and believe he is the Christ, but there seems to be more for us to learn."⁴⁴¹

"Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" asked Paul.

The men looked at each other and one of them said, "We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

Paul asked, "Well, then, what kind of baptism did you receive?"

Herodian replied, "The baptism of John."

"The baptism of John was for those who turned from their sins; and he told the people of Israel to believe in the one who was coming after him – that is, in Jesus."

The men looked at each other and the one who had spoken asked, "Can we receive the Holy Spirit too?"

Paul was tired, but his eyes lit up, "Come, let us go to the mikvah."

With Rufus leading the way, and Titus and Timothy following, they entered the side door into the courtyard of the synagogue. Aquila also accompanied the group and helped the men prepare for baptism. One by one

⁴³⁹ Acts 18:19

⁴⁴⁰ His name suggests that he was a freedman of Herod or a member of his household. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*

⁴⁴¹ Herodian: In Ephesus – Acts 16:11

they entered the mikvah and Paul placed his hands on each, saying, “It is through faith that all of you are God’s sons in union with Christ Jesus. You are baptized into union with Christ, and now you are clothed, with the life of Christ himself.”⁴⁴²

One man, a Gentile came up and knelt at Paul’s feet, “I am Epaenetus of Ephesus, may I too receive this baptism?”⁴⁴³

Paul looked at him and put his hand out to raise him to his feet, “Have you been a God-fearer for long?”

“No,” replied the man, “but a friend took me to listen to Apollos, and ever since my heart has been burning to know more.”

“Then you must come and hear more, for surely if you believe that Jesus is the Christ you will be saved.”

Aquila said, “Why don’t you come to join us for our Sabbath meal. Then we can tell you about Jesus of Nazareth.”

Epaenetus accepted gladly. Paul’s tiredness seemed to have dropped from him and he discussed with Titus and Timothy how best to follow-up by giving more teaching to these newly baptised men.

Paul’s teaching that Sabbath had made a deep impression on all who heard him, and during the following weeks more and more people came to listen. Since many of these were Gentiles who had never before attended the synagogue, and because many of these were baptised after attending the special meetings Paul, Titus and Timothy arranged during the week, the leaders of the synagogue began to question Paul more closely on his teaching. Gradually the opposition grew amongst the Jews. Many had become believers, but there were those who knew the new teaching was a threat and they bitterly resented Paul’s success.⁴⁴⁴

Paul discussed the growing opposition with the brethren one first day, and one of the converts, Stachys⁴⁴⁵ said, “I will ask the philosopher, Tyrannus if you can hire his lecture hall.⁴⁴⁶ You could use it from the sixth to the eleventh hour⁴⁴⁷ when the whole town stops work during the heat of the day and even the slaves get a few hours off”.

Rufus said, “What a good idea, brother, it is conveniently situated near the theatre and the gymnasium.”

“Do you think he would allow an opposing ‘philosophy’ to be preached from his premises?” Aquila asked.

⁴⁴² Galatians 3:26-27

⁴⁴³ Epaenetus: Conversion – Romans 16:5

⁴⁴⁴ Paul: Jewish opposition in Ephesus – Acts 19:9

⁴⁴⁵ Stachys: Ephesian convert – Romans 16:9

⁴⁴⁶ Tyrannus: Hiring Hall – Acts 19:9

⁴⁴⁷ From about 12 noon to 5 p.m.

“If you hire it, he will be only too pleased,” replied Stachys. “He is always moaning about the upkeep. He’s been trying to find someone to use it while the gentlemen of leisure bathed, rested and had their dinners.”

Tyrannus was a man of dignity and learning, was pleased to let out his lecture hall during the hours he himself rested, and an arrangement was amicably agreed upon.

Soon Paul’s days fell into a regular pattern. He spent the many mornings visiting, then like most Ephesians he went to the baths before returning to Priscilla and Aquila’s home for his first meal at the fifth hour.⁴⁴⁸ In the afternoons he lectured and answered questions. Titus and Timothy took groups to prepare them for baptism. In the evenings they attended the various house groups that sprang up throughout the city. Paul was endlessly grateful to Edna and Nicogenes. Their regular transfers into his account, made him financially independent for the first time since he began his travels.

As the months passed, Paul soon gathered a larger team of helpers around him. Rufus’s mother, Tamar was not afraid to give them council and Paul came to value her wise advice. Urbanus,⁴⁴⁹ a Greek convert, spent many hours visiting families to encourage them in their new faith. There were others, but the one on whom Paul came to rely for sharing the daily lectures was another Greek, Tychicus. He was a man of learning and deep spiritual perceptions, whose love of Jesus Christ deeply impressed both Jew and Gentile.

It was some time after Pentecost the following year that Paul who still went to synagogue on the Sabbath with Aquila, saw to his delight two of his kinsmen. “Andronicus!⁴⁵⁰ Junias!⁴⁵¹ What brings you here?”

The two men turned, their faces lit up, “Saul! We’ve found you!” The men embraced warmly. Paul introduced them to Aquila and then they went in to begin the service.

Afterwards Paul asked the two, “What are you doing here?”

“At Passover there were, as usual, many believers from the Diaspora,” began Andronicus, “Many of them begged the brethren to send someone to give them teaching and guidance. We were chosen to visit these isolated groups in Asia and since we knew you were coming to Ephesus we decided to come to see you first, before going on to Laodicea, Sardis, Pergamen and then further on from there.”⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁸ About 11 a.m.

⁴⁴⁹ Urbanus: In Ephesus – Romans 16:8

⁴⁵⁰ Andronicus – Paul’s Kinsman: In Ephesus – Romans 16:7 (New International version)

⁴⁵¹ Junias – Paul’s Kinsman: In Ephesus – Romans 16:7 (New International version)

⁴⁵² Revelation Chapters 2 and 3 someone other than Paul had established these churches.

Paul turned to Aquila, “These are my kinsmen. They became followers of the Lord Jesus long before me!”⁴⁵³

Aquila smiled and said, “Why don’t you come for the Sabbath meal and then you can talk.”

There was indeed plenty to talk about and much to plan. For Paul it was a great relief to share some of his difficulties in bringing Gentiles into the church who had no knowledge of the Torah and of Jewish history. Andronicus was not one of those who opposed the baptism of Gentiles and he fully appreciated hearing Paul’s experiences. In Jerusalem the overwhelming climate of opinion prevented free discussion of these problems. It had been one of the reasons that Andronicus and Junias had sought out Paul in Ephesus to become properly briefed before they went into the other major cities of Asia.

After a few happy days, in which they attended Paul’s lectures at the Hall of Tyrannus, the two men took their leave of Paul and started on their journey. They promised to return to give a full report when the way opened.

One afternoon, Paul, Titus and Timothy returned from the daily teaching at the Hall of Tyrannus. They found Chloe from Corinth had arrived.⁴⁵⁴ Paul could not remember her, but when he was introduced he could see she was not someone easy to forget.

She was a strikingly tall woman, dressed in a finely embroidered linen garment, with gold ear-rings. The brooch on her shoulder was an unusual stone set in a delicate tracery of silver. She was not exactly beautiful, but a calm dignity and grace, together with a quick and intelligent mind made her attractive.

Chloe could see Paul was trying to recall her and smiled, “No, you have not forgotten me. I only became a follower of the Way after my husband died, but Priscilla...”

Priscilla interrupted, “What she is not going to tell you is how she helped us when we arrived as strangers and refugees from Rome! It was Chloe who helped us find a place to set up our business!”

The two women, so unlike, had obviously become instant friends, and the friendship had deepened, especially after Chloe’s conversion.

Chloe looked at Priscilla, “You remember how you tried to bring me to the Lord and how I said such things were for the poor and weak?”

Priscilla smiled.

⁴⁵³ Romans 16.7 In the New International Bible, the translation ‘My relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was’. The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia (Publ Eerdmans 1979) suggests that Andronicus was one of the most prominent and successful of the travelling missionaries of the early church.

⁴⁵⁴ Chloe of Corinth: In Ephesus – 1 Corinthians 1:11

Chloe turned to Paul, “The Lord heard me! Aristetas my husband, loved his horses and always had a chariot running in the Games. One day he was trying out a new stallion and it bolted, his chariot overturned. He was brought home unconscious and died three days later.”

Chloe’s face grew sad and she paused, “He meant the world to me. I had taken no interest in the business, and suddenly he was gone, leaving me with four children and a business about which I knew nothing. I wanted to die. How could the gods do this to me? I was angry as well. It was as if the light had gone out and I was in deepest darkness.”

She turned to Priscilla, “You had already left Corinth, but in that darkest period, something you said became like a dim candle in the far distance. At first I took no notice, but I kept coming back to the words you spoke, ‘Jesus is a light to the nations, through him all the world shall be saved.’”⁴⁵⁵

She asked Priscilla, “Do you remember? Any rate I decided if this person you always went on about could enlighten my darkness, I would give him a try, and as it happened Fortunatus, my husband’s manager, had been a believer for some time.”

She broke off and smiled broadly, “I thought that if Jesus could change him, he could do something for me. I asked him about the meetings and he took me to one. It was completely unlike anything I had expected, there were slaves and Romans, men and women, Jews and Greeks like myself sharing with such love and caring. Some of the women prayed for me, and then they took me and taught me ‘The Way of the Lord.’ It was not long before I was baptised and became one of them.”

Priscilla said quietly, “Praise be God’s Holy name.”

The men said a heartfelt, “Amen.”

Paul asked after a pause, “So the church continues to grow? Is all well with the brethren?”

“When Apollos arrived, there was a great upsurge of interest and many more Jews began to attend the meetings.”⁴⁵⁶ He was able to convince many of them that Jesus was indeed the fulfilment of their Law, but I found his arguments a little too involved. It was the fellowship of caring people that drew me and made me whole in a way I had never before experienced.”

She stopped for a moment and added, “Of course when brother Peter arrived...”

“Peter is in Corinth?”⁴⁵⁷ Paul’s eyes lit up with pleasure.

⁴⁵⁵ Isaiah 49:6, Luke 2:32

⁴⁵⁶ Apollos: In Corinth – Acts 18:27

⁴⁵⁷ Peter: In Corinth – 1 Corinthians 1:12

Chloe smiled, “Yes, he made a great impression. Here was someone who had lived with Jesus for three years and told wonderful stories about his life on earth. Many people came to hear him.”

Chloe turned to Paul, “Of course no one explained things the way you did. People who were taught by you somehow seem stronger and more disciplined.” She looked puzzled, “I can’t exactly explain it, they seem guided from within into knowing what is wrong for them.”

Paul was concerned, “Do you mean there are those who behave differently?”

Chloe nodded, still puzzled, “It seems to me that some of the newcomers like to say they are believers, but they still live the way they always lived with drinking parties and prostitutes, they don’t like to be told they are wrong either. But those who were taught by you seem to have an inward guide and have left their old ways.”

Paul was appalled. All too well he knew how easy it was for people to be attracted to the Lord for what they could get out of him but whose hearts were still unconverted.

“When are you leaving?” he asked abruptly.

Chloe looked a little surprised, “When Fortunatus has finished our business, I suppose in about ten days.”

Paul said, “Would you take a letter back to the brethren, when you go?”

Chloe’s puzzled expression cleared and she smiled, “It would be a pleasure.”

In the days before her departure, Chloe attended Paul’s lectures each day. She began to understand just exactly why his teaching seemed to empower those who heard it. He never told them about Jesus’s life on earth, but he did tell them how Jesus Christ lived in each one transforming and making people into the likeness of himself.

In the meantime Paul spent some time thinking about what to write to the brethren of Corinth.⁴⁵⁸ Finally, early one morning he summoned Timothy to bring his writing materials and begin a letter. They were sitting in a corner of the courtyard under a spreading apricot tree which gave a dappled shade. Aquila was busy with the men in the workshops across the yard. There was a quiet murmur of voices and Paul closed his eyes to collect his thoughts. Finally he began dictating, and continued all morning.

Timothy did not accompany Paul and Titus to the Hall of Tyrannus, but spent the rest of the day making a fair copy of the letter. When they returned later in the day, Paul asked Titus to read it aloud and then he picked up a stylus and dipping it in the ink, “With my own hand I write this;” Paul formed

⁴⁵⁸ Paul: 1st letter to Corinth – 1 Corinthians 5:9

the letters with difficulty and they sprawled across the papyrus scroll. “Greetings from Paul. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.”⁴⁵⁹

He handed the scroll back to Timothy for final sealing.

Chloe and Fortunatus took leave of them three days later. Paul sent personal messages to many of the brethren, adding that he hoped he might visit them again in the not too distant future.

⁴⁵⁹ Note that the first letter to the Corinthians in our Bible is actually Paul’s second letter. See 1 Corinthians 5.9

CHAPTER 23: IN EPHESUS-MEETING WITH THE ASIARCHS

CE 54 SUMMER

*ACTS 9:1-20
1 CORINTHIANS 16:5-17*

Paul's ministry in Ephesus continued to prosper.⁴⁶⁰ Many times during his preaching or times of worship, people would be healed and more and more people came for help. The team he had gathered grew in confidence and maturity, some even took the message of salvation to nearby villages. Timothy was Paul's right-hand man, he helped him prepare each day's lecture and kept notes on all of them. Paul had found this helpful as the months passed because he could check on what subjects he had covered. But it was Titus who would often take over a teaching session if Paul had another engagement.

"I have complete confidence in the gospel," there was a moderate crowd in the Hall of Tyrannus. "It is God's power to save all who believe, first the Jews and then the Gentiles. For the Gospel reveals how God puts people right with himself." Paul looked at his listeners, "It is faith from beginning to end. As the scripture says, 'The person who is put right with God through faith shall live.'"⁴⁶¹

"What will happen to those who don't believe?"

Paul looked at the questioner and saw he was not one of the regulars but a man of substance. He wondered who he could be.

"God's anger is revealed from heaven against all the sin and evil of the people whose evil ways prevent the truth from being known."

The man was inclined to argue, "How can you say such a thing when evil men prosper? I see no sign of God's anger being revealed against them!"

"God punishes them, because what can be known about God is plain to them, for God himself made it plain." The man shook his head in disbelief. Paul continued, "Ever since God created the world, his invisible qualities, both his eternal power and his divine nature, have been clearly seen: they are perceived in the things that God has made."

The man's attention was caught and Paul continued directing his argument to him, "Those people who choose to live evil lives have no excuse

⁴⁶⁰ *Ephesus: Paul ministry in in CE 54 – Acts 19:8*

⁴⁶¹ *Romans 1:16-18*

at all! They know God, but they do not give him the honour that belongs to him, nor do they thank him. Instead, their thoughts have become complete nonsense, and their empty minds are filled with darkness. They say they are wise, but they are fools; instead of worshipping the immortal God, they worship images made to look like mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.”

“What difference does it make what a man worships?”

“What a man worships determines what he will become and you can clearly see what kind of lives these people live. They do the filthy things their hearts desire, and they do shameful things with each other. They exchange the truth about God for a lie; they worship and serve what God has created instead of the Creator himself, who is to be praised for ever!”

A group of his regular listeners said, “Amen!”

“Because they do this, God has given them over to shameful passions. Even the women pervert the natural use of their sex by unnatural acts. In the same way the men give up natural sexual relations with women and burn with passion for each other. Men do shameful things with each other, and as a result they bring upon themselves the punishment they deserve for their wrongdoing.”

Paul continued to elaborate his theme. It had not been his intention to deal with these subjects but the strange man and his questions prompted the change in his plan for that day.

“And so what difference does it make to be a follower of your God?” The stranger was serious in his question.

Paul paused as he often did and appeared to be listening within himself, “If, through faith in Jesus Christ, you receive the full measure of God’s Spirit, then you let the Spirit direct your life, and you will not satisfy the desires of the human nature. For what our human nature wants is opposed to what the Spirit wants, and what the Spirit wants is opposed to what our human nature wants. These two are enemies, and this means that you cannot do what you want to do. The Spirit of God produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have put to death their human nature with all its passions and desires. The Spirit has given us life; he must also control our lives.”⁴⁶²

When Paul stopped the strange man came up to him and introduced himself, “I am Theodorus of Ephesus. I have heard of your activities for some time and the reports have been so confused and contradictory that I decided to come and see for myself what you are up to!”

Paul suddenly realised that this man was one of the city governors. The man smiled as he saw Paul recognize him. He was surprised and impressed

⁴⁶² Galatians 5:16-18, 22-25

when the only response Paul gave was to ask him, “Do you want to become a believer?”

Here was someone who was neither afraid nor impressed by power. On the spur of the moment and much to his surprise, Theodorus found himself saying, “Will you come and dine with me and some of my friends?”^{463;464}

Equally surprised Paul suddenly smiled, “It would give me great pleasure.”

“Where do you live? I will send an invitation.” Paul gave his address, the man nodded and followed by his servant he left the hall.

A few days later the same servant arrived with an invitation for Paul to attend ‘A dinner party at the home of Theodorus the Asiarch on the following evening.’ Aquila was extremely impressed and asked how Paul came to know such an illustrious person. Then Paul explained Theodorus’s visit to one of his lectures the previous week.

Priscilla said, “What will you wear, my brother? They all have such fine clothes.”

Paul laughed, “I don’t think they are inviting my clothes to dinner.”

“No, but Priscilla’s right,” Aquila remarked, “You can’t just go in your old brown robe. You should have something new.”

Paul became angry, but Priscilla was not to be diverted. She looked through Aquila’s chest and came up with his newest linen robe with a fine embroidered border. “Please, my brother, wear this.”

Paul could see he would get no peace until he had succumbed to her pressure. The next crisis was Paul’s intention to arrive alone. Aquila said diffidently, “I think you should take someone with you.”

“Whatever for?” Paul asked in surprise.

“Well, I think the governors always expect their guests to bring a servant along.”

“I haven’t got a servant.”

“No, but I think you should take someone with you. They will expect it.”

At this point Titus came to Aquila’s support, “You do not just arrive unattended at the homes of the rich. Even in Antioch people are accompanied by a servant.”

“Well, I don’t have a ‘servant’ so how can I take one?” Paul’s voice rose in annoyance.

“You could take Timothy,” remarked Titus mildly. “He often waits on you and he would be acceptable to your hosts.”

⁴⁶³ Paul: Meets the Asiarchs – Acts 19:31

⁴⁶⁴ See Acts 19:31 ‘Some of the provincial authorities, who were his friends.’ This would also indicate that Paul was no longer short of funds, since these men would be unlikely to befriend a penniless nobody.

Paul was mollified, “Oh, well in that case, let Timothy come with me.”

Titus took Timothy aside to brief him on his duties for the evening. Then Priscilla looked at his clothes to make sure they too were appropriate.

The next evening Paul and Timothy set off having been inspected by their friends. There were eight other guests present, friends and close associates of Theodorus. Paul was surprised when a large robust man came up to him and said, “My whole household is always telling me what you say! I am Narcissus,”⁴⁶⁵ his greeting was jovial and friendly, “I can tell you since my chief steward has been listening to you, my household expenses dropped! Of course I couldn’t let on that I was impressed, but I would like to know what it is you tell these fellows that turns them from rogues into honest men!”

He turned away and Theodorus introduced the other guests and then led them into the dining hall. The whole house, set on the side of the hill facing the sea, was spacious and furnished with exquisite taste. Much to Paul’s surprise, for he was not as ignorant of the customs of the rich as he had pretended, he was given the place of honour next to his host. The couches of the diners were set three to each of three sides of the table. Timothy stood behind Paul’s couch and observed the servants of the other guests to find out what was expected of him. As far as he could see they did little and many of them soon settled down on cushions to wait for their lord’s pleasure.

There was an orchestra playing on one side of the room. The table was set with silver plates and glass goblets. When the guests were settled on their couches, wine was poured and the first course, consisting of small sausages served with black damsons, was brought in.

The conversation was general and seemed to concern itself about some new horses one of the men called Hipparchus had just imported from Syria and which were not up to his expectations.

“It will take a while for them to settle before they showed their true form, the journey takes it out of them,” Narcissus commented.

The first course was cleared away and a dish of chickpeas and beef covered with a sweet sauce replaced it. The conversation swirled round Paul, who was intent to eat the smallest quantity of each dish guessing if he wasn’t careful, he would be unable to do justice to his host’s table.

The third course consisted of two whole suckling pigs, basted with a honey sauce to golden brown perfection. They were placed nose to nose on two platters and sweet Syrian dates were placed between them.

Paul glanced at Timothy and gave a half smile and murmured, “The Kingdom of Heaven is more than eating and drinking,” as he accepted a very small portion from the slave carving the meat.

⁴⁶⁵ Narcissus: ‘Christian brothers’ in his household – Romans 16:11

Theodorus heard part of Paul's remark, "It's about time we heard from our guest what he's been teaching around town. You talk about the 'Kingdom of Heaven' but what about a man's duty to the city and the emperor?"

Paul was caught by surprise, he knew they would want to hear him at some stage, but the question was not one he usually had to deal with. He took a sip from his wine glass and thought to himself, I must be careful, they are pouring unwatered wine. Then he turned to Theodorus and said, "Everyone must obey the state authorities, because no authority exists without God's permission, and the existing authorities have been put there by God."

"What's that? What's that?" A fat man at the other end of the table demanded. "Theodorus, tell your pipers to go and pipe elsewhere. I want to hear what your little man is saying since you seem to think his teachings are unusual. Although I can't imagine any new philosophy that hasn't already been covered by all those windbags we hear."

Theodorus motioned the orchestra to silence and then dismissed them with a nod.

Timothy in the meantime had taken his stylus and wax tablets from his pouch and started making notes.

Paul took the opportunity to marshal his thoughts, then raising his voice slightly, began, "Whoever opposes the existing authority opposes what God has ordered; and anyone who does so will bring judgement on himself."

A tall, lean, man in the middle of the table said, "Well, spoken." He turned to Theodorus, "At least he is no barbarian."

Paul flushed. The indolent tone sounded patronising, but he was warming to his theme and continued, "For rulers are not to be feared by those who do good, but by those who do evil."⁴⁶⁶

"What about taxes?" The man spoke from the other end of the table.

"Because the authorities are working for God when they fulfil their duties, people must pay their property and personal taxes."⁴⁶⁷

"So what do you teach?" asked Narcissus, "Those men of mine have changed, and it is not from the beatings they received from me!"

Paul turned to him, "I teach God's secret plan which he has for all peoples."⁴⁶⁸ And the secret is his way of putting people right through their faith in Jesus Christ."⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁶ *Romans 13:1-3*

⁴⁶⁷ *Romans 13:6-7*

⁴⁶⁸ *Colossians 1:2*

⁴⁶⁹ *Romans 3:22*

“And who is this Jesus Christ? I’ve never heard of him, have you?” The speaker turned to his neighbour who was having his goblet refilled. He repeated, “Never heard of him.”

Paul turned to his host, “May I speak freely?”

Theodorus nodded, “That’s what I hope you will do.”

“Jesus was born of a young Jewish woman in Galilee in the reign of Caesar Tiberius. When he was about thirty, he began preaching in his home country. Subsequently he was crucified while Pontius Pilate was procurator of Judaea.”

A shocked murmur greeted this information.

“He died and was buried, but three days later he rose from the dead.” The murmur grew to a growl of angry denials.

“What utter rubbish!” “A criminal!” “A fable for children!”

Paul waited out their anger and slowly they turned back to him. Narcissus said impatiently, “Well, go on then, man. Don’t stop.”

Paul smiled thinly at him, “He was seen by many of his disciples during the next few weeks and then he was taken up to heaven, but before he left he told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit, who would guide and teach them in his place.”

“Why do we have to ruin a good dinner with this rubbish?” The old man at the far end of the table demanded. There were growls of agreement.

Paul smiled at them and said, “The things you say and feel entirely reflected my own feelings at that time!”

He had caught their attention again and while the next course was being served Paul described his own total rejection of the events he had just described. “I became an ardent persecutor for anyone claimed to be a follower of this Jesus.”

“But now you teach about this man and call him ‘Christ’. How’s that?” Narcissus asked wonderingly.

Then Paul told of his own encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus and the realisation that beyond everything he himself had believed or thought, Jesus was what he claimed to be, the son of the Living God.

“What is more,” continued Paul to his audience, “God chose me to go and preach the good news of salvation throughout the world.”

“Which is what you’ve been doing in Ephesus,” remarked Theodorus.

Paul nodded as he took a bite of the pastry-wrapped fig picker he had been served.

“This fancy teaching, if it catches on, could cause problems with the worship of Artemas.” The tall thin man spoke.

“Yes, and if word gets around that there is a new worship of some fancy god in Ephesus and the people are falling away from the old faith, it could seriously affect the affairs of the city.” The old man at the end of the table added.

“What do you teach about the worship of the city’s goddess?” Theodorus asked.

Paul took a deep breath. Here was the crucial question. “For a Jew there is no God but God. I teach those who become followers of Jesus Christ to keep away from the worship of idols. When we come together for our sacred meal we take the cup and give thanks to God and when we drink it we are sharing in the blood of Christ. And when we break bread and eat it, we share in the body of Christ. We cannot drink from the Lord’s cup and also from the cup of demons. We cannot eat at the Lord’s table and also at the table of demons.”⁴⁷⁰

Theodorus looked grim, “Your teaching is undermining the faith on which this city is built. We may have to take action against you.”

There was an awkward silence and then Narcissus said, “Well, come on don’t ruin a good dinner. The man’s your guest. You’ve let him have his say, let’s get on with it.”

Thankfully the guests turned to each other and made low-voiced comments. Theodorus motioned for the next course which was an apple pie made with a mixture of apples, honey and filberts, and told the slave standing behind his couch to call back the orchestra.

Paul knew he had offended his host and many of the other guests. Yet when asked a direct question, what else could he have done? He was thankful to overhear Narcissus saying, “Well, I don’t care. All I can say is my slaves were a bunch of thieves and now they are honest men. There must be something to it!”

There was one final course of soft cheese and olives, and then thankfully, Paul was able to take leave of his host and with Timothy’s help he walked down the hill. Timothy, who had been handed food from Paul’s plate, as had many of the other slaves attending their masters had enjoyed the luxurious meal. But Paul, who was normally a light eater, felt distended and uncomfortable.

Paul returned to his daily lectures. For a time thoughts of possible repercussions from Theodorus’s dinner party weighed on his mind and then he forgot them. These were happy days. The numbers of converts grew and Paul’s fame reached into every quarter of the city.

⁴⁷⁰ 1 Corinthians 10:14-16 & 21

Titus⁴⁷¹ and Timothy did their best to relieve him of some of the pressures that began to wear down even Paul's energies. Paul was far from pleased when he discovered one of their ruses.

Timothy approached Rufus one day, "Brother Paul gets no time to rest. Even when he is eating, people bring the sick for him to heal. I'm worried because he is often exhausted."

Timothy's remark made Rufus stop and look at him. "You are right. We must try and stop them. We have told the new brethren that they can pray for the sick, and indeed they have been laying hands on one another and receiving healing."

"Yes, but it is not the believers that cause the trouble, it is those who have heard of Paul and think he is the 'Great Prophet' of this new God, Jesus Christ. They won't let anyone else pray for them, and they wait until Paul appears, so they can waylay him, often when he is most tired and of course he never refuses them, but tells them that it is Christ Jesus who heals them, and they must come back to hear more about him."

Rufus said, "Maybe mother could make a suggestion."

Tamar thought about it for some time, and then said, "I remember hearing how there was a sick woman, who touched the hem of our Lord's robe and was healed. Why not give these people something that belongs to Paul and see if that won't help?"

Timothy was delighted with the solution and took an odd handkerchief and when they ran out, an apron or two unbeknownst to Paul. The poor and humble took these tokens with great reverence, and frequently came back within a few days with the sick person, now fully restored to health.

At first Paul merely thought he had mislaid various articles. But one morning as he arrived for the lecture, he met a group of people he had never seen before carrying one of his aprons, then the whole story came out.⁴⁷²

"Where did you get that?" Paul asked taking his apron back.

Timothy said nervously, "I gave it to them."

"Whatever for?"

Timothy was speechless. He suddenly realised how their good intentions would be interpreted by Paul.

"Well, come on," Paul said irritably, "Why are these strangers carrying my apron?"

"I, er, that is, we gave it to them," Timothy replied miserably.

"Whatever for?" Paul began to fear the answer.

⁴⁷¹ Titus: *Ephesus CE 54 – Titus 1:5*

⁴⁷² Paul: *The handkerchief incident – Acts 19:11*

“Well, we hoped to spare you from all these strangers begging you to heal their family members. We let them take something of yours home with them.”

“Don’t you realise you are pandering to these people’s love of magic?” He was very angry.

Timothy looked downcast, “We were trying to spare you.”

Paul was far from pleased. “Don’t you know that the Lord Jesus cannot be mocked?” he shouted. The people were frightened by their reception. They were bringing him gifts and had come to thank him.

“The Lord feeds us in body and soul, his strength is made perfect in our weakness,” continued Paul reprovingly.

But Timothy wanted to justify their action, “We told the people to come back to hear about Jesus Christ, and to give him the thanks and praise. They have all come back.”

“What do you mean ‘all’?” demanded Paul. “How long has this been going on?”

Rufus arrived at this point and said quietly, “It is my fault, brother. I thought we could help spare you from the endless numbers of petitioners who queue up and refuse prayer from anyone else.”

Paul was more and more alarmed. “Don’t you see that you are indulging their love of magic and spells. This is not to the honour of the Lord.” Then he demanded angrily, “But why didn’t you pray for these people yourselves? You know that the Lord gave his disciples power to heal the sick and cast out evil spirits. You are making me out to be a magician.” Paul was really angry.

They were standing outside the hall of Tyrannus, and a crowd of curious onlookers was gathering round. Rufus took Paul’s arm and walked him up the steps into the hall.

Then he said, “Brother, you are right. I came to tell you about a group of seven brothers who tried to drive out an evil spirit using the name of Jesus.” He stopped and suddenly laughed.

Paul was still far from mollified and Rufus’s laughter annoyed him still further,⁴⁷³ “Well, what happened?”

“The man with the evil spirit attacked them with such violence that he overpowered all seven of them!”

“Seven men?” exclaimed Timothy.

“Yes,” Rufus grinned at him. “They had their clothes torn off them too. I heard the evil spirit said to them, ‘I know Jesus, and I know about Paul; but you – who are you?’”

⁴⁷³ Paul: *The Sons of Sceva* – Acts 19:13

Paul grunted. He turned to the group of people who had provoked this crisis and said more gently, “You are right to come and give thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for it is He and He alone who gives us good gifts. You must come and learn how Jesus is the Way. No one comes to the Father except through him.”

While the hall filled with people. Paul went to one side to pray and when he finished, he came forward and preached against those who practised magic and the evil powers of the unseen world that surrounded the unwary, luring them into all kinds of evil and sin.

His listeners were filled with fear. And when the story of the seven sons of Sceva, who claimed he was a High Priest of the Jews, went round the town, the fear and dismay infected even more people.⁴⁷⁴ Before the end of the week, many believers came to Paul, bringing their books of magic and spells.

Paul directed that the books should be burnt in front of the hall.⁴⁷⁵ As the flames rose accompanied by a tall column of smoke, more and more people added to the pile.

The believers returned home rejoicing at the wonderful victory of the Lord over the powers of darkness. That evening Paul was eating at Rufus’s home and they told Tamar of the many incidents they had witnessed and laughed again at the discomfiture of the seven sons of Sceva. Tamar did not join in their laughter and neither did Paul.

After the meal, Tamar said to Paul, “My son, come and talk with me.”

When she had sat down with Paul on a couch near her, Tamar said, “My son, Satan will not take this defeat without making trouble for you and the brethren. You have stirred up powerful enemies this day.”

Paul, who had been quiet all through the evening meal, nodded, “I have felt the Lord warning me too. But what could I do? This evil had to be rooted out from amongst the brethren.”

Tamar looked lovingly at the little man, “I remember hearing that when the Lord Jesus drove out the sheep and cattle from the Temple and overturned the tables of the money changers, his disciples remembered the scripture, ‘The zeal of thy house shall eat me up!’⁴⁷⁶ We know the Lord had to do this thing, but it united all his enemies against him – the business community, the priests, the teachers of the Law, people who would not normally find common cause.”

Paul remembered the fury of the authorities and nodded.

⁴⁷⁴ *Seven Sons of Sceva: Ephesus driving out the devils – Acts 19:13*

⁴⁷⁵ *Paul: Burning of books in Ephesus – Acts 19:19*

⁴⁷⁶ *John 2:17 (Revised version)*

“Nothing may happen just yet,” continued Tamar, “But you would do well to plan for trouble before it comes.”

Two days later the brethren gathered for the fellowship meal at ⁴⁷⁷Aquila and Priscilla’s home. There was still much excitement at the events of the past week. Narcissus’s slaves told how the incident was discussed at a feast he had given the next evening.

“Do you know that they estimate those books cost fifty thousand drachma!”⁴⁷⁸

Epaenetus whistled, “No wonder people in the market are saying those books cost a fortune. It was a fortune!”

The men continued to exclaim amongst themselves as the meeting came to order.

After the sharing of the wine and bread, and as some of the brethren were leaving, Aquila drew Paul aside and murmured, “I heard at the synagogue yesterday that many of the Jews are alarmed at what has happened and fear reprisals. Alexander is extremely angry and has some plans afoot to discredit the Christians. Of course I did not hear much, because he knows I am a follower of the Way.”

Paul nodded. The feeling of joy at the spontaneous destruction of so many magic books had given way to an increasing sense that the principalities and powers of the dark world would re-group and bring trouble to the Christians.

Aquila continued, “Priscilla and I feel you should plan to leave Ephesus for a while. If you are not here, our opponents will have less to focus on.”

Paul was startled into an objection, “You mean me to leave and let the brethren bear the brunt?”⁴⁷⁹

Aquila smiled, “My dear friend, you have told me yourself that your presence in a city makes those who follow the Law furious, and when you have gone, they are content to leave the Gentile believers alone.”

“And what about the Jewish believers? Will they be left alone?”

“Paul, my friend, there is not one of us that can dispute with them on points of the Law and make them look foolish. Those of us who continue to attend synagogue are accepted and left alone. It is you they see as a threat, because your arguments and testimony undermine their authority.”

Paul looked thoughtful, “I was thinking it was about time I visited the churches in Macedonia and Achaia. Besides the Gospel must be taken all over the Empire and I want to go to Rome and then on to Spain.”

⁴⁷⁷ Aquila and Priscilla: Church meetings in house – Romans 16:5

⁴⁷⁸ A drachma was about a day’s wages

⁴⁷⁹ Paul: Storm gathers in Ephesus – Acts 19:21

Aquila looked relieved, he had not told Paul the extent of the anger felt in the synagogue, which he knew was fuelled by genuine fears.

Paul said thoughtfully, “But of course I can’t leave yet. There are things I must do. Even so, it might be a good idea to send Timothy to the brethren to tell them I plan to come and to prepare the collection for the brethren in Jerusalem, then I can pick up their collections and see how the churches are managing.”⁴⁸⁰ He suddenly looked at Aquila. “Yes, that’s the right way to do it. Who do you think we can send with young Timothy?”

This was not at all what Aquila had hoped, but he knew better than to argue with Paul, so he said mildly, “Why not talk to the brethren and pray about it. There are several young men who would benefit by such a journey.”

Paul called Timothy to him the next morning. “We’ve heard nothing from the brethren in Macedonia since your visit three years ago. I plan to visit all the churches we established at that time, but I think you should go first and tell them of the collection I want to make for the brethren in Jerusalem.”

Timothy’s eyes lit up. Those had been heady days for him travelling round Macedonia on Paul’s behalf. “I would be pleased to visit all the brethren, can I take Erastus with me? He is very keen for the Lord’s work and we get on well together.”⁴⁸¹

Paul looked at him thoughtfully, “What would his father say? I thought he was studying.”

Timothy grinned, “I think his father would like him away from the students who are always up to some prank or other.”

“Then is he steady enough to take on a mission of this kind?” Paul looked dubious.

“He longs to serve the Lord, but doesn’t know where to begin.”

“If you go, then I want to instruct you both on what to tell the brethren you visit. Bring him round this evening after the lectures and I will decide if he is the right one to go.”

Timothy left Paul on flying feet to tell the good news to his friend. Paul in the meanwhile asked Aquila what he thought of the young man.

“He comes from a good family, and his father was one of the first of the Greeks to join our group, but Priscilla knows his mother, ask her what she thinks.”

“What do I think of what?” asked Priscilla coming in carrying some freshly carded wool ready for spinning.

⁴⁸⁰ Timothy: Visit churches of Macedonia – Acts 19:22

⁴⁸¹ Erastus: With Timothy to Macedonia – Acts 19:22

“I want to send Timothy through Macedonia to prepare them for my visit, and he suggested he takes young Erastus with him. Aquila says you know his mother well.”

Priscilla beamed, “If Timothy wants to take him, nothing would please his mother more. They are worried with the rowdy activities of his fellow students. It is difficult for Erastus to cry off every outing they plan.”

Paul did not look too pleased at this news. “That’s all very well for Erastus, but what about Timothy and the need to teach the brethren they visit? You can’t send a young man who is liable to be led astray at the first opportunity.”

Priscilla said gently, “The young man is sincere and devoted to the Way, but he needs responsibility and if Timothy feels he would like him as a companion, then he should go. His parents would send him with their blessing.”

Reassured, and after eating a light meal, Paul set out for the hall of Tyrannus.

Timothy brought Erastus home for the evening meal. The two young men were in high spirits and Priscilla smiled fondly at them both. She noticed Paul studying them under his black brows. She was thankful he said nothing to dampen their good spirits.

After the evening meal, with the lamps lit and a brazier burning in the room to drive out the cold damp of the early spring weather, they all settled round. Priscilla took the soft blue wool she had been carrying that morning and began to spin it.

Paul cleared his throat and looking at Erastus remarked, “Timothy seems to think you would be a suitable companion for him to visit the churches in Macedonia. Would you agree?”

Erastus looked nervously across at Timothy and replied, “I would do my best to support and help him as companion and servant in the Lord Jesus.”

Paul gave him a long look before nodding his head, “Yes, I think you mean what you say.” He then turned to Timothy, “You are to take my warm greetings to all the brethren. I want you to see that the elders we appointed are continuing as sober, responsible men. They should have only one wife. Make sure that they hold to the teachings I gave them and are not being led astray by useless discussions. You know how we teach that if a man has accepted Christ Jesus as Lord, then he must live in union with him. He must build his life on him and become daily stronger in his faith.”⁴⁸²

Paul broke off. He smiled affectionately at Timothy, “I know I don’t have to tell you these things, but people fall away from their first devotion to the

⁴⁸² *Colossians 2:6*

Lord, and you must encourage them to grow in faith and knowledge of the Lord.”

Timothy nodded. He was utterly devoted to Paul, but he had neither Paul’s learning nor capacity for original thought. However, he did faithfully what was entrusted to him, and if people tended to discount him because of his youth and from being overshadowed by Paul, they soon found out that he had his own gentle ministry and a special gift of encouraging others to use theirs in the service of the Lord.

“What I particularly want you to explain to the churches you visit is our desire to make a collection to help God’s people in Judaea. Tell them that each first day fellowship, they are to set aside some money in proportion to what they have earned and save it up. When I come, I want it all ready, so that I will write letters of introduction to the men they must choose to take their gift to Jerusalem.”⁴⁸³

Paul thought a moment, “If the time seems right, maybe they can go along with me when I leave for Jerusalem. At any rate, I want each church to send one or two representatives to take their offerings to Jerusalem. In this way we shall bind the whole church of Jesus Christ into one body.”

Almost to himself Paul added, “He must find unity amongst us when he returns.”

The next morning Timothy and Erastus, dressed for travelling and carrying bags with their spare clothes, together with sufficient funds for them to travel without having to beg local brethren for support, took their leave of the brethren. Paul hugged them both and gave them his blessing. Then he watched them set off to the harbour, full of excited anticipation. Paul smiled and turned to walk up the steps into the hall.

Some days later three men arrived at the home of Priscilla and Aquila.

“Stephanas!” Priscilla hugged him, “What brings you here? And Fortunatus, my brother.” She hugged them and then paused before the third man.⁴⁸⁴

He smiled and said, “I’m Achaicus.”⁴⁸⁵

Priscilla’s face cleared, “Of course, my brother. How could I forget your name, you are also of Chloe’s household.” She turned back to Stephanas and asked again, “What brings you here?”

“We have a letter for Paul from the brethren in Corinth!” Stephanas replied.^{486;487}

⁴⁸³ 1 Corinthians 16:2-4

⁴⁸⁴ Stephanas & Fortunatus: Visit Ephesus CE 54 – 1 Corinthians 16:17

⁴⁸⁵ Achaicus: Visits Ephesus CE 54 – 1 Corinthians 16:17

⁴⁸⁶ Corinthian Church: Delegation to Paul CE 54 – 1 Corinthians 16:17

⁴⁸⁷ Paul: News from Corinth CE 54 – 1 Corinthians 7:1-25, 8:1, 12:1, 16:1

Priscilla called her husband, who also greeted the three men with hugs. When Aquila heard they had brought a letter for Paul he looked anxiously at them, “Are you having problems, My brothers?”

Stephanas nodded, “There has been considerable dissension amongst the brethren, and some of us felt we should ask brother Paul for guidance.” He broke off and looked worried, “Is he not here?”

“Not at the moment,” replied Priscilla, “But he will return some time after the tenth hour when his lectures and discussions are finished. Come in, come in, you must be tired. We have no room for you to stay, but share our evening meal, we will send you round to Philologus and Julia. They will be delighted to have you. They live just behind us near the city wall.”

“No, you mustn’t worry, we will stay with Sosthenes⁴⁸⁸ for two nights, he will be glad to hear news of Corinth, but perhaps you could send someone to tell him to expect us later this evening.” Stephanas requested.

“Is Sosthenes here?” Aquila was surprised.

“Haven’t you seen him? He has recently come to work with his uncle in the library.” Stephanas replied.

“And after your two nights with Sosthenes, have you got somewhere to stay?”

Fortunatus said, “Our mistress wants us to see her business contacts in Ephesus so we shall be staying with Asyncritus,⁴⁸⁹ who deals with her affairs.”

“You will have a busy time while you are here. Let me send a maid for some wine while you wait for brother Paul.”

Paul came a short while later, tired from the day’s teaching but this dropped from him like a cloak when he saw who was waiting for him.

There were more joyful hugs until Paul finally said, “Let me go and wash and then we will talk until Priscilla brings us an evening meal.”

Paul’s first words when he returned were, “You are having problems?”

Stephanas nodded, “Some of us drafted this letter for you, because there is much disagreement about how to deal with certain issues.”

Paul looked at him for a quiet moment and then said, “But that is not the real reason is it?”

Achaicus surprised asked, “How do you know?”

“You can’t fool an old rabbi like me. A letter could have been sent without the three people helping deliver it! Are you having trouble with the Jews?”

⁴⁸⁸ Sosthenes: Living in Ephesus – 1 Corinthians 1:1

⁴⁸⁹ Asyncritus: Believer in Ephesus – Romans 16:14

Stephanas shook his head, “No, since Apollos’s visit they seem to accept that we are a way-out sect, similar to the one they call the ‘Essenes’, whoever they might be.” He stopped obviously wondering how to broach the difficult subject.

“You see,” he began slowly, “First brother Apollos visited us, and he answered nearly all the objections of the Jewish community to the claim that Jesus is the Christ. Even if he did not convert them into disciples, at least they don’t disrupt our meetings or harass our Jewish brethren when they go to synagogue. Then brother Peter arrived.⁴⁹⁰ His visit caused a great upsurge in interest and many people came to hear him preach, even those who were not believers came to listen to someone who had known Jesus and heard him teach. They felt he was an authentic apostle.” Stephanas looked apologetically at Paul, whose sudden movement indicted his reaction to this remark.

“I suppose, from what you do not say, they are questioning my authority?”

Fortunatus said hurriedly, “No, no, nothing like that, it’s just that some of the brethren now say they follow Peter’s teaching, since he knew the Lord, and others say they follow Apollos’s teaching, because he can show that Jesus fulfils the prophecies about him in your scriptures.”

Achaicus added, “Some people hate all the arguing and say they just want to follow Christ, since you taught us that we are united with him in the Holy Spirit.”

Paul groaned. He could imagine the chaos amongst the Gentile members of the church. They did not have the Jewish tradition of unity in diversity, nor because of his emphasis on faith in Christ, did they have the protection of the Law to keep them together.

“You better read me the letter you have brought,” his face was full of pain.

Stephanas looked at Paul for a moment and then said softly, “The first time I heard you speak, I thought you were talking rubbish! The second time I could see you believed every word you said. The third time I knew there was only one person that I wanted to know as you do, Jesus Christ, the living son of the only True God.”

As he spoke, some of the pain left Paul’s face, and a faint smile reached his eyes. “Thank you, my son. Now read the letter to me.”

Stephanas took the papyrus scroll out of its cover and broke the seal. He cleared his throat and began to read, “From the brethren of Christ’s church at Corinth, to our brother Paul, Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus.”

⁴⁹⁰ *Peter: Visit to Corinth – 1 Corinthians 1:12*

Paul interrupted, “How many agreed to send this letter, or did it just come from a few of you?”⁴⁹¹

“Some of us wrote it and we read it out at the first day fellowship meal. After some argument, it was agreed to send it as we had drafted it.” Stephanas omitted to say that some people had left angrily when they heard the letter was addressed to Paul, rather than Apollos or Peter.

“We would like your guidance on the following matters, since there are some of our group who say it is wrong to be married and there are others who say nothing is forbidden, provided you accept the Lord Jesus as Saviour. There are also members of our group married to unbelieving husbands or wives. Should they get a divorce, since they are required to perform family rites in which they no longer believe?”

Stephanus looked up and saw that Paul was giving him his full attention. He continued, “What about people who are not married? Should they remain single? What about women whose husbands have died? Is it wrong for them to remarry? We find many of our members are much troubled, especially those betrothed to unbelievers, since they know they will have to attend functions at the feasts of our local gods and eat meat offered to idols. Some of us think it is better not to marry at all, especially women who have to obey their husbands.”

“Certainly a married person has more worries than a single one,” observed Paul. “I must think about this because it does indeed raise issues which make it difficult to be obedient to our Lord,” he thought a moment, “But I do not remember ever hearing that he condemned the married state, only that a person must never divorce and remarry.”

Achaicus remarked casually, “One man, whose wife died and whose widowed step-mother has been living with them, now sleeps with her.”

“What?” Paul exploded. “Not even the heathen would countenance that. How does he justify his actions and how do the brethren allow him to continue in fellowship?”

Stephanus looked at Achaicus in surprise, “I haven’t heard of that.”

“It’s not something one would tell to the fellowship.” Achaicus said sourly. “I heard it from my wife, whose sister is a slave in the man’s home.”

“But a step-mother, isn’t she old?” asked Stephanas.

“She’s his late father’s concubine and he married her shortly before he died. She’s still young and pretty.”

Paul thundered, “Something must be done about this. It is a scandal that the Lord’s people should behave in such a shocking way.”

⁴⁹¹ Paul: *Receives letter from Corinth* – 1 Corinthians 7:1-25, 8:1, 12:1

Stephanas looked at him a moment and then continued reading, “What must we do about food offered to idols? Most of us feel it is wrong to eat it, let alone buy it at the market. But there are those who quote the Lord who said, ‘Nothing you put into your body makes it unclean, only that which comes from the mind.’ It is also difficult if we eat with our pagan friends because everyone buys their meat from the temple sacrifices, we do not know what we should do. Must we refuse to visit our families and friends?”

Fortunatus said at this point, “It is particularly difficult for slaves, because they are obliged to obey their masters and they can only eat what their masters provide.”

Paul nodded. He had also experienced the problem of eating with unbelievers. “These are difficult questions, I will seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord himself ate with Samaritans, he knew the problems of living in the world.” He nodded to Stephanus to continue.

“Dear brother, we also need guidance on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Many of our number feel the only acceptable worship is that given in tongues. Sometimes it is difficult to control the outpouring of praise and worship from those who are particularly blessed. Furthermore there is a feeling amongst some of our members that those who do not have the gift of tongues are not true believers. This matter is causing much pain amongst us.”

Stephanus looked up from the letter and said bluntly, “Sometimes it is like a madhouse, with people babbling away, each trying to outdo the other, the women are particularly noisy. It is driving away those who want to learn about the Lord and giving a bad name to our group.”

“Are the women leading the group then?” asked Paul.

“There are two in particular, Romans ladies, who seem to think their status gives them a right to boss everyone else around.” Stephanas spoke with suppressed anger. “The joy has gone from our meetings,” he added sadly

Paul said softly, “That first joy always goes, the grace of our Lord carries us the first part of the Way. Then he sets us down and expects us to learn to walk the Way with him.”

His quietly spoken thought reached through the gloom that had gradually descended on his three visitors and suddenly they smiled. Hope had returned.

They stayed late talking and exchanging news. Finally the flickering lamps warned them it was long past bedtime. Paul however did not sleep. He stood for long hours praying for insight and guidance. Gradually, just before dawn a great sense of peace and joy came over him. He knew then the presence of the Holy Spirit would guide his answers to the problems in the church at Corinth and he lay down to sleep.

CHAPTER 24: IN EPHEBUS – THE SECOND LETTER TO CORINTH

CE 54 SPRING

*ACTS 19:1-20
1 CORINTHIANS 16:5-17*

Over the next few days Paul continued to talk with Stephanas and the men from Chloe's household. Aquila and Priscilla also took part in some of these discussions, as did others from their group. Finally he felt ready to begin his letter. He considered who should write for him. It needed one who was quick and accurate in taking down rough notes on wax to be later transcribed. Or, he thought, no, they must write directly onto papyrus, this letter is too important to risk some amanuenses changing his message by the inaccurate rendering of his notes. How he wished for Timothy who understood his meaning sometimes before he had put it into words.

Suddenly he remembered Stephanas's news that Sosthenes had moved to Ephesus and he decided to ask him if he could lend him a scribe to act as amanuenses. Sosthenes greeted Paul warmly and after consulting with his uncle was pleased to let Paul use one of their scribes. They agreed Paul would come just after sunrise the following morning.

Paul spent the rest of the day organising with Titus, Tychicus and the rest of the team to take over the teaching for the next few days. He wanted to devote himself entirely to composing answers to the difficult problems raised by the church in Corinth.⁴⁹²

Sosthenes lived behind the library in the Greek Agora. His uncle was old and had no children of his own. He had written to Sosthenes to come and take over the running of the Library. Sosthenes, had bitterly resented his beating by Paul's accusers in front of Gallio and he was pleased to leave Corinth.

Demophon, the manager, was just opening the doors the next morning when Paul walked up the steps. He greeted Paul pleasantly and indicated that Sosthenes was inside. Paul found him placing some new scrolls in their leather covers on the shelves. The name of the book and the author was written neatly at the end facing the customer. The scrolls were listed alphabetically according to the author.

Sosthenes took Paul into another room, where a group of young scribes were copying books to the dictation of an older man. Out through the door

⁴⁹² Paul: 2nd Letter to Corinth – 1 Corinthians 5:9

was a shaded courtyard and at the back of this was the house where Sosthenes, his wife and five children lived with his elderly uncle and ailing wife. The slaves who worked in the shop were housed in rooms along one side of the courtyard. The women of the household cooked and cleaned. When it was cold or wet the whole establishment ate together in the main room of the house. It was a crowded, happy community.

Sosthenes chose a sober-looking young man as amanuenses. He was not a Greek but a Lydian, when Paul looked surprised Sosthenes said, “This young man is my best scribe. His name is Ardys. He is most accurate and can keep up with you. I take it you want an accurate rendering of your words?” Sosthenes’s eyes twinkled.

Paul said, “Thank you, my friend,” he turned to the young Lydian, “Do you understand my Greek?” The young man nodded without speaking. His eyes were dark and close together, set in a round face, which seemed devoid of animation.

Sosthenes pointed to the courtyard where there was a bench under a tree.⁴⁹³ “You will be undisturbed there, my friend. Please give my greetings to the brethren in Corinth.”

Ardys fetched a small table and set an ink pot in place before checking his pens and unrolling the papyrus. His movements were careful and unhurried. When he was ready he looked up at Paul.

Paul was deep in thought, but when he noticed Ardys was ready he began the formal opening, “From Paul, who was called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and from our brother Sosthenes- to the church of God which is in Corinth,” Paul stopped, not because Ardys needed time to catch up, but he wanted to emphasize the unity with Christ. He continued, “To all who are called to be God’s holy people, who belong to him in union with Christ Jesus, together with all people everywhere who worship our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours – May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.”

Paul sat back and sighed. How he longed that the Unity in Christ was realised by all those who confessed him as Lord. But how difficult it was to preserve this unity. He must remind them how wonderful it was.

Sosthenes came by to see how they were getting on and heard Paul saying, “Jews want miracles for proof, and Greeks look for wisdom. As for us, we proclaim the crucified Christ, a message that is offensive to the Jews and nonsense to the Gentiles; but for those whom God has called, both Jews and Gentiles, this message is Christ, who is the power of God and the wisdom of

⁴⁹³ Sosthenes: Sends Greetings to Corinth – 1 Corinthians 1:1

God. For what seems to be God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and what seems to be God's weakness is stronger than human strength."

Sosthenes looked at Ardys and wondered what the effect of Paul's words was having on him. His uncle had purchased the young man in the slave market a few months previously. He came with strong recommendations as to his skill as an amanuensis. And he had not disappointed them, but the young man was so shut in to himself. He did what he had to and never joined in the joking and horse-play of the other young men. Sosthenes shrugged, if Paul's words failed to move him, there was little hope for him.

Paul had been dictating with his eyes shut and had not noticed Sosthenes's quiet observation. Ardys on the other hand had noticed and resented it. Why did the old man keep prying? He did his job. Wasn't that enough? But no, he kept pestering him to be part of the family. Well he didn't want to be part of any family; not ever again. He suddenly realised he had missed the last sentence.

"Er, could you repeat that?" He asked Paul.

Paul opened his eyes and said, "Forgive me, am I going too fast?"

Of course he hadn't been going too fast, Ardys felt angry, why must these people put on this false humility?

Paul repeated, "But God has brought you into union with Christ Jesus, and God has made Christ to be our wisdom."

Who was this 'Christ' the skinny little man kept babbling about? Ardys gave an involuntary sigh.

Paul continued more slowly, "By him we are put right with God; we become God's holy people and are set free. So then, as the scripture says, 'Whoever wants to boast must boast of what the Lord has done.'"

Paul continued dictating until the morning was almost over and the smell of fresh bread and cooking pervaded the courtyard. Suddenly the door of the scriptorium was flung open and a group of laughing men came out. Ardys looked up briefly.

Paul said, "Let me just finish this my son and then you can go too."

Ardys nodded, "No one, then, should boast about what men can do. Actually everything belongs to you: Paul, Apollos, and Peter; this world, life and death, the present and the future – all these are yours, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God." Paul got up and stretched. He realised he was also hungry.

Sosthenes came across, "You will stay for our midday meal, my friend. I am sure there you have much more to say."

"Thank you, it would be good to eat with you."

A table was brought and set with dishes of food for the two men to help themselves.

They lay back on cushions and after filling their cups, Sosthenes asked, “How is it going?”

Paul looked thoughtfully at him, “I have a feeling that things are a great deal worse in Corinth than Stephanas is telling me. What do you think?”

Sosthenes took a sip from his wine before answering, “I left Corinth over a year ago. You remember how the Jews beat me the day Gallio threw them out of court. That was bad enough, but what really hurt me was that I was the president of the synagogue and neither Daniel nor Jethro nor any of them told me what was being planned. I felt that if this was their attitude to the leader of the Jewish community I wanted nothing more to do with them. When my uncle invited me to come and take over the running of the library, I jumped at the opportunity.”

Paul wondered why Sosthenes was telling him all this.

“I began to realise that apart from the antagonism of the Jews who rejected the teaching about our Lord, there were elements in the church who were using it to augment their position. They vied with one another to produce sumptuous food at the Fellowship meals but they only shared it with their friends, they ignored the poorer brethren and the slaves. It seemed as if they thought becoming Christians, they were now privileged and should have preferential treatment.”

Paul’s face was full of pain, “Do I know the brethren causing this trouble?”

Sosthenes thought, “I know a couple of men, they are probably not the only ones, I think you’d better ask Stephanas and the men from Chloe’s household.”

“I need to pray before I continue the letter to them.” Paul was deeply disturbed. Sosthenes left him and Paul began to pray earnestly using the gift of tongues to let the Holy Spirit speak for him. Later he returned to the courtyard and sat in the shade of the tree, where Ardys found him a short while later.

Ardys, who had no interest in the subject he was writing about, sat waiting while Paul, with his eyes closed continued deep in thought.

Finally he opened his eyes and smiled at the young man. “You’re ready for me, good. Let’s continue, no don’t bother to read back what you wrote this morning, there is a great deal more that needs saying.”

Ardys said nothing, merely dipped his carefully prepared reed pen in the ink and sat waiting.

Paul began and as he continued to dictate his hurt reached through the tough skin of Ardys, he quickly glanced at the man beside him. He, who was so filled with his own angers and resentments, seldom perceived that others suffered.

After a while Paul's spirit cleared and he declared, "For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of words but of power. Which do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in a spirit of love and gentleness?"

Ardys noted the change in Paul's mood and wondered at the words he was writing. What was this 'power'? If someone as weak and puny as Paul could claim to have it, he wondered if he could acquire it as well. Paul's next sentence was such a change of mood that Ardys wondered if he had heard aright.

"Surely you know that the wicked will not possess God's Kingdom. Do not fool yourselves; people who are immoral or who worship idols or are adulterers or homosexual perverts or who steal or are greedy or are drunkards or who slander others or are thieves – none of these will possess God's Kingdom."

Paul had covered many subjects but as he thought of the news he had heard, grief almost overwhelmed him. Ardys sensing his distress looked up in surprise, in spite of himself, found he was listening to this strange little man. He, who had suffered as a child, suddenly found a shaft of hope reaching into his frozen spirit.

"Some of you were like that. But you have been purified from sin; you have been dedicated to God; you have been put right with God by the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

Ardys stopped writing and exclaimed, "How can it be possible to be purified, when you have been the plaything of a cruel man and his sodden friends?"

Paul could not fail to hear the bitterness in the young man's voice. "What is impossible for man is possible for God,"⁴⁹⁴ he remarked quietly.

"Did this Christ come for everyone, or just some people?"

"He came to bring salvation to the whole world!"

"He would never accept someone like me. I am filthy in body and soul."

"No one is outside the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, if you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from death, you will be saved."⁴⁹⁵

Ardys's face was full of pain, he dropped his pen and put his head in his hands. "You have no idea what I do. I am totally lost. I hated my mother for

⁴⁹⁴ Luke 19:18-27

⁴⁹⁵ Romans 10:9

selling me, her youngest child into slavery. I can't forgive that she sold me to that frightful man – she knew he was a drunken pervert – but he paid her well and she didn't care what happened to me.” He began a hard painful sobbing.

Paul sat quietly, praying for the young man's deliverance.

After a time Ardys said in a stifled voice, “I wanted to punish my mother and...” but he couldn't go on. “I am past hope,” he muttered.

Paul put out his hand and touch his shoulder, “Tell me, so you can be delivered from Satan's power.”

After a while Ardys sniffed, wiped his eyes and his nose on the sleeve of his robe. Quietly and looking straight at Paul, he said, “I like raping older women. Sometimes I think I shall kill them, it terrifies me.”

He watched to see the rejection in Paul's face, but he saw nothing but love and pity. Slowly the tears gathered in his eyes. “You mean He can forgive even that?”

Paul nodded, “I use to deliver his disciples up to prison and death and He forgave even that. When he died on the Cross, he took our sins upon himself and died in our place. In baptism we are buried with Christ and share in his death so you will die to your old life and be reborn into the life of Christ. Because, although Jesus died on the Cross for our sins, yet by the glorious power of the Father he rose from the dead, so we might live a new life.”⁴⁹⁶

Hope flared in the young man's face, “When can I be baptized?”

Paul thought, “What you are going to write to the brethren in Corinth is what you need to hear for your salvation. If you still feel in the same mind when we have finished, then you can receive baptism.”

Ardys's face fell, “You want to prove that I'm serious?”

“I want you to understand the fullness of the life that will come to you in Christ Jesus!”

Ardys looked closely at Paul to see if there was any underlying rejection, but once more he saw the love in the older man, miraculously without any lust. He drew a deep sigh, bent his head and picked up the pen.

Paul smiled quietly and asked, “What was the last line you wrote?”

“You have been dedicated to God; you have been put right with God by the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” Ardys raised shining eyes to Paul and gave a faint smile.

“Let me just finish this part, and then tomorrow we will begin answering the queries from their letter.” Paul continued dictating and finally ended with, “Avoid immorality. Any other sin a man commits does not affect his body; but the man who is guilty of sexual immorality sins against his own body.

⁴⁹⁶ *Romans 6:3-4*

Don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and who was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourselves but to God; he bought you for a price. So use your bodies for God's glory."

Paul sat back and thought, "That will do for today, my brother."

Ardys's eyes once more filled with tears, he could hardly see to finish the sentence, a tear dropped on the papyrus, smudging the ink. Paul knew he needed time and quietly putting his hand on the young man's shoulder said, "Go in peace tonight." He rose and crossed the courtyard and walked into the shop to thank Sosthenes for his help. Ardys sniffed his way to the last word before throwing down the pen and putting his head into his arms gave way to great healing sobs.

Paul woke during the night to hear the wind howling round the house and the rain pouring down. He lay there thinking, tomorrow he must answer the queries in their letter. Paul resigned himself to lying awake for the rest of the night, and was surprised to wake up some time later to a faint rain-dimmed light filtering through the shutters of his room.

He rose and shivered in the damp air. He went to wash and say the morning prayers. Then he dressed in his warmest woollen robe, added an outside coat, and then unrolled his much-loved Cilesian cloak, made of black goat's hair, felted together, it was water and wind-proof. In fact it was so stiff that it could almost stand up on its own. But it served him through the cold winters and it would keep him warm and dry this morning as he made his way to the library. He arrived to find Sosthenes and his Demophon steward discussing where Paul could sit and dictate.

Paul greeted them and after responding Sosthenes said, "I think you and Ardys must work in the corner of the library if you don't mind. The scriptorium is busy and would disturb you. The house is full of women and children and even if we rigged up a shelter in the courtyard, it would be too cold."

Paul looked round, there were shelves round the walls and more free-standing bookshelves down the middle of the room. He knew patrons would come in later and wander round. He did not relish trying to dictate with pagan listeners eavesdropping on what he was saying.

Sosthenes pointed, "I think you can be fairly private in this corner. I don't suppose there will be many people out in this weather."

Ardys arrived carrying the small table. He greeted Paul warmly and Sosthenes, who had never heard him address anyone voluntarily raised his bushy eyebrows in surprise. When Ardys had finished setting up the table and putting out his pens and ink, he finally unrolled the scroll and looked expectantly at Paul.

"How are you, my brother?" Paul asked.

His eyes filled with tears, as Ardys had never felt he was valued for himself before. His own emotions unsettled him and he could not speak, beyond saying, “I am coming alive.”

“Then let us get down to work. It will be a hard day for you.” Ardys grinned happily.

Paul had the letter from Corinth in his purse, but he knew its contents well enough.

Sosthenes had been listening with interest to Paul’s dictation. Demophon, who was still unpacking and examining the scrolls from the Roman consignment, showed Sosthenes one of the scrolls he had unwrapped. It was old and falling in pieces. Sosthenes took it carefully and examined it.

He said quietly, “This must have been the only text Lucilius could find. If he thinks it is important enough to send to me, I wonder why he did not have it copied first.”

“Maybe he has his own copy and found this one and just added it in case you wanted it.” Demophon suggested.

It was a puzzle and Sosthenes decided to read the text later. He returned to checking his catalogues and heard Paul speaking slowly and thoughtfully, “But if you do marry, you haven’t committed a sin; and if an unmarried woman marries, she hasn’t committed a sin. But I would rather spare you the everyday troubles that married people will have.”

Just then the shop door opened and a young man burst in laughing as he shook his cloak before walking with sodden sandals to Sosthenes.

“My master says this is weather for reading! He sent me to ask if you have any of the plays of Phrynichus of Athens?”

Sosthenes went to the shelf containing the authors filed under ‘P’, searched a moment and then took down a bunch of scrolls returning with them to the table, where he handed them to the young man to examine.

“What would you recommend?” Asked the young man, “He wants something to entertain the guests at a dinner party he is planning.”

“He could hardly do better than the ‘Phoenician Women’, which is full of charming lyrics, and ideal for singing to the accompaniment of flutes and harp. Or here is ‘Troilus’, which is also suitable.”⁴⁹⁷

The young man took the scrolls out of their cases and read a few lines. One from ‘Troilus’ caught his eye and he read it aloud, “the light of love on rosy cheeks is beaming,” the young slave grinned, “That sounds all right! I’ll take this one.”

⁴⁹⁷ *Greek Tragedy by Norwood Page 8.*

Sosthenes rolled the scrolls carefully and replaced them in their cases. The young man handed him a coin and departed, grinning cheerfully.

When silence had once more returned to the library Sosthenes heard Paul dictating, “That is my opinion, and I think that I too have God’s Spirit.” Sosthenes sighed, he hoped he could read the whole of Paul’s letter later. It was most frustrating to be missing bits of it.

Sosthenes murmured, “We need to read the whole of this letter of brother Paul.”

Demophon nodded. He wasn’t really listening to Paul. So far he unpacked and listed thirty-five scrolls. He was wondering how they would ever manage to copy so many major texts when the scriptorium was already fully occupied by the many aspirant writers of Ephesus, most of whom, in Demophon’s opinion wrote trash.

There was pain in his voice as Paul continued, “What soldier ever has to pay his own expenses in the army? What farmer does not eat the grapes from his own vineyard? What shepherd does not use the milk from his own sheep?”

Sosthenes was surprised at the bitter undertone he detected in Paul’s words. Somehow he always appeared so self-assured, so full of spiritual power and energy, he had not credited him with this sense of isolation and abandonment. Then he thought back to his own feeling of betrayal by the Jewish community in Corinth. Men he had thought he had known and who had chosen him out of respect to be president. His mind was abstracted. He continued checking his stock list of books, and noting the number of copies he had.

The door opened and a gust of cold wind came in with another customer. Sosthenes recognized him, “What brings you out in this wet weather today, my friend?”

The man smiled, “My master asks if you have anything new in? He is tired of his scrolls and wants to read something more modern.”

Sosthenes turned to Demophon, “Have they finished the new work we received by the writer Marcus Annaeus Lucanus?”

Demophon nodded, “They finished it the day before yesterday and Phrynichus is labelling the cases.”

Sosthenes turned back to his customer, “Go and fetch a scroll and let Timaeus here see it.” Demophon went to the scriptorium and presently came back with a new scroll.

“Would that suit your master?”

Timaeus removed the scroll from its case, untied the ribbons and opened it. He read from one or two sections and then handed it back. “Yes, I think that will do. Especially if I tell him you’ve only just received it.”

Sosthenes re-rolled the scroll and tied it up before putting it back in its case. Timaeus paid for it and left.

As the quiet returned, Paul was saying, “Well, whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do it all for God’s glory. Live in such a way as to cause no trouble either to Jews or Gentiles or to the church of God. Just do as I do; I try to please everyone in all that I do, not thinking of my own good, but of the good of all, so that they might be saved.”

He ended with “Imitate me, then, just as I imitate Christ,” unaware that Ardys had found these words strange and wonderful, Paul was about to continue, when Sosthenes said, “Are you not going to break for food today?”

Paul turned round, “Is it so late?” Then turning to Ardys, “Come, let’s take a break.”

They went to wash, and although Ardys did not hold to Jewish custom, he found Paul pouring the water for him to wash, as if Paul was the slave! Ardys felt the ice that had long frozen his inner being, melting in the warmth of Paul’s regard.

The meal was served in the main room of the house because of the rain. Steaming platters of whole wheat topped with a sauce of mixed herbs dried fruit and onions. There were long loaves of coarse-ground wheat, with goatsmilk cheese. The food was plentiful and warming on the cold day.

In spite of the wet weather, everyone dispersed after the meal for the midday break for rest or other diversions, several sat down to play backgammon and the younger slaves threw dice.

Once more Sosthenes took Paul to his own room where they spent some time talking. Finally, sometime before the ninth hour, everyone began to reassemble to continue their various activities, as Sosthenes and Paul walked back across the courtyard they were both amazed to see Ardys laughing with the rest of the scribes.

“What did you do to him?” Asked Sosthenes.

“It is not what I did, but what Christ is doing.” Replied Paul.

“Is it what he hears you telling the Corinthians?”

“Partly, but whatever it is, let us give praise to the Lord.”

Sosthenes nodded, and added to himself, ‘And to his dedicated servant, Paul of Tarsus!’

When they returned to the library, it was so dark, Demophon was busy lighting the oil lamps. Ardys also fetched two lamps and Demophon produced two lampstands.

After they settled, Paul started off by addressing the problem of the women in the congregation. He was well aware that the customs of Roman, Greek and Jewish women were different. He did not approve of the freedom

he saw amongst the Roman women and felt it encouraged general laxity in moral standards. It was a touchy subject. He hoped he dealt with it sensitively.

Having disposed of this problem, Paul then turned to a much more serious one. In fact this was the real heart of the problem in the Corinthian church. He started, “In the following instructions, however, I do not praise you, because your meetings for worship actually do more harm than good. In the first place, I have been told that there are opposing groups in your meetings; and this I believe is partly true.”

He must be careful, they must not feel he is taking sides but he could not condone those whose behaviour brought the Gospel message to shame.

“No doubt there must be divisions among you so that the ones who are in the right may be clearly seen.” Let me be clear what they are doing at present is not what they were taught by me. “When you meet together as a group, it is not the Lord’s Supper that you eat. For as you eat, each one goes ahead with his own meal, so that some are hungry while others get drunk.”

Anger flooded Paul. They were making a mockery of all they had been taught. “Haven’t you got your own homes in which to eat and drink? Or would you rather despise the church of God and put to shame the people who are in need? What do you expect me to say to you about this? Shall I praise you? Of course I don’t!” He continued to elaborate on the dangers of misusing the Fellowship Meal.

Then Paul checked their letter again. Oh, yes their questions about the Holy Spirit. He shut his eyes and gathered himself. He felt the power of the Holy Spirit flooding him. When he finally opened his eyes he had no idea of the passing of time. Ardy was sitting watching him, relaxed and at peace.

Paul began, “Now, concerning what you wrote about the gifts from the Holy Spirit. I want you to know the truth about them, my brothers. You know that while you were still heathen, you were led astray in many ways to the worship of lifeless idols. I want you to know that no one who is led by God’s Spirit can say ‘A curse on Jesus!’ and no one can confess ‘Jesus is Lord,’ unless he is guided by the Holy Spirit.”

Let me make it quite clear that speaking in strange tongues is only one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

“There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them. There are different ways of serving, but the same Lord is served. There are different abilities to perform service, but the same God gives ability to everyone for their particular service. The Spirit’s presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all.”

Paul was filled with the presence of Christ. He no longer had to think what he would say. It was as if he was just a mouthpiece for the Lord himself.

“The Spirit gives one person a message full of wisdom, while to another person the same Spirit gives a message full of knowledge. One and the same Spirit gives faith to one person, while to another person he gives the power to heal. The spirit gives one person the power to work miracles; to another, the gift of speaking God’s message; and to yet another, the ability to tell the difference between gifts that come from the Spirit and those that do not. To one person he gives the ability to explain what is said. But it is one and the same Spirit who does all this; as he wishes, he gives a different gift to each person.”

Sosthenes and Demophon had long since stopped pretending to work and were sitting quietly, listening.

Paul reached for an analogy to explain what he had been talking about, and came back to the picture of a person’s body, with all its special parts.

“Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts. In the same way, all of us, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free, have been baptized into the one body by the same Spirit, and we have all been given the one Spirit to drink.”

Ardys could not believe his ears – the same Spirit whether slaves or free! Yet hadn’t Paul poured the water for him to wash as if Paul was the slave and he, Ardys the master? The wonder of it filled him and he longed for the moment he could be baptized into this miraculous fellowship. Paul was continuing, giving Ardys no time to think. He sighed, reached for another pen and dipped it in the ink.

Paul suddenly realised that he had been speaking with no thought of Ardys. He opened his eyes and saw the young man writing swiftly, neat columns of script running down the scroll. He waited until Ardys had caught up and then smiled at him. Ardys took the opportunity to stretch and flex his fingers. Then he nodded at Paul to continue.

“So then, the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’” Paul was smiling as he watched Ardys’s hand move across the page, “Nor can the head say to the feet, ‘Well, I don’t need you!’ On the contrary, we cannot do without the parts of the body that seem to be weaker; and those parts that we think aren’t worth very much are the ones which we treat with greater care; while the parts of the body which don’t look very nice, are treated with special modesty, which the more beautiful parts do not need.”

Paul had long used this analogy of the body to explain the interdependency of those baptized into union with Christ. This was the first time he had fully developed the picture of the church being Christ’s body, a living organism. It pleased him and he prayed his readers would see the truth of the analogy.

Ardys's shoulders and back were stiff and sore, his hand felt cramped yet nothing could stop the joy which flooded him as he took down the words from Paul.

"All of you are Christ's body, and each one is a part of it. In the church God has put all in place: in the first place apostles, in the second place prophets, and in the third place teachers; then those who perform miracles, followed by those who are given the power to heal or to help others or to direct them or to speak in strange tongues."

There now! Let them think on that! If they must speak in strange tongues, let them know the gift is not the most important and should not take precedence over the other gifts. I must emphasize this.

"They are not all apostles or prophets or teachers. Not everyone has the power to work miracles or to heal diseases or to speak in strange tongues or to explain what is said. Set your hearts, then, on the more important gifts. Best of all, however, is the following way."

There was nothing to warn his listeners what was coming.

Paul's speech slowed, he almost seemed to be talking to himself,⁴⁹⁸ "I may be able to speak the languages of men and even of angels, but if I have no love, my speech is no more than a noisy gong or a clanging bell. I may have the gift of inspired preaching: I may have all knowledge and understand all secrets; I may have all the faith needed to move mountains – but if I have no love, I am nothing. I may give away everything I have, and even give up my body to be burnt – but if I have no love, this does me no good."

"Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth. Love never gives up; and its faith, hope and patience never fail."

"Love is eternal. There are inspired messages, but they are temporary; there are gifts of speaking in strange tongues, but they will cease; there is knowledge, but it will pass. For our gifts of knowledge and of inspired messages are only partial; but when what is perfect comes, then what is partial will disappear."

"When I was a child, my speech, feelings, and thinking were all those of a child; now that I am a man, I have no more use for childish ways. What we see now is like a dim image in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. What I know now is only partial; then it will be complete – as complete as God's knowledge of me."

There was a pause and then he concluded.

⁴⁹⁸ 1 Corinthians 13

“Meanwhile these three remain: faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of these is love.”

Paul stopped. His eyes were closed. He seemed far away and when Ardys finished writing, he looked up. Darkness had fallen outside as the rain continued to pour down. The other work had long since stopped. Ardys quietly rolled up the scroll. He gathered up his pens and ink, folded the table and put everything near the counter.

Sosthenes said, “You’ve done well, my boy. Go in peace. I will wait for him.”

Ardys followed Demophon out into the darkness.

Sosthenes continued to wait for Paul, thinking he might wonder where everyone had gone. He wanted to invite him to their evening meal which he knew was being served. Paul showed no sign that he was aware of anything happening around him, then as Sosthenes moved he looked up. Sosthenes was aware of a great peace in the older man.

“Will you come and share our evening meal?” He asked quietly.

Paul shook his head. “It seems to be late, I would be better going home.”

“Then let me send Ardys to accompany you. The streets are wet and full of water.”

Again Paul shook his head, “I used him hard today. He deserves a rest. I will need him tomorrow to finish this letter.”

Sosthenes was himself deeply moved by Paul’s poem on love, and realised Paul needed to be alone. As he saw him to the door, Sosthenes suddenly embraced him and said, “Those words on love will live until the coming of our Lord and inspire countless generations of the faithful.”

Paul gripped Sosthenes briefly, then taking his faithful Cilician cloak he slipped quietly out into the night.

The next day a tremulous sun shone through the drifting clouds. As Paul walked down the hill to the library, patches of blue sky grew bigger. It looked as if the day would be fine. He hoped they could sit in the courtyard to complete the letter. But when he arrived, he found the bench was wet and a chill wind shook water drops from the tree.

Ardys was ready and waiting for him between the bookshelves and as he entered the bookshop, Sosthenes remarked, “I’m afraid you won’t have such a quiet spot this morning.”

Paul nodded and went to his stool. He was still caught up in the mood which inspired his words on love, but he felt he needed to address the problem of the Corinthians undisciplined use of strange tongues in their worship.

He began, “It is love, then, that you should strive for. Set your hearts on spiritual gifts, especially the gift of proclaiming God’s message. The one who

speaks in strange tongues does not speak to others but to God, because no one understands him. He is speaking secret truths by the power of the Spirit. But the one who proclaims God's message speaks to people and gives them help, encouragement, and comfort. The one who speaks in strange tongues helps only himself, but the one who proclaims God's message helps the whole church."⁴⁹⁹

Paul elaborated on this, encouraging his readers to rather speak words that could be understood and would build up the church. The more he pictured their meetings, the more he felt he needed to warn them. Ardys, who had never heard these 'strange tongues' wondered what it was all about. He thought it must be something like the religious frenzy of the Bacchanalia.

Sosthenes, who had experienced a little of the unruly behaviour of some of the Greek women in the Corinthian church was delighted to hear Paul's stringent advice on the right use of 'strange tongues' and silently applauded when Paul concluded with, "If, then, the whole church meets together and everyone starts speaking in strange tongues – and if some ordinary people or unbelievers come in, won't they say that you are all crazy? But if everyone is proclaiming God's message when some unbeliever or ordinary person comes in, he will be convinced of his sin by what he hears. He will be judged by all he hears, his secret thoughts will be brought into the open, and he will bow down and worship God, confessing, 'Truly God is here among you.'"

Ardys glanced quickly at Paul and gave him a half smile.

Paul was abstracted. He waited for Ardys to catch up and sat thinking. He must remind them how the brethren worshipped. He began slowly, "This is what I mean, my brothers. When you meet for worship, one person has a hymn, another a teaching, another a revelation from God, another a message in strange tongues, and still another the explanation of what is said. Everything must be of help to the church." Then he reverted to the right control of speaking in strange tongues and if there is no one to interpret, then he "must keep quiet and speak only to himself and to God."

Paul then dealt with the behaviour of the women in the church. Their behaviour angered him and as he spoke this intensified until he ended, "It is a disgraceful thing for a woman to speak in church."⁵⁰⁰

Sosthenes was puzzled by Paul's vehemence, women often ministered in the worship and spoke in strange tongues. Did he really mean no women must

⁴⁹⁹ 1 Corinthians 14 to 15:11

⁵⁰⁰ In this letter Paul gives guidance at several levels. 1 Corinthians 7:10 He writes, 'For married people I have a command which is not my own but the Lord's...' In 1 Corinthians 7:12 he writes, 'To the others I say (I, myself, not the Lord.) In Corinthians 7:25 he says, 'I do not have a command from the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is worthy of trust' and he adds at the end of the chapter, (v 40) 'That is my opinion, and I think that I too have God's Spirit.' However when really roused about certain behaviour on the part of some women he chooses to take as his authority Jewish Law! See 1 Corinthians 14:34 'the women should keep quiet in the meetings. They are not allowed to speak; as the Jewish Law says, they must not be in charge.'

share in the worship? Or did he just mean they must not run the church? He could understand that, because it was totally at odds with Jewish tradition.

Just then the first customer entered. Paul looked up annoyed at the interruption. He saw the weather was now fine and warm. He said abruptly to Ardys, “Come let us go to the courtyard.”

It took a few minutes for Ardys to move his table and other paraphernalia outside and it gave Paul time to think what he wanted to say. He decided to remind them of the authority he had in preaching as an apostle.

The day was now warm and the smells of cooking was pervading the courtyard, before Paul could continue, the door of the scriptorium burst open and out came a noisy group of men, shouting and laughing.

“It seems we must take a break.” Paul said, none too pleased at the interruption. Ardys put down his pen and stretched. He was beginning to feel he was writing a book, not a letter! He wondered how much more there was.

Sosthenes once more invited Paul to eat with him in his private room, and Paul thankfully accepted. Since it was the day of preparation for the Sabbath, the meal was simple. Work would end early today, and the women were baking and cooking in preparation for the Sabbath.

Paul had lost that flowing inspiration of yesterday. There was more he needed to say. He needed this break to think what it was. Sosthenes found his guest abstracted and not inclined to talk. Regretfully he abandoned his plan of asking Paul about his strictures on women taking part in the worship.

Instead he asked mildly, “How is it going?”

Paul scooped some lentils on to his bread and said, “I’ve nearly finished. Young Ardys is a treasure. How did you find him?”

“We were short of a copier. Good ones are hard to find and they are quickly snapped up. Finally I went to the slave market and spoke to one of the agents to keep an eye out for someone suitable. Some time later I got a message from him that he had a young man who was recommended as a copier. When I went to see him, the agent was far from hopeful. He said the slave was sullen and unco-operative. His previous owner had sold him because of his ill-temper, though I only discovered this later. But when I saw him, he looked young and healthy and I thought I would try him out.”

Sosthenes mixed some wine and water and took a sip. “Well, there was nothing you could put your finger on, but young Ardys was a hard case. He never talked. He was avoided by the other copiers. He did his work, but that was all.”

Sosthenes smiled, “Whatever was wrong with him, you have certainly made him a changed man.”

“That is the Lord’s doing. He was in the deepest darkness of the spirit and Our dear Lord reached down and saved him, even as he saved me.”

“Blessed be he,” remarked Sosthenes.

When they finished the meal, Paul made up his mind. “I think I will talk with Stephanas and the men of Chloe’s household. There may be things I have still need to address before I finish off. Have you any idea where I might find them?”

Sosthenes thought a moment, “Where are they staying?”

“With Chloe’s business contact, Asyncritus,” replied Paul.

“Yes, let me send young Ardys, he’ll be glad of a change in activity.”

While Ardys went off on his errand, Paul fetched the letter where it was neatly rolled up on the table.

Sosthenes walking with him remarked, “May we copy it before you send it off?”

Paul looked surprised, “Why would you want to make copies of a letter like this?”

Sosthenes looked quietly at him and then said, “You really don’t know that you have written the most perfect poem on Love in the whole of literature? For this alone your letter to Corinth is immortal.”

Paul thought, yes, he had been under the guidance of the Holy Spirit for much of the letter, but Sosthenes’s language was excessive, “You exaggerate, my friend, words can never be ‘immortal’ and you do wrong to describe them so.”

Sosthenes was unrepentant, but realised if he annoyed Paul there would be no chance to copy the letter and he longed to know the full text, “I think that your advice to the church at Corinth will also be needed by the brethren here in Ephesus. While you are with them, they can bring you their difficulties, when you are gone, some of what you say to the brethren in Corinth will be helpful to our brethren here.”

Paul could see the logic of this. “How long would it take to copy?”

“It depends how much more you intend writing, but I think two days would complete the job.”

Ardys returned and told him Stephanas and his companions were still at home. Paul nodded and left the library to walk up to the house. He turned right out of the Agora and climbed up towards the city wall.

Paul said, “I have brought you what I have written so far, before I finish it, I want to know if there are any other matters you think need more attention.”

He handed the papyrus to Stephanas, who gave it to Achaicus, “Here you are the keeper of records, you read it to us.”

Achaicus paused a moment and then unrolled the document, cleared his throat a little nervously and began to read aloud. As he read, the silence deepened amongst his listeners. When Achaicus had done, no one spoke.

Finally Paul said, “Is there something you don’t like.”

“Words fail me. You have more than answered the queries we asked you, you have set before us a vision of our life in Christ, I cannot believe our brethren back home, will not be reconciled and reunited once more in the One who is our Lord and Saviour”

His two companions nodded their agreement. Then Fortunatus said, “But what you say about Jesus appearing to his disciples after his resurrection, reminds me that some of our number are worried about what will happen to those who have died before the coming of our Lord?”

“Even more worrying to some,” added Achaicus, “are those who’s family members died before they heard the Gospel preached.”

“Didn’t some ask to be baptized on behalf of these family members?” Paul asked.

“Yes,”

“Well,” remarked Paul, scathingly, “Why did they become baptized on behalf of their dead relatives if they did not believe they would be raised from the dead? They can’t have it both ways.”

“What do you mean?” Achaicus was puzzled.

“If they were baptized on behalf of those who are already dead, what is their reason if they have doubts about the resurrection of the dead? If they believed in it enough to be baptized on behalf of those already dead, then those who die in the Lord before his coming, will also rise.”

“Oh,” Achaicus nodded, not sure that he followed Paul’s reasoning.

Stephanas commented, “Some people get very worked up about the kind of body people will have when they rise from the dead.”

Paul thought a moment, “It is like planting a seed in the ground. What grows is much more than what you plant. We bury our mortal bodies, which is like the Man from earth, what is raised to immortality is our spiritual body which is like the Man from Heaven.⁵⁰¹ I must think some more about this, because there is no doubt these are important matters. Is there anything else I need to address?”

“You have not said anything about the collection for Judaea,” remarked Fortunatus.

⁵⁰¹ 1 Corinthians 15:6 -

“Oh, yes, that was the last point in your letter. I will add something about that.” Paul paused and then added, “Sosthenes wants to make a copy of the letter before you leave. Can you spare the time?”

Fortunatus answered, “Achaicus still has one more contract to secure, then we were planning on leaving as soon as possible. Tomorrow is your Sabbath, but I suppose two or three days longer would not really matter.”

Stephanas’s eyes lit up, “Then we can join them in their first day worship.”

The three men accompanied Paul back to his lodgings. They were filled with happiness at what they had read in Paul’s response to the letter they had brought. It was a light-hearted group that saw him to his door.

After the Sabbath, early on the following morning Paul once more returned to Sosthenes’s bookshop to complete the letter. The day was fine, so he and Ardys were under the tree in the courtyard. Paul spent considerable time on the resurrection the faithful can expect and the manner in which it will occur both for those who have died and for those still living. He touched on the manner in which the collection for the brethren in Judaea should be done. Finally Paul told them about his immediate plans.

“I shall come to you⁵⁰² after I have gone through Macedonia – for I have to go through Macedonia.⁵⁰³ I shall probably spend some time with you, perhaps the whole winter, and then you can help me to continue my journey, wherever it is I shall go next. I want to see you more than just briefly in passing; I hope to spend quite a long time with you, if the Lord allows.

“I will stay here in Ephesus until the day of Pentecost. There is a real opportunity here for great and worthwhile work, even though there are many opponents.

He was nearly finished. What more must he say, Oh, yes Timothy would probably arrive with them before he himself got there.

“If Timothy comes your way, be sure to make him feel welcome among you, because he is working for the Lord, just as I am.”⁵⁰⁴

He worried about Timothy.⁵⁰⁵ He did not have a strong constitution and his physique was such that people tended to ignore him. Yet Paul knew his dedication and faithfulness, he was utterly reliable and truly a child of God.

“No one should look down on him, but you must help him to continue his trip in peace, so that he will come back to me; for I am expecting him back with the brothers.”

⁵⁰² Corinth: Paul’s re-visit – 1 Corinthians 16:5

⁵⁰³ Macedonia: Paul’s plans – 1 Corinthians 16:5

⁵⁰⁴ Timothy: To visit Corinth – Acts 19:22

⁵⁰⁵ Timothy: Suffered indigestion – 1 Timothy 5:23

Paul thought a moment. Yes, he better mention that Apollos might come, with his blessing as it were.⁵⁰⁶

“Now, about brother Apollos, I have often encouraged him to visit you with the other brothers, but he is not completely convinced that he should go at this time. When he gets the chance, however, he will go.”

There! thought Paul, that’s it. He could hear the preparations for the first meal of the day and he said to Ardys, “There’s not much more, let us finish it before we go to eat.”

Ardys nodded and completed the sentence.

“Be alert, stand firm in the faith, be brave, be strong. Do all your work in love. You know about Stephanas and his family; they are the first Christian converts in Achaia and have given themselves to the service of God’s people. I beg you, my brothers, to follow the leadership of such people as these, and of anyone else who works and serves with them.”

Paul hoped this would strengthen Stephanas and his group. And then he thought, let me make it quite clear they were right to come, so he continued, “I am happy about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus; they have made up for your absence and have cheered me up, just as they cheered you up. Such men as these deserve notice.”

Ardys completed the sentence and rubbed his hand before choosing another pen and dipping it in the ink.

“The churches in the province of Asia send you their greetings; Aquila and Priscilla and the church that meets in their house send warm Christian greetings. All the brothers here send greetings.

“Greet one another with a brotherly kiss.”

Ardys completed the last word and Paul said, “Let me write my own greetings to them.”

Ardys rose from his place and Paul sat down and took the pen. He squinted at the page before scrawling with an untidy script, “With my own hand I write this: Greetings from Paul.”

He thought a moment before adding, “Whoever does not love the Lord – a curse on him!”

The young men poured out of the scriptorium across the yard, as usual with much laughter and horse play. Sosthenes and Demophon also came out and looked to where Paul was engrossed. Sosthenes was surprised to see him labouring at the writer’s table.

⁵⁰⁶ *Apollos: Visits Corinth – 1 Corinthians 16:12*

Paul looked up and said, “We’ve nearly finished,” he wrote slowly, the letters large and badly formed, “Maranatha – Our Lord, come! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus.”

The space had run out. Paul handed the pen back to Ardys as he rose. Then he embraced the young man and asked, “Do you still want baptism?”

“More than anything in the world I want to be a follower of the Lord Jesus and part of his family.”

“So you shall. Come let us join the others.”

Sosthenes had decided they would make as many copies of this letter as he had scribes to take down dictation. The reason was partly because he could not have two dictations going on at the same time, and partly because he foresaw that this letter would become a means of strengthening the brethren in the future when Paul had left them, and there were bound to be some who wanted their own private copies of it.

It took Cephalus and his team two and half days to complete the copies, during this time Paul held discussions with Aquila and Priscilla and a few of his closest associates.

Finally he called Titus and said, “I want you to go with Stephanas and the men from Chloe’s household when they return to Corinth.⁵⁰⁷ You must help them in any way you can, and report back as soon as possible as to how they receive my letter.”

Titus was quiet a moment. He had other plans which he had been wanting to bring to Paul at the right moment. “Brother Paul I have been wanting to talk to you about my parents. I have received a letter from mother that my father is ill and has returned to Crete.”

Paul was concerned. “Is he seriously ill then?”

“My mother writes that he longs to be amongst his own people. I think she feels he has gone home to die. She asks me to come when I can. My wife and children have also moved with them. My mother says they did not like to leave them in Antioch since I had given no indication when I might return.”

Paul was silent.⁵⁰⁸ This was a serious disruption to his plans, with Timothy still away, he relied on Titus’s understanding of his teaching about the Lord’s Way. Finally he said, “My son, I need you to go, because you will give me a full account of what is happening. As you know I had planned travel through Macedonia to visit the churches there before visiting Corinth. When you

⁵⁰⁷ 2 Corinthians 12:18

⁵⁰⁸ Paul: Visits Crete – Titus 1:5

return from Corinth, we could visit Crete. Your parents were always kind in those early years in Antioch, and then return to Corinth.”⁵⁰⁹

Titus’s worried expression cleared. “I know they would be pleased to see you. I don’t think my mother is happy with the move back to Crete, she writes, ‘They are such pagans here!’”⁵¹⁰

Titus left the next morning with Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus. Paul had urged him not to delay in returning. He wanted to finalise things in Ephesus before leaving for extended visits. He was still unhappy that his plans to go to Macedonia were to be further delayed, but he could understand Titus’s desire to see his parents. Paul decided he would show Apollos a copy of his letter to Corinth and discuss some of the problems. Paul felt Apollos’ message of salvation complimented his own. He frowned, it should not have caused division. But then if people wanted to quarrel and form parties, they’d use any excuse! Paul sighed and went to look for Apollos.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁹ This rather tortuous course accounts for the various changes in Paul’s plans, and also the fact that Titus was left in Crete – Titus 1:5 and the fact that Paul changed his plans for visiting Corinth more than once. 1 Corinthians 16:5 and 2. Corinthians 1:16

⁵¹⁰ Titus: Visits Crete – Titus 1:5

⁵¹¹ It is suggested by some scholars that the Epistle to the Hebrews was written by Apollos.

CHAPTER 25: THE DISASTROUS SECOND VISIT TO CORINTH

CE 54 AUTUMN-55 JULY

*2 Corinthians 2:1-4;
Titus 1:5 & 3:12*

While Paul waited anxiously for Titus's return,⁵¹² Artemas of Lystra arrived looking for Timothy.⁵¹³ He brought news that Lois had died and that Eunice wanted him to come home. Paul explained his plans and suggested that since no one was sure where Timothy was at present, he might as well accompany him when he left Ephesus. Rather reluctantly Artemas agreed.

Titus returned from Corinth within the month. His account of the reading of Paul's long letter heartened Paul, but his further report showed that all was not right. He said there were brethren from Jerusalem who seemed to have taken over the running of the church. They expected to be supported by the believers and insisted they were the only true apostles.

Paul and the team consisting of Tychicus, Artemas, Titus, left for Crete almost immediately.^{514;515}

Paul's decision to take Tychicus on this mission was prompted by the desire to have a mature man of strong faith to support him.

Titus was delighted to be reunited with his wife and children. His father's health had improved with the coming of Paul. He was determined to see all his family converted before he 'joined the Lord' as he explained it. The fact that his brothers, cousins and other relatives showed little interest in this new faith, seemed to stimulate him to greater efforts. He looked set to live for a good many more years. Paul left Titus there to help establish a Christian community and he set sail for Corinth.

Eight days later the ship approached the harbour of Lechaion. They could see the temple to Aphrodite on the top of the Acrocorinth gleaming in the sun. In spite of himself, Paul felt vaguely apprehensive. Titus's reports had been positive it was true, but he was sure there would be problems.

Paul and his companions arrived at Titus Justus' house where presently a sober-looking slave opened the door and greeted Paul gravely.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹² Paul: *Waits for Titus – 2 Corinthians 2:12*

⁵¹³ Artemas: *Accompanies Paul in CE 54/55 – Titus 3:12*

⁵¹⁴ Paul & Titus: *Visit to Crete – Titus 1:5*

⁵¹⁵ Tychicus & Artemas: *To Crete with Paul – Titus 3:12*

⁵¹⁶ Titus Justus: *In Corinth – Acts 18:7*

“Is your master at home?” Paul inquired.

“Come with me, sirs, I will call him,” he let them into the atrium, which was cool and withdrew through to the courtyard.

After a time Titius came striding through to greet them. It seemed to Paul his welcome was a little strained.

Paul introduced his two companions, “This is Tychicus of Ephesus and Artemas of Lystra. Are you and your household in health?” Paul embraced Titius and then turned to his companions and said, “This is Titius Justus. I told you about how good he was to me during my last visit.”

“Greetings brothers,” Titius returned Paul’s embrace, “We received your second letter and many of us found it inspiring.”

Paul was quick to pick up the implication, “But not all?”

Titius looked sad, “No, there is much dissension amongst the brethren.”

“Who are those who have caused this division amongst you?”

Titius seemed reluctant to name them and finally said, “They are apostles from Jerusalem.”

There was an awkwardness in his manner that puzzled Paul, “Are they staying with you?”

“No, but they are coming here tonight to hold a meeting. Would you and your companions care to stay?” The invitation was lukewarm to the point of rudeness.

Paul could see the thought worried Titius and he said, “No, my brother, we will go to Chloe’s household and stay there. Then you can arrange for me to meet with these brothers from Jerusalem tomorrow. Where does the church meet for First Day breaking of the bread?”

“There are three or four groups that meet in different homes. Since the troubles last year we seldom come all together for a fellowship meal any more. People prefer to keep to their own group.”

“Surely Christ cannot be divided up in this way?” Paul was horrified.

Titius remained silent and Paul turned to his companions and said, “Come let us go to ⁵¹⁷Chloe’s house and we will sort these things out in the morning.”

Titius watched them go with relief. He could see no way to avoid a very unpleasant scene when the apostles from Jerusalem met up with Paul.

Paul led Tychicus and Artemas out along a wide street towards the eastern end of the city. They turned down a side street and then into a square shaded with sycamore trees. Chloe’s house was on the north side. Paul knocked at the closed door and this time their welcome was much warmer. The servant girl saw them and ran inside calling her mistress. Chloe could be heard

⁵¹⁷ Chloe: Corinth – 1 Corinthians 1:11

saying, “Hush girl, you make it sound as if the Persians were on the doorstep!”

“Oh, my mistress, no! Much better! It’s brother Paul!” The girl’s excited voice reached them through the archway.

Chloe said, “Brother Paul!” And came hurrying to greet them.

When she saw him she again exclaimed, “Brother Paul! Praise to the Lord!”

Tychicus had met Chloe before, she recognized him and greeted him warmly. Paul then introduced Artemus.

“You are all welcome, my brothers! Wait until I send a message to Stephanas.”

“Has Timothy arrived?”

Chloe saw his anxiety and said, “No brother, we’ve not seen him yet.”

Paul’s heart sank, maybe Timothy had encountered grave opposition in Macedonia and was in prison somewhere. Perhaps after a few days in Corinth he should go looking for him.

Stephanas and his wife came round later in the evening and the happiness of their re-union was replaced by the sad news of divisions and acrimony in the church.⁵¹⁸

Paul opened the discussion, “Tell me, who are these ‘apostles from Jerusalem?’”

Stephanas replied, “One is brother Michael and the other is brother Jeshaiiah.”

Anger seems to make Paul’s beard bristle and his eyes flashed, “Michael and Jeshaiiah are not apostles. They stir up trouble and grief wherever they go. What are they teaching the people?” A sudden thought that they might be insisting on circumcision further agitated Paul.

Stephanas replied, “They say they have been followers of the Lord during his ministry on earth, and this makes them true apostles.”

Paul made an angry noise.

Stephanas looked at him a moment and continued, “They say that Jesus was a Jew and we must respect and obey the Laws of Moses. They warn us against newcomers and upstarts, who preach a false gospel.”

“What about circumcision and the halachah? Do they teach that as well?”

Not sure what Paul meant, Stephanas said uncertainly, “No, they don’t force the Gentiles to be circumcised, but they seem to obey the Jewish law themselves.”

“In what way?”

⁵¹⁸ *Stephanas: Corinth – 1 Corinthians 1:16*

“Well they refuse to stay with Gentile families and prefer to eat in Jewish homes, although they will join our fellowship meals.”

“What do they tell you about the Lord Jesus?”

Stephanas looked round at the others and Chloe answered, “Brother Michael is a persuasive speaker. He tells us many of the stories about the teachings and miracles of the Lord Jesus.”

Paul was worried, these men could do untold damage, not by anything they said, but by their attitude and approach to the brethren. He felt sure they were wolves in sheep’s clothing.

Stephanas’s wife’s comment seemed to confirm his suspicions, “We collect at each First Day so these brothers and their wives may carry forward the gospel.”

“They have their wives with them as well?”

“Brother Peter brought Sister Anna with him when he came,” remarked Stephanas. He was obviously confused. Something in the coming of these apostles had increased the divisions in the church, yet he could not see what it was that made him uncomfortable. In some strange way, he felt encouraged by Paul’s obvious antipathy to them.

The next morning Titius sent his servant to tell Paul that brothers Michael and Jeshaiah had summoned the whole Christian community of Corinth to a meeting the following day. Permission had been given for the meeting to be held in the synagogue just after noon. Paul knew he was being manipulated and to be put at maximum disadvantage.

That evening the whole of Chloe’s group met for prayer. The group was united in their desire for love to prevail amongst the Christians.

The next day Paul, Tychicus and Artemas, accompanied by the whole of Stephanas’ and Chloe’s households, arrived at the synagogue to find a large crowd was already milling about outside, many people greeted Paul warmly. It was a joy and surprise to Paul to find his cousins Andronicus and Junias were amongst those present.⁵¹⁹ They managed to whisper that things were very difficult and Paul must be on his guard.⁵²⁰ Several people turned away or pretended they did not see him.

Michael and Jeshaiah, both tall men, were standing in the doorway greeting the people as they entered. There was no way to avoid them. It was not Paul’s nature to avoid an issue. Accompanied by Tychicus and Artemas, and followed closely by his cousins, they mounted the steps.

⁵¹⁹ *Andronicus & Junias: Corinth – Romans 16:7*

⁵²⁰ *There is no hard evidence that Andronicus and Junias were in Corinth at this time. However they were imprisoned with Paul at some stage before he wrote his letter to Rome in CE 56. (Romans 16:7)*

Before Paul could speak, Michael embraced him and said in his rich, mellifluous baritone, "Greetings brother Saul." Jeshaiiah, with less enthusiasm, did the same. They ignored the rest of Paul's companions but turned to greet the people coming behind Paul and his party.

Paul saw how they had managed to take the initiative. He was going to be isolated and made to look insignificant. Physically, as well, they looked the part of learned and respected teachers. Andronicus and Junias sat one on either side of Paul. They knew of his dedication to the Lord Jesus and his courageous preaching throughout all the provinces. Paul's early persecution of the church had deeply hurt and embarrassed them, but his miraculous conversion had delighted them. They talked in low voices exchanging news while the crowd continued to press into the synagogue. It was soon packed to over-flowing. The crush of people and the heat of the day was oppressive. Finally when no more could be accommodated, and the courtyard was also full, Crispus rose to address the assembly.

"My brothers," he began, "I welcome you all today in the name the Lord Jesus."

"Amen." The whole group responded.

Turning to where Paul was sitting he smiled and said, "I greet our brother Paul, who has returned to us. It was he who first brought us the good news of salvation. We know he has been concerned for all those whom he brought to the Lord and we thank him for his letters which have become a source of help and inspiration to many of our people."

Paul was touched by Crispus's remarks. He well knew the difficult position in which he must find himself.

"Since brother Paul first preached the Gospel to us, we have been privileged to have brothers Peter and Apollos visit us. Each one has enriched our knowledge of the Lord Jesus and Apollos particularly was able to show convincingly how Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled all the requirements of the Law and prophecies concerning the Messiah."

And now, thought Paul, how will he introduce these two?

"Our latest visitors, Brother Michael and Brother Jeshaiiah have continued in instructing us and enriching our lives in the Lord. If there have been some of our members who have had doubts between the teachings of all these brothers, you will have these set to rest because our first, much beloved teacher, Brother Paul, and our most recent teachers, who knew and loved the Lord Jesus when he was alive, will now be able to answer any questions you may have for themselves."

Crispus turned to Paul, "I would call on you, my brother to speak to us."

Later Paul would only remember the whole meeting with pain and embarrassment. He spoke warmly and with conviction, reminding them of

the months he was with them and the teachings he gave them. He touched on the matters he had written about, and finally after begging them to preserve the Unity of the Spirit and their common faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, he sat down.

Brother Michael was then invited to speak, and after paying tribute to the words of ‘Brother Paul’, proceeded to destroy all Paul’s creditability without actually mentioning him by name. Michael had gained weight since the Council of Jerusalem, but he was still a commanding figure, with his curly black hair and beard and his dark piercing eyes.

His voice reverberated round the crowded room, “It gives me great pleasure to welcome brother Paul today. His energy and dedication to the Lord Jesus is well known to you all. During our time in your beautiful city, brother Jeshaiiah and I have been well received by the brethren. You have welcomed us and made us feel at home. It is therefore good that in return for your hospitality, we have been able to give you fundamental teaching on the Gospel of the Lord Jesus, the Messiah; the Christ; our Saviour.

“As you know, we accompanied the Lord on many of his journeys when he went about the country of Galilee and later Judaea teaching and healing. We have received our commission to come and teach the brethren from the brothers in Jerusalem, who confirmed us as true apostles, commissioned to go forth in the sacred name of our Lord.

“Some of you may not know what we mean by ‘true apostles’. Our Lord commissioned those of us who had accompanied him during his earthly ministry. He knew there would come false teachers and he wanted to make sure that the teaching given would be only that which he himself gave.

“It has been our sad duty to warn you that there are self-appointed teachers, who come with self-appointed authority to spread a different gospel, a perverted gospel, one which is not in accord with the teachings of our Lord.”

Paul could contain himself no longer, in spite of Andronicus’s attempt to hold him back, he leapt to his feet, “Who are you to judge me?” He demanded.

Everyone turned to look at the cause of the interruption, and some of the officials of the synagogue started to move towards Paul.

Michael, his calm unruffled, “Why does my brother appropriate my words to himself? Perhaps you feel they apply to you?” His voice was silky.

“You know you refer to me. Who else but me brought this church into being? Who has laboured throughout Asia, Macedonia and many other places alone to bring the good news of salvation to all humanity, but me?”

People began to shout support for one side or the other and very shortly there was pandemonium. The officials of the synagogue battled across the room to arrest Paul. Scuffles broke out and blows were exchanged. Michael

and Jeshaiiah remained calm and aloof. It was Paul who was made to look insignificant and foolish.

As the officials took him out to the courtyard, Andronicus and Junias shouted, “You have no cause to arrest this man.” They struggled to protect Paul, and the hazzan said, “Take these two as well.”

The meeting calmed down with the removal of Paul, but people divided into groups and were arguing furiously with one another. Tychicus and Artemas were shocked and only with difficulty were prevented from trying to release Paul along with his cousins.

It gave Daniel great pleasure to have Paul once more in his power. He chained the three men to the wall in the small cell at the back of the synagogue.

In the meantime the synagogue slowly emptied as people drifted off, unhappy and confused not knowing where the truth lay. The officials made sure the Gentiles and even the God-fearers left the premises. No one was allowed to see or speak to Paul. His friends were distressed and alarmed. They could think of no way of helping him.

Shortly, Nathaneal, arrived together with Judas, muddled old Jethro, Caddis and others. A quorum was established, three judges were appointed and a court hearing was convened. Paul and his cousins were brought from the cells and a charge of riotous and disruptive behaviour was brought. Michael and Jeshaiiah’s testimony was considered perfectly clear and adequate and Paul was sentenced to thirty-nine stripes.

Nathanael looked round the court, “As for these other two men it seems to me they are not implicated in the main charge against Saul of Tarsus, may I have your leave that they should be released?”

The members of the court gave their assent. Angry at the summary way they had been arrested, chained up and then released, Andronicus and Junias were conducted to the steps of the synagogue and told to go.

Everything had happened so quickly, Paul was taken out and flogged there and then by Daniel, who was only too pleased to inflict the maximum pain. The three judges read the thirty-nine verses during the flogging. By the end, Paul was hardly conscious. Daniel took him back to the cell and re-chained him to the wall.

Andronicus and Junias took the news of Paul’s trial and sentence to Chloe and Stephanas. The sun was setting when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaius, returned to the synagogue to ask if Paul could be released.⁵²¹ Tychicus and Artemas went with them. Since the sentence was complete, reluctantly Daniel admitted them to collect a barely conscious Paul.

⁵²¹ *Fortunatus & Achaius: Corinth – 1 Corinthians 16:17*

One look at his condition and Stephanas said, “We must get a litter for him.” He thought a moment and then said, “I am sure brother Titius has one which his wife sometimes uses, go and see if he will lend it.”

Fortunatus ran to Titius’s house. When he also heard of Paul’s conviction and sentence, he came over, together with his two slaves and the litter.

Titius said, “Take him to my house. I will get a doctor to look at his wounds.”

They tried to lift him gently into the litter, but Paul cried out as they inevitably touched his bruised and lacerated body. Soon Titius had him installed in bed, and his wife used a mixture of oil and wine to wash him. The doctor came and gave him a draft of poppy extract. When he was as comfortable as they could make him, he finally fell asleep and his friends left him to discuss this disastrous turn of events.

Titius was greatly shocked that the two so-called ‘apostles’ could have provoked an incident resulting in such an unwarranted punishment. He had listened to their teaching with respect, but a small doubt had taken root in his mind. They had been totally unlike Paul in their approach and style. They expected to be supported by the local brethren. They were often overbearing in their manner, and their teachings had brought even greater divisions to the brethren of Corinth.

The men talked late into the night, debating the best plan. Finally Titius said, “I think you should take Paul away for the time being. There is no point in him suffering further insult and possible injury at the hands of his enemies.”

Tychicus remarked, “It is not easy to ‘take Paul away’ if his mind is set on staying!”

Stephanas smiled, “He would listen, if we told him the brethren wished it.”

“Wouldn’t he think we were betraying him too?” Achaius asked anxiously.

Titius said, “The divisions amongst the brethren are so deep, and these two ‘apostles’,” the distaste he had begun to feel for them showing in his pronunciation of the word, “must be persuaded to leave. It would be better if he left the city while we tried to bring back order into the church. We need to start praying that the Spirit of Jesus may once more be restored to us. We must return to our first faith, and the love which brother Paul wrote about in his last letter. Then we will send for him to come again.”

His listeners felt a sense of relief at these words. Stephanas went home, while the others returned to Chloe’s house to report on the events of the afternoon and the decision they had reached with Titius.

The next day Paul was still in great pain, and lay weakly smiling at those who ministered to him. “I am getting too old for these beatings.” He drifted into a merciful sleep.

His friends held further discussions about where they could send him. A suggestion that he returned to Ephesus was turned down by Tychicus, “No, he needs time to rest and recover his strength. Ephesus is not the place for that.”

Once again it was Titius who came up with the answer. “I have a family estate in Illyrium, some way outside of Dyrrhachium I will write to my steward to make you welcome for as long as you wish to stay.”^{522;523}

Stephanas looked at him and asked, “Is it not a long journey, my brother?”

“Most of the journey is by sea, which will give him time to rest and regain his strength, by which time he will be ready to ride out to the farm.”

It took a few days to find a ship sailing up the coast, by which time the brethren most concerned for Paul had persuaded him of the soundness of their plan. Truth to tell, Paul was grateful that they took control. This whole incident had shocked him in both body and soul. He felt deeply wounded and discouraged. The scene in the synagogue replayed itself in his mind’s eye. He could see how many of the people were supportive of that deceptive ‘apostle’ and his friend. Paul turned painfully to the wall and wept.

The ship which they had chosen proved to be slow and smelly, with an undisciplined crew and a drunken captain. The moment it left Lechaion, Tychicus wished they had waited for a better vessel but as Artemas pointed out, they did not have much choice, there were fewer ships sailing north to Illyrium than to the rest of the ports of the Middle Sea. Paul was too sick and depressed to care, so they made the best of it and tried to keep him comfortable and quiet. A difficult job, with the loaded condition of the boat and the number of passengers with their baggage piled around them.

Tychicus’s fears about the ship and its captain were confirmed near the end of the journey. It was a calm sunny day and the sails hung loose from the mast when a sudden squall drove the boat onto some nearby rocks.

Their arrival at Titius’s estate with no baggage and a scarcely legible letter of introduction was greeted with suspicion until Tychicus explained they had been shipwrecked. He recounted how they had been picked up by a vessel sailing to Nicopolis where they had been treated with great kindness by some of the poorer townsfolk. But this event had further weakened Paul and he was now shivering with fever.

⁵²² *Illyrium: Paul’s visit – Romans 15:19*

⁵²³ *See Romans 15:19. (Paul does not say where he went, Dyrrhachium is now Durres (Durazzo))*

It helped them that Titius' agent, Lichas was there collecting rents, he confirmed that the three were friends of their master. Immediately the manner of Aristodemus, the steward became brisk. He ordered rooms to be made ready for them and after further discussion with Lichas, decided he should make clothes and other necessities available for them.

Tychicus was deeply concerned over Paul's condition. His mind seemed obsessed with Michael's belittling of his ministry. Of the way he had been rejected by those he kept calling 'my children in Christ'. Tychicus asked Aristodemus, a grey-headed, tall man of sober habit, if there was a doctor nearby.

"There is no doctor nearer than Dyrrhachmin, but my wife is experienced in herbs and potions and I will ask her to come."

Paul's recovery was slow. His depression would not lift, even when he was once more able to walk around the estate. Finally one day he said, "Artemas, can you find some papyrus? I must write to the church at Corinth."

When Artemas returned Paul's eyes were shut, and without opening them he began, "From Paul, who was called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ, and from our brothers Tychicus and Artemas, to the church of God in Corinth; may God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace."^{524;525}

He stopped a moment for Artemas to catch up and then launched straight into the burden of his heart, "I, Paul, make a personal appeal to you – I who am said to be meek and mild when I am with you, but harsh with you when I am away. By the gentleness and kindness of Christ I beg you not to force me to be harsh when I come; for I am sure I can deal harshly with those who say that we act from worldly motives."

Tychicus, who came upon them at this point, sat down quietly without making his presence known. The morning sun was warm. The flies buzzed round on the paving stones and Paul poured out all the pain and grief of his last visit to Corinth.

"I do not think that I am the least bit inferior to those very special so-called 'apostles' of yours! Perhaps I am an amateur in speaking, but certainly not in knowledge; we have made this clear to you at all times and in all conditions.

⁵²⁴ Paul: 3rd Letter to Corinth – 2 Corinthians 13:1

⁵²⁵ Paul wrote four letters in all to the Corinthians. The first one (mentioned in 1 Corinthians.5:9) is lost. The second one we call 1 Corinthians is intact. The third letter (this one) is thought by some scholars to be partly contained in Chapters 10-13 of 2 Corinthians, and the fourth letter is then thought to be 2 Corinthians Chapters 1-9. The reason behind the joining Letter 3 to the end of Letter 4 is possibly explained by scrolls tending to wear at their ends. If the end of Letter 4 was lost and the beginning of Letter 3 – it might have seemed sensible to the early editor to make one letter from the two.

“I did not charge you a thing when I preached the Good News of God to you; I humbled myself in order to make you important. Was that wrong of me? While I was working among you, I was paid by other churches.”

The pain and the bitterness of his defeat by Michael and Jeshaiiah burned in the words he dictated. He declared, “I will go on doing what I am doing now, in order to keep those other ‘apostles’ from having any reason for boasting and saying that they work in the same way that we do. Those men are not true apostles – they are false apostles, who lie about their work and disguise themselves to look like real apostles of Christ.”

He opened his eyes and saw Tychicus, nodded to him and when Artemas was ready, finished, “Well, no wonder! Even Satan can disguise himself to look like an angel of light! So it is no great thing if his servants disguise themselves to look like servants of righteousness. In the end they will get exactly what their actions deserve.”

Tychicus said, “It’s time for a break and something to eat.”

Paul nodded, got up and went to wash. “He’s not himself,” murmured Artemas. “He is badly hurt and tries to justify himself.”

“Let him get it out of his system. He has kept it bottled up and I think that has contributed to his recent fever. I would be glad if we had some news from Corinth to hear what happened after we left. Lichas could tell me nothing, except to say his master had held many meetings.”

Artemas finished tidying his writing things. He rose and followed Tychicus. He loved Paul profoundly and it hurt him to see the pain in him and record it in the letter.

After they had finished eating, Tychicus left them to carry on. Paul asked Artemas to read the last paragraph and then continued, “I repeat: no one should think that I am a fool. But if you do, at least accept me as a fool, so that I will have a little to boast of. Of course, what I am saying now is not what the Lord would like me to say; in this matter of boasting I am really talking like a fool. But since there are so many who boast for merely human reasons, I will do the same.”

His sense of outrage at the way they had abandoned him for those two false ‘apostles’ made him want to wound his readers and wake them up to the men who had duped them.

“You yourselves are so wise, and so you gladly tolerate fools! You tolerate anyone who orders you about or takes advantage of you or traps you or looks down on you or slaps you in the face. I am ashamed to admit that we were too timid to do those things!”

His bitter sarcasm made Artemas look up, but Paul was staring, unseeing across the courtyard.

“But if anyone dares to boast about something – I am talking like a fool – I will be just as daring. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I. Are they Christ’s servants? I sound like a madman – but I am a better servant than they are!”

He fell silent. When he began again his voice was soft, “I have worked much harder, I have been in prison more times, I have been whipped much more, and I have been near death more often.”

Again he stopped, thinking back.

“Five times I was given the thirty-nine lashes by the Jews; three times I was whipped by the Romans; and once I was stoned. I have been in three shipwrecks, and once I spent twenty-four hours in the water.” He was speaking slowly as he enumerated his sufferings. “In my many travels I have been in danger from floods and from robbers, in danger from fellow-Jews and from Gentiles; there have been dangers in the cities, dangers in the wilds, dangers on the high seas, and dangers from false friends.”

His voice was filled with weariness and deep sadness, “There has been work and toil; often I have gone without sleep; I have been hungry and thirsty; I have often been without enough food, shelter, or clothing. And not to mention other things, every day I am under the pressure of my concern for all the churches. When someone is weak, then I feel weak too; when someone is led into sin, I am filled with distress.” Artemas could barely hear his voice.

He stopped and held his head in his hands. Artemas caught up and sat quietly waiting, pity in his eyes.

“If I must boast, I will boast about things that show how weak I am. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus – blessed be his name for ever! – knows that I am not lying. When I was in Damascus, the governor under King Aretas placed guards at the city gates to arrest me. But I was let down in a basket through an opening in the wall and escaped from him.”

Once more Paul sank into silence. Was all this suffering and loneliness worth it? Everywhere he went he encountered violent opposition. Why only him? Why not Peter and the others? He made a conscious effort to lift his inner eyes to his Lord. He had always accepted it as a privilege to be allowed to share in his sufferings. As he began to give thanks once more for the life and ministry to which Christ had appointed him a picture filled his mind. He remembered a similar time of despair in Tarsus and the vision that had been granted to him.

Suddenly he spoke, “I have to boast, even though it doesn’t do any good. But I will now talk about visions and revelations given me by the Lord.”

Paul had never told anyone of the vision which had carried him through those years. “I know a certain Christian man who fourteen years ago was

snatched up to the highest heaven (I do not know whether this actually happened or whether he had a vision – only God knows).”

Again Paul stopped. He remembered how intensely real it had been. Artemas watched him, and saw joy flood his face as Paul recalled that wonderful moment. “I repeat, I know that this man was snatched to Paradise (again, I do not know whether this actually happened or whether it was a vision – only God knows), and there he heard things which cannot be put into words, things that human lips may not speak. So I will boast about this man – but I will not boast about myself, except the things that show how weak I am.”

Artemas was puzzled. Did Paul really mean it had not been his own vision? Yet the look on his face as he spoke of it, belied that. Sometimes, Artemas thought as he wrote, Paul is odd.

“If I wanted to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be telling the truth. But I will not boast, because I do not want anyone to have a higher opinion of me than he has as a result of what he has seen me do and heard me say.”

Paul heaved a great sigh, and opened his eyes. He caught Artemas’s eye and smiled, “But to keep me from being puffed up with pride because of the many wonderful things I saw, I was given a painful physical ailment, which acts as Satan’s messenger to beat me and keep me from being proud.”

His voice dropped, “Three times I prayed to the Lord about this and asked him to take it away. But his answer was: ‘My grace is all you need, for my power is strongest when you are weak.’ I am happy, then, to be proud of my weaknesses, in order to feel the protection of Christ’s power over me.”

Suddenly the strength of Christ’s love flooded back. The vision of his mission was restored, “I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Tychicus came in at this point and caught the last sentence. He caught also the note of strength and joy which had returned to Paul’s voice. He raised his eyebrows at Artemas, who smiled.

Paul saw Tychicus and said, “Sit down, this won’t take long.”

Tychicus listened and heard once again the grief Paul was feeling over his rejection by the Corinthians and their acceptance of Michael and Jeshaiah. He himself wondered how some of the brethren could have been taken in by these two. They were so self-important, totally unlike Paul. But then Tychicus remembered, there had already been divisions in the Corinthian church, so maybe one group had welcomed the two as supporting their cause. It was a serious situation.

He heard Paul saying he was intending to visit them shortly. He shook his head. That didn't seem wise, at least not if those two false 'apostles' were still there. He wondered what they could do to prevent Paul's premature return to Corinth.

He was lost in thought, when he heard Paul reiterate, "this is now the third time that I am coming to visit you." Really alarmed, Tychicus rose and went out. Where was Paul's good sense?

The next day Paul made Artemas read the whole letter to Tychicus before it was sealed. While Paul rested, Tychicus invented an excuse to take Artemis to see a flock of local goats and then asked. "What is your response to brother Paul's idea to return to Corinth?"

Artemas shook his head, "I think it is most unwise and premature. It seemed to me that brother Titus was going to try and straighten matters out between the different groups."

Tychicus nodded his agreement and added, "I asked Lichas if Michael and Jeshaiiah had left and he said they show no sign of leaving, adding, 'They are too comfortable.'"

"Then how can we prevent him from returning too soon to Corinth?"

"What about Titus?" Tychicus suggested suddenly.

"What about him?" Artemas was muddled by the sudden change of subject.

Tychicus thought for a moment, "What if we suggest he needs Titus to be with him before he returns to Corinth? And what if we suggest that he should not return until we are sure the brethren there have got rid of Michael and Jeshaiiah?"

"Yes, but how will we know when they have gone? Especially if they show no sign of wanting to leave? And how do we get hold of Titus?" Artemas felt this plan had too many holes in it.

"I think brother Paul would agree the brethren in Corinth need to get rid of Michael and Jeshaiiah before he returns. I think also that he would like Titus to be with him." Tychicus thought a moment, "We might be able to stall him from returning until next spring."

"Well, if you think you can do that, good luck to you!" Artemas grinned suddenly, "All the same, I think you are right and it is worth a try."

"I will talk with Lichas, he seems a sensible sort of man and I think we could trust him with a message for brother Titus." With that the two men walked slowly back from the farm.

Tychicus looked for Lichas in the servant's quarters and found him regaling a pretty young kitchen maid with tales of the Corinthian festival to Venus. He jumped to his feet when he saw Tychicus.

“Are you busy?” Tychicus smiled.

“Er, no sir. Can I help you?” Lichas was in his mid twenties and far from good looking but he was quick-witted and pleasant.

“Can you give a message to your master for me?”

“Certainly, sir.”

“We do not want it talked about, can you be discreet?” Tychicus watched him closely for any sign of resentment or venality.

Lichas grinned, “You can trust me, sir,” then he added simply, “My master does.”

“We are worried about brother Paul,” Tychicus confided, “He intends returning to Corinth fairly soon. We feel it would be unwise for him to do so just yet, especially until after the departure of those two men from Judaea. We need to have some means of knowing when they have left.”

Lichas said slowly, “I am not one of you people, but I love my master and I know this new faith means a great deal to him. Might I suggest, sir, that master Paul should wait until my master has held discussions with all the believers.”

“Do you mean they have not met since brother Paul’s beating?”

“They hadn’t when I left. There was much shouting and anger, and I know my master wants those who support the men to get rid of them. So far they haven’t managed it.” Then he added, “Always supposing they wanted to!”

Tychicus felt things had gone from bad to worse, “Is there any way your master could let us know when he thinks the time would be right for brother Paul to return?”

“No problem,” Lichas grinned, “He can send me!”

Paul, who was worried about their lack of funds, came looking for Lichas and found Tychicus deep in conversation with him, “Are you planning to keep me from returning to Corinth?” He was far from pleased.

Tychicus was dismayed to be caught out. He had hoped there would be time for a calm assessment of the situation. He had reckoned without Lichas, who said, “Sir, if you will but have patience, my master will send me to let you know when the two men who caused you all the trouble have left. Until then, he would earnestly recommend that you wait before your return.”

Paul grunted but seemed satisfied for the moment, “I have brought you a note for sister Chloe. She is to contact brother Aquila in Ephesus and ask him to transfer money to your master. Perhaps you could arrange for it to be sent to me here?” He gave a sealed letter to Lichas.

CHAPTER 26: LETTER TO TITUS – RETURN JOURNEY THROUGH MACEDONIA

CE 55 Autumn to Spring 56

Titus 3.12

Lichas departed the next day. The three friends were sitting relaxed on couches in the shade of the inner portico. Paul was beginning to look himself.

Tychicus, after a quick look at Artemas broached the subject that bothered them. “My brother what are you plans when we leave here?”

Paul replied, “I have been thinking and praying about this, Lichas is right that I must wait to hear that the church has got rid of those two trouble-makers for themselves.”

“Have you thought that perhaps while you wait, you could get Titus to join us so that when the time comes, he can go with you?”

The idea had obviously not occurred to Paul, “Titus,” he repeated in surprise, and then slowly, “Well, why not? He would be a great help. Yes, that’s a good idea, I will write to Titus.”

Once more a sense of purpose filled Paul, “Let’s see, there are about two months before the autumn storms. Titus may as well stay as long as he can amongst his own people.” Paul thought, and then said suddenly, “Why don’t we winter at Nicopolis? Titus can join us there.⁵²⁶ Then we would be well-placed to leave early in the new season for Corinth. Yes, I think that is the best plan.” He turned to Artemas, “Fetch your writing things.”

Artemas rose and Tychicus also went out. He thought he might as well write a letter on his own account to tell his family where they were and that he could give them no definite idea when he would return.

It was a short letter but writing it took up most of the morning. Paul laid down clear guide-lines for the behaviour of mature men, women, and that of young people and slaves.

Artemas frowned, how could people like Michael and Jeshaiiah who had actually known the Lord Jesus, profess to be apostles – men sent out to witness to others – and yet be filled with greed and desire for power? Something had gone wrong somewhere. He prayed he would never become complacent and find Satan had taken over once more. He shuddered.

Paul who was stretching asked, “Are you all right, brother?”

⁵²⁶ Paul: Letter to Titus – Titus 1:1,5. Paul winters at Nicopolis – Titus 3:12

Artemas shook his head as if to clear it, and smiled, “Yes, thanks be to the Lord Jesus Christ, I am fine.” Then he added, “But I was just wondering where people like Michael and Jeshaiiah went wrong?”

Paul looked grim. “We are all tempted, and often fail to do the things we know we should, and find ourselves doing that which we know we shouldn’t. Brother Peter often warns ‘Your enemy, the Devil, roams round like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Be firm and resist him.’ I can think of no better advice, except our Lord’s own words ‘Watch and pray that you do not fall into temptation.’”

Paul was quiet and then he roused, “Come, let me finish off. When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me in Nicopolis, because I have decided to spend the winter there.” He remembered two of the brethren he had met in Crete and added, “Do your best to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos to get started on their travels, and see to it that they have everything they need. Our people must learn to spend their time doing good, in order to provide for real needs; they should not live useless lives.”

There, Paul had said it again ‘doing good’. Perhaps that was the secret, when you were intent on doing good there was less opportunity for Satan, whereas if you just sat around singing praises to God, you could still fall back into evil ways. Once more Artemas shook his head – that did not explain Michael and Jeshaiiah. He would have to pray over this.

Aristodemus promised to send the letter with a reliable slave to Dyrrhachium the next day. Paul gave him two drachmae to pay the captain of the ship.

Summer was drawing to a close and they decided to leave all together for Nicopolis. From there Tychicus would carry on to fetch Titus. Artemas was to go to Corinth and see how matters stood there with the off-chance that he might find Timothy and if not he could at least bring Paul some much needed funds. However if Artemas found Timothy then they should return to Lystra, in which case he would write to Paul telling him how matters stood in Corinth.

Paul was reluctant to let them both go, but decided it would be better to know what was happening first hand than to spend the winter in uncertainty.

Nicopolis was a Roman town and Paul had found a Jewish family willing to take him in. The family who had befriended them after the shipwreck had begged him to return, but winter in two rooms with four young children was not to be thought of. However Paul spent much time visiting with the families they had met while he waited.

The first news to reach Paul was a letter from Artemas, brought by Lichas. Its contents upset Paul beyond measure and for two days he lay with pounding head unable to eat. Finally on the third day he recovered and re-read the letter.

From Artemas and Timothy to our brother Paul, greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I arrived in Corinth to find brother Timothy had been working among the brethren trying to bring reconciliation to the different factions in the church here. The two trouble-makers had left before he arrived and I am told that they went to Macedonia.

Brother Timothy and I are leaving immediately for Ephesus. We hope to be home in Lystra before winter sets in. May the Lord continue to bless your work. I include the money you asked for. Artemas.

When Paul looked for Lichas, he discovered he had left to go on to Illyrium.

By mid-October Tychicus had returned with Titus who reported his mission had gone well. His parents were happy and his wife had settled down in her new home. The churches they had established were flourishing.

Tychicus read Artemas's letter, "This is bad news," he looked up at Paul, "how does this affect your plans?"

Paul shrugged, "My inclination is to hurry back to Corinth to strengthen them, but I fear for the churches in Macedonia, and think that maybe we should go there first."⁵²⁷

"You still don't really know how things stand in Corinth," Titus remarked slowly. Tychicus's account of Paul's treatment there, had appalled him.

"There's not much we can do until the end of the winter storms, let us pray for the Lord's guidance," Tychicus suggested.

During the winter they continued to discuss the problem, slowly a plan began to emerge. Finally they agreed Titus should go to Corinth, while Paul and Tychicus went to Macedonia. The decision brought peace to their troubled minds.⁵²⁸

As soon as they heard the mountain passes were open, they made preparations to leave. Paul's final words to Titus were, "Come to Ephesus with news as soon as you can, my son." They hugged each other and Titus watched them shoulder their traveller's bags and start off.

The weather was still cold and snow lay deep in the shadows on the passes, but they arrived in Berea one evening a week after they had left Nicopolis and made their way to the home of Pyrrhus.⁵²⁹ It was five years since Paul preached there but Pyrrhus, Sopater and their households were

⁵²⁷ Paul: *Reverses plan to go to Corinth – 2 Corinthians 2:1*

⁵²⁸ Titus: *Goes to Corinth CE 56 Spring – 2 Corinthians 2:13*

⁵²⁹ Pyrrhus: *Berea – Acts 20:4*

delighted to greet him once more.⁵³⁰ Sopater was married with his own household. His young wife had just given birth to their first son.

Since they did not intend to stay long Paul asked Pyrrhus if a meeting of the elders could be managed the following morning, with a gathering of the whole church in the evening. While his visitors washed and settled in, Pyrrhus sent messengers to the various households. Paul and Tychicus had reckoned in this way any opposition from the Jews would be minimised.

Early the following morning, the seven elders arrived, greeting their visitors with great warmth. When they had settled in Pyrrhus's rather small room, Paul smiled and said, "I greet you all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. I have prayed constantly that you would be strengthened and grow in love and fellowship and now I can see and hear from you how things are going."

Hegelochus, the eldest of the group, was a man of wisdom and learning, opened with, "We have tried to hold to the teachings we received from you. We have kept contact with the brethren in Thessalonica and welcomed many visiting brothers, including brother Peter and his wife, and brother Timothy, who taught us how to deal with problems that arose amongst us."

"Have your numbers grown?"

"Many of us have relatives in the surrounding countryside, and although we have met with great opposition in some quarters, in others, people welcome the teaching about the Way. There are small groups which meet for praise and worship in several of the villages."

"What about your young men? Do they fall into temptation? How do you deal with offenders?" Tychicus asked.

Trygaeus replied, "It is hard for our young men when those with whom they attend the gymnasium take part in the local religious festivals. They are often led astray."

"Yes," agreed Pyrrhus, "We have decided that those who celebrate the local festivals cannot come to our fellowship meals. Sometimes this breaks families apart, and we find it difficult when it is our own children."

Tychicus remarked, "This affects nearly every family where some members are converted and some reject the Gospel of Christ."

Pyrrhus said, "Often it is the mother who comes to the Lord, and then she suffers greatly when she refuses to sacrifice to the household gods. Many husbands beat their wives to force them to honour his ancestors. If they should be divorced, many women have no means of support and nowhere to live, since their own pagan families will refuse to take them back."

⁵³⁰ *Sopater – Son of Pyrrhus: Berea – Acts 20:4*

“So then what do you do?” asked a thickset young man in workmen’s clothes.

They all looked at Paul, who said, “If a Christian is married to an unbeliever, and they are prepared to go on living with them, they are not to divorce. The unbelieving spouse is made acceptable to God by being united to the believer. Also their children are acceptable to God through the believer. However if the unbelieving spouse wishes to leave, then let it be so.”⁵³¹

“But what of a husband who does not want to divorce his Christian wife and beats her because she is a Christian?” The thickset young man persisted.

“Yes, what do you do then?” asked another thin man.

“There is no easy answer to this, but wives must submit to their husbands. If we share Christ’s suffering, we will also share his glory,” Paul said slowly. “I think that what we suffer at this present time cannot be compared at all with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.”⁵³²

There was a moment of silence. They all knew that this was an on-going problem, not only in Christian households, for women had no legal rights apart from their husbands, who exercised total control over both wife and children.

“There is another matter we must discuss, my brothers,” Paul changed the subject. “Have you had a visit from two so-called ‘apostles’ called Michael and Jeshaiiah?”

The men in the room looked at each other. Pyrrhus said, “I have not heard of any such men. Why?”

“They spent some months in Corinth and caused deep divisions between the brethren. Divisions which even now have not been healed. They claim to be apostles but they come to teach you a different gospel from the one you received from me. Have nothing whatever to do with them, for they are dangerous men. They seem to be shepherds but they are ravening wolves.” Paul’s voice was bitter.

Hegelochous asked, “Do they come with letters of introduction? It would be difficult for us to refuse them hospitality if they came with the commendation of our brothers in Jerusalem.” He looked shrewdly at Paul, who seemed to have a personal animosity against them.

Paul returned Hegelochous’s look with piercing eyes, “You are right to suspect my motives, for I suffered greatly at their hands, but they have been causing trouble in one way or another for many years. It was they, and the party they represented that went round the churches in Asia insisting the Gentiles should be circumcised.” There was a shocked murmur.

⁵³¹ 1 Corinthians 7:12-16

⁵³² Romans 8:17-18

“After the Council of Jerusalem seven years ago, this matter was decided once and for all, so now they go around pretending to be apostles and expecting the churches to provide for them. They favour the richer brothers. They also are happy to receive support from the local synagogues and play up to the Jewish community. They are dangerous men, for they soon set people against each other, and then they pose as the source of the only ‘true teaching.’” Paul’s voice conveyed intense distress.

Hegelochnus nodded. He knew how thin the line was between doing things for the love of God and doing things to advance one’s own personal position. He had been a city magistrate for many years and could discern the public servant from the man of ambition. He knew Paul did nothing for his own personal advantage.

“Is there any other matter you wish to raise?” asked Paul. There were one or two questions which he dealt with, then he said, “Later this year I want to return to Jerusalem and after that I must go to Rome. Timothy has already explained to you about the collection I want all the churches to make for the brethren in Judaea. It is important for the brethren there to know of the love which you have for the Lord Jesus.”

Pyrrhus said, “We take a collection each first day as you told us. We should be glad to be able to send it soon.”

“How will we know when you will leave for Jerusalem?” a frail, thin man spoke.

“I must return to Corinth as soon as I have word from them, thereafter I will either come myself, or send one of my helpers to inform you of the time of our departure.”

That evening there was a fellowship meal. Paul and Tychicus both spoke. It was a time of joy, and songs of praise filled the home of Hegelochnus. The next morning they left.

They arrived in Thessalonica two evenings later and went immediately to the home of Jason, where they were warmly welcomed by Jason’s wife.⁵³³ She took them through to where Jason was sitting reading in the warm sunlit courtyard.

He rose when he saw his visitors, “Brother Paul!” His voice and manner were cool.

Paul said, “Peace be on this household,” he embraced Jason, adding, “Is all well with you, my brother?”

“Peace be with you too, my brother. Yes, all is well.”

“This is Tychicus of Ephesus.”

⁵³³ Jason: *Thessalonica – Acts 17:5*

“Peace be with you, my brother.” Jason was courteous but distant.

Paul held his gaze for a long moment before Jason dropped his eyes. Paul smiled and said, “You have had visitors, my brother.”

Surprised, Jason looked back at him, “What do you mean? We always have visitors,” but he looked away again.

“My brother, you have been visited by those two false ‘apostles’ Michael and Jeshaiah.”

“Er, yes. How did you know?”

“Because they make it their business to go round living it up and leaving dissension and grief behind them.”

It was as if a weight was lifted from Jason. He straightened his shoulders and said briskly, “Come, you are tired from your travels and I keep you standing.” He turned to his wife, “Mosina, get the guest room ready, and send Xanthius to help our brothers wash for the evening meal. I can see there is much you have to tell, and I need to hear.” His manner was no longer distant.

While the servants served them the evening meal, the men shared their news.

Jason started by saying, “Timothy spent some weeks here last year. His visit was much appreciated by us all. He is a steady young man and keeps his head when confronted with problems. He told us you would be coming and we were looking forward to this. Then late last year, we welcomed brothers Michael and Jeshaiah, men who told us they knew and loved the Lord Jesus and had been apostles from the beginning.” Jason stopped, embarrassed.

“Not like me.” Paul offered bitterly.

Jason nodded. “They gave us serious warnings about your ministry and how you perverted the true gospel. We found this very difficult to understand. You had brought us to the Lord, we had received the Holy Spirit and been baptised. We had appointed elders and our fellowship in the Lord was growing.”

He stopped and his listeners sat quietly. They could see the conflict still going on in Jason and knew how the local church must have suffered as well.

“There was much disagreement amongst us. These two men seemed so plausible, and spoke with such authority, but -” he fumbled for words to describe the situation, “We saw none of the fruits of The Spirit. There were no healings, no spiritual gifts, only arguments and fights. Those who had been taught by you refused to believe you had taught a false gospel. Then there were those of us who tried to keep the peace.” He gave a heavy sigh. “They encouraged us to give to the collection they were taking to Jerusalem, and because we had already been collecting for this, we gave them the money.

Some of us felt they had no intention of taking the funds back to the brethren in Jerusalem.” Jason’s voice conveyed the discouragement and pain he felt.

Paul was outraged, “You mean you gave them all you had been collecting? Timothy told you I would be coming.”

Jason looked even more desolate. “My brother, we have bitterly regretted our decision but somehow at that time it never occurred to us these were false apostles.”

“What made you suspect them, then?” Paul was still angry.

“They were so unlike you. They demanded the best of everything, and often ignored the poorer members of our group while favouring the more important ones. Then some of us remembered how you had worked to support yourself while you were with us and you always had something to give to the needy. We remembered our Lord’s saying, ‘By their fruits you shall know them,’ and the fruits of these men were dissension and strife. We had a meeting of elders and decided we would suggest they move on. It was difficult to get rid of them but finally they left.”

Jason was quiet for a moment. Then he said sadly, “The results of their visit lives on, members have fallen away, and our fellowship meals no longer fill us with joy.”

A silence fell on the room.

“What was the reaction of the local synagogue?” asked Paul.

“Oh, they loved them! They were invited to speak at the Sabbath services, in fact the Jews who caused so much trouble in your last visit, have come to accept the Christians as just another Jewish sect and while not exactly welcoming the uncircumcised Gentiles, they are prepared to accept them as God-fearers. I suppose you could say that is the one good result of their visit.”

Paul grunted and Tychicus remarked, “I don’t believe good can ever come out of evil.”

Paul shot him a quick glance and fell thoughtfully silent for a moment. Then he said, “Call the brethren together.”

“Would tomorrow evening be too soon?”

“The sooner the better,” replied Paul, “We do not stay long, I want to return to Ephesus where I hope to have news of Corinth, for I need to return there. Then I will go to Jerusalem with the collection from the churches.”

The following evening everyone who could, crowded in Jason’s house. A sense of relief had swept through the Christian community. People who no longer came to the fellowship meals were there; those who had been divided into pro-Paul and anti-Paul factions remembered how it had been Paul himself who had originally taught them. The elders had to move the meeting

from Jason's home. Torches were lit and the whole company moved to the shore where they settled down. Paul stood on a rock.

He stretched out his hand and began, "May God's grace be with you all. You have come through a time of severe testing. Our Lord himself said, 'Be on our guard against false prophets; they come to you looking like sheep on the outside, but on the inside they are really like wild wolves.'⁵³⁴ I want to encourage you, my brothers. There is no condemnation now for those who live in union with Christ Jesus. The law of the Spirit, which brings us life in union with Christ Jesus, sets us free from the law of sin and death."

Paul was speaking slowly and clearly, "Those who live as their human nature tells them to, have their minds controlled by what human nature wants. Those who live as the Spirit tells them to, have their minds controlled by what the Spirit wants."

An almost audible sigh of relief swept through the crowd. Men who had been standing, sat down. Those who had felt bitter, relaxed and those who had drifted away because of the dissension in the church, began to feel they had been too hasty.

"To be controlled by human nature results in death; to be controlled by the Spirit results in life and peace. And so a person becomes an enemy of God when is he is controlled by his human nature; for he does not obey God's law, and in fact he cannot obey it."

Paul looked around at the quietly listening crowd and said fiercely, "Those who obey their human nature cannot please God."

His voice softened, "But you do not live as your human nature tells you to; instead, you live as the Spirit tells you to – if, in fact, God's Spirit lives in you. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ lives in you, the Spirit is life for you because you have been put right with God, even though your bodies are going to die because of sin."

Paul remembered the confusion amongst the Thessalonians concerning the second coming. He himself had been so sure the Lord would return shortly and they would all be caught up in the glory of this time, but during his last illness, he had suddenly felt his mortality. He had been grappling with the thought that he himself might die before his Lord returned. It had caused him great turmoil of mind and spirit in those months he was in Illyrium.

He had worked through the doubts and now he declared, "If the Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from death, lives in you, then he who raised Christ from death will also give life to your mortal bodies by the presence of his Spirit in you."

⁵³⁴ *Matthew 7:15*

He raised his voice, “Those who are led by God’s Spirit are God’s sons. For the Spirit that God has given you does not make you slaves and cause you to be afraid; instead, the Spirit makes you God’s children, and by the Spirit’s power we cry out to God, ‘Father! My Father!’ God’s Spirit joins himself to our spirits to declare we are his children. Since we are his children, we will possess the blessings he keeps for his people, and we will also possess with Christ what God has kept for him; for if we share Christ’s suffering, we will also share his glory.”

Jason turned to his fellow elders and saw by the light of the rising moon that they were held in the grip of Paul’s teaching. He breathed a prayer of thanks that Paul had turned their thoughts away from the dissensions that had split them and pointed them directly to Christ.

“My friends, do not return to grieve over your past failures, let the Spirit help you, weak as you are. There are times when we do not know how we ought to pray; then the Spirit himself pleads with God for us in groans that words cannot express. And God, who sees into our hearts knows what the thought of the Spirit is; because the Spirit pleads with God on behalf of his people in accordance with his will.”

Paul stopped and once more gathered their full attention, “We know that in all things God works for good with those who love him, those whom he has called according to his purpose.” He spoke slowly and except for the gentle lapping of the waves on the shore, there was no sound from his listeners as they held onto every word. “Those whom God had already chosen he also set apart to become like his Son, so that the Son would be the first among many brothers. And so those whom God set apart, he called; and those he called, he put right with himself, and he shared his glory with them.”

He paused and said, “In view of all this, what can we say?” Suddenly it was as if Paul was caught up once more in the great vision of a new people united through Jesus Christ and able to overcome everything. “If God is for us, who can be against us? Certainly not God, who did not even keep back his own Son, but offered him for us all! He gave us his Son – will he not also freely give us all things? Who will accuse God’s chosen people? God himself declares them not guilty! Who, then, will condemn them? Not Christ Jesus, who died, or rather, who was raised to life and is at the right-hand side of God, pleading with him for us. There is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord.”⁵³⁵

Paul fell silent and the crowd, caught up in the vision he had conjured up by his words, remained quiet and still. Then softly a voice began to sing,

⁵³⁵ *Most of Romans Chapter 8*

“Praise the Lord!
 You servants of the Lord,
 praise his name!”⁵³⁶

The words were taken up and a great song of thanksgiving rose from the whole crowd which ended on a note of great joy. Then everyone was laughing and hugging each other. People who had been alienated sought one other out and before a word was spoken, they were embracing, tears streaming down many cheeks.

The elders came up to Paul and hugged him, thanking him for bringing new life to the church. Paul was tired, but there was something else he wanted to put right.

He stood up on his rock, waiting for silence, and finally, when people saw him standing as if he wanted to continue speaking, they gradually hushed the chatter around them, until quietness fell once more on the gathering.

“There is something which troubles me deeply,” Paul began, “I have been told that the two false apostles took the collection you had been making for the brethren in Judaea. Timothy will have told you how important I consider this gift from the churches of the provinces. It had been my intention that when the time came to return to Jerusalem I would come myself to take up your gifts. Now I feel that this is not enough. You must appoint one or two of your number to accompany me, bringing your own gift to Jerusalem when I go. In that way everyone will know that the gift you send comes from you and you will have a first hand report that this money is safely delivered. I also want some of you to meet those whom Jesus himself appointed as apostles, and for them to know that this gospel has found life in you.”

A great cheer greeted Paul’s words, and people began to fumble for any loose coins in their purses and press them on the elders. It was a spontaneous gift of thankfulness.

Paul refused to take any money with him, but when Aristarchus suggested that he and Gaius⁵³⁷ should accompany him back to Ephesus, Paul welcomed the suggestion. They left the next day for Philippi, spending the night in Apollonia on the way.

The party which now accompanied Paul was happy and full of joyous expectations. They arrived in Philippi in high spirits. Paul took them through the forum and straight to Lydia’s home. The door was flung open. The elderly slave recognized Paul immediately and invited the whole party into the entrance hall. He went to call his mistress.

⁵³⁶ Psalm 113

⁵³⁷ Acts 19:29 These two men were with Paul during the riots in Ephesus. Acts 27:2 States that Aristarchus comes from Thessalonica.

Lydia came smiling with both hands outstretched, Paul gave her a warm hug, “Blessings on you and your household Euodia, is all well with you?”⁵³⁸

“Welcome and blessings on you my brothers. Yes, all is well with us.”

“This is Tychicus of Ephesus and Aristarchus and Gaius of Thessalonica.”

“Greetings my brothers.” Lydia smiled warmly at them, come in and have something to eat and drink. Leave your bags here.” She turned and called, “Eryximachus take these brothers to wash and then bring wine and dried fruit for them.”

Presently they were seated and Lydia told Paul the local news. “You know of course that Agariste died just over three years ago?”

Paul nodded, “Yes, I had heard. What is Luke doing now?”

“He assists his father and treats private patients around town.”

“And the church? “

Lydia beamed, “It continues to grow, not so fast, but steadily. We welcomed Timothy, and he stayed for some weeks. He’s a serious young man, but steady and full of good sense.” She echoed the comments of others and Paul was pleased for his young protege.

“Have you had other visitors?” There was anxiety in Tychicus’s voice.

“Oh, yes, let’s see. Brother Peter was here about four years ago, and then brother Apollos came for a short time. I’m afraid he was over the heads of most people.” She thought a moment, “That’s about all, of course we exchange visits with Thessalonica and even Berea fairly regularly.”

Slightly puzzled Tychicus asked, “Did you not have a visit by Michael and Jeshaiah of Jerusalem?”

“Oh, that rubbish.” Lydia’s voice was full of scorn, “We soon saw through them and sent them packing.”

Her listeners laughed and Paul asked, “How did you manage that?”

Lydia’s eyes twinkled, “You’ve had trouble with them elsewhere?”

Anger filled Tychicus’s face, “You have no idea how much trouble! They caused great dissension everywhere they’ve been and in Corinth they were the cause of brother Paul being beaten in the local synagogue.”

Lydia looked shocked, “Well, it helped that we had warning of them from Thessalonica. Our elders met and decided no one would give them hospitality.” She laughed, “My, how they tried to worm their way in, but they only knew the name of brother Clement, and you know how wooden and stupid he can appear!⁵³⁹ They had to pay for their own board and lodgings so

⁵³⁸ Euodia: Philippi – Phil 4:2

⁵³⁹ Clement: Philippi – Phil 4:3

they left!” She laughed again. Her amusement spread to her listeners and they laughed with her.

She turned to Paul, “There is someone who longs to talk with you! May I send you up to brother Luke?”⁵⁴⁰

“Luke?” Paul’s tired face lit up, “I long to see him too, but what of his parents?”

“Oh, you needn’t worry about them, his father maintains a courteous relationship with the brethren, but his mother has joined us! If you are rested, I will send one of the servants to carry your bag up the hill.” She turned to the Tychicus and Titus, “Will you stay here, my brothers?”

Paul arrived at Luke’s home just as the sun was sinking behind a spreading bank of cloud. Eulalia was delighted to see him and said, “You are an answer to prayer, Luke has been longing to see you again.” Eulalia showed Paul to his room saying, “They will be home soon. Lucian was operating at the Roman camp and Luke was assisting.”

Paul took the opportunity to rest and filled with a sense of peace, he fell asleep.

Presently he awoke to hear Luke saying, “Paul, here? Where have you put him?”

Eulalia tried to hush him and said, “He’s sleeping, don’t wake him.”

Paul stood up and put on a fresh robe.

Tears ran down their cheeks when the two men embraced. Paul had forgotten Luke’s quiet strength and how often without saying very much he had imparted a spirit of warmth and love.

“Oh, how pleased I am you have come at last.” Luke wiped his eyes on the back of his hand. “When Timothy called round last year to say you would be coming, I thought it would be soon. As the months went by I hoped you might be planning to spend the winter here. And still you didn’t come, I began to worry something had happened to you.”

“My plans were changed a number of times.” Paul followed Luke into the comfortable living area where Lucian was already pouring himself a beaker of wine and water.

Lucian turned and greeted him cordially, “You have made one person very happy,” he smiled. “I’ve never known Luke to be so impatient, at one stage he even suggested he would come and look for you.”

Paul looked enquiringly at Luke, who smiled rather sheepishly and said, “Well, yes, I have begun to feel the Lord wants me to write an account of his life and ministry.”

⁵⁴⁰ Luke: Philippi – Acts 16:16

A look of astonishment filled Paul's face, "Whatever for?"

"Well, it seems to me that those who knew the Lord Jesus are all getting older. It is now twenty-five years since he returned to the Father and each new group of converts has to receive the story of who he was and what he did at second and even third hand. There are some very strange stories going around and I think we need to make sure that converts hear the right ones."

Paul looked at him for a long moment. His mind went back to the time he was suffering from fever in Illyrium and the knowledge that he might die before the second coming had filled him with fear. He thought of all the places that had still not been reached by the gospel and he began to see the sense of Luke's concern.

"You are right, my brother. I have always felt it is enough that people know the Living Christ and become part of his Living Body. I forget that they like stories about Jesus. I suppose it is not enough just to give them his own words." Paul was thinking as he answered Luke. Suddenly his mind cleared, "Yes, you are right, truly the Lord speaks to each one differently so that his full purpose may be achieved!"

Luke's face cleared. He had not been too sure of Paul's response.

"What do you plan to do about it?" Paul asked.

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about."

They hardly noticed when the servants brought in the meal, Eulalia and Lucian sat quietly listening. Lucian knew that he would be losing his son to this man. He had come to respect Luke, both as a doctor and as a man of quiet strength. Agariste's death had saddened Luke, but Lucian felt it had made him a better doctor. He would sorely miss his son's help in his medical practice. Yet as he listened to the two men talking, he realised there was something here that was both a mystery and a challenge. He was not a religious man. His mind had been trained to analyse and reason. The fanciful goings on of the gods seemed irrelevant to the daily needs of the people he treated. He saw Paul as an educated man, with a mind even more finely trained to reason than his own, yet his faith in this Jesus Christ motivated all he did.

To the surprise of everyone, Lucian suddenly said, "Socrates said that a man who brings forth and nurtures true goodness will have the privilege of being beloved of God, and becoming, if ever a man can, immortal himself.⁵⁴¹ Is this what you are saying?"

Paul was delighted that his host had finally been prompted to ask such a question. He paused a moment, thinking and then said, "There is a conflict in man between his body and his mind. His mind approves of one thing and his

⁵⁴¹ *The Symposium by Plato – Penguin Classics 1951 Page 95*

body betrays him and keeps him a prisoner to the law of sin. Thus I do not do what I would like to do and instead I do that which I hate. In my own strength I cannot be truly good, but thanks be to God, I am rescued from this body that is taking me to death, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and through him, I become a new man.”⁵⁴²

Lucian felt this was a bit above him, yet it challenged him to think further. There was something about this ‘Jesus Christ’ that did change people. He had seen the changes in both Luke and his own wife. There was a joy and serenity about them. Paul was different, he radiated a power and conviction which Lucian had found intensely off-putting at their first meeting. Now he was not so sure. There were others he knew, who had apparently ‘met’ this dead person, and been radically changed. He said no more and both Luke and Paul left him to his own thoughts.

Paul and his party waited until after the fellowship meal on the first day of the week before departing. Luke was unable to accompany him, but promised as soon as he had finalised his affairs in Philippi, he would join Paul in Ephesus.

⁵⁴² *Romans 7:14-25*

CHAPTER 27: IN PRISON IN EPHESUS⁵⁴³

CE 56 April – May

Acts 19.23-Ch 20.1

They arrived in Ephesus just over a week later. It was late afternoon when the men walked past the synagogue. Their timing could not have been worse. On the top of the steps with Alexander, stood Michael and Jeshaiah.⁵⁴⁴ Paul realised that Alexander must have been made president of the synagogue in his absence. The combination of the three men filled Paul with foreboding.⁵⁴⁵ Trying to look as unconcerned as possible, Paul's party walked on past. Tychicus turned at the end of the road to go home, taking Titus with him. Paul, Aristarchus and Gaius and made their way to the home of Priscilla and Aquila.

There was a warm and loving welcome waiting for them. To Paul's joy and relief Timothy was there also. They embraced, Paul thought Timothy was looking thin and Timothy was shocked at the signs of suffering and aging he noticed in Paul.

"How did you leave your mother?" inquired Paul.

"She was sorry for me to go, but she is in good health. The brethren in Lystra see she has plenty to do instructing the young women in the Way."

Later during the evening meal, Priscilla said suddenly, "Brother Mark is in Ephesus."⁵⁴⁶ I think you know him?"

Paul's eyes lit up, "John Mark? Where is he staying? Is he well? When did he come? What brought him to Ephesus?"

Priscilla laughed and replied, "He's staying with brother Rufus, they appear to be old friends. He seems well. Let me see, what were the other questions?" She stopped with a twinkle in her eyes. Paul saw she was teasing him and waited.

⁵⁴³ The evidence of this imprisonment is circumstantial viz;

* Acts 19:21 Paul made up his mind to travel through Macedonia

* Acts 19:29 The mob seized Gaius & Aristarchus, 2 Macedonians travelling with Paul (Luke doesn't actually describe where they had been.)

* Paul wrote 3 letters: to Philemon, Colossians and Laodiceae (lost?) while in prison see (Philemon v.9; Colossians 4:10; Ephesians 3:1.)

* Aristarchus and Paul were in prison together (Col 4:10)

* 2 Corinthians 1:8 Paul says that in Asia (Ephesus) 'We gave up all hope of staying alive.'

* Paul was also imprisoned in Caesarea and Rome, but since the occasion for 2 of the 3 letters is the return of the slave, Onesimus, to his master, a look at the map will indicate Ephesus is a far more likely place of sanctuary for an escaped slave than Rome or Caesarea.

⁵⁴⁴ Alexander: Jewish leader in Ephesus – Acts 19:33

⁵⁴⁵ Paul: Returns to Ephesus – Acts 19:23-29

⁵⁴⁶ Mark: In Ephesus – Colossians 4:10

“Oh, yes, he arrived early this month and he was looking for you!”

A happy smile lit up Paul’s face, “Praise God, blessed be he! I will go round to see him in the morning.” Then the light died out of his face, and Paul asked Aquila, “How long have Michael and Jeshaiiah been in Ephesus?”

Aquila looked puzzled a moment, “Who are they?”

“Are you not going to synagogue?” Paul was surprised.

“The Jews have become very antagonistic to those of us who follow the Way. I think they are planning something.”

Paul turned to Timothy, “Did you meet these two during your travels?”

“I arrived after they had left Corinth, but the church there was still in disarray and I heard of the shameful way you were treated. They seem to me to be dangerous men.”

Paul turned to Aquila, “These are the men who originally travelled through Galatia after Barnabas and I had been there, insisting the Gentiles should be circumcised. They are indeed dangerous trouble-makers.”

Aquila’s suspicion that the Jews were planning something was quite correct. During Paul’s absence the antagonism of the pagan community for the Christians had subsided. But the Jews were determined they would distance their community as far as possible from the Christians to make sure if there was trouble their community would not be included. Alexander, a coppersmith, had been appointed as leader of the synagogue. He was a rich man with good contacts amongst the city’s magistrates.⁵⁴⁷

The coming of Michael and Jeshaiiah brought further fuel to stoke the fires already kindled against Paul, and when Paul and his companions had walked past the synagogue, the leaders amongst the Jewish community decided to act quickly before word of their intentions leaked out.

The following evening Ephaphros, a member of the church at Colossae, arrived.⁵⁴⁸ With him was a slave in his early twenties. With something obviously troubling him he spent the evening closeted with Aquila. When Paul heard of the problem, he offered to accompany him to Tychicus’s home. Aristarchus decided to go with them. The three men together with the slave, were just walking out at the end of the road when a troop of city guards met them.

Surprised but not alarmed, Paul stopped when the officer ordered him, but when he saw he was to be shackled he demanded, “On whose authority and what charges are you arresting me?” One guard hit him across the head with the butt of his spear. No one spoke. Paul’s two companions and the slave were also roughly secured in chains.

⁵⁴⁷ Alexander: Coppersmith in Ephesus – 2 Timothy 4:14

⁵⁴⁸ Ephaphros: From Colossae – Colossians 4:12

Indignantly Paul spoke again to the officer, “It is obviously me you want to arrest, so release my companions, they are visitors to Ephesus.”

For the first time the officer grunted, “So much the worse for them,” and with that gave the order to march.

John Mark and Rufus were making their way to the home of Priscilla and Aquila when they passed the city guard with the prisoners going in the opposite direction. With shock they saw that one of the prisoners was Paul. Mark was just about to call out, when Rufus held his arm.

“Who are those men with Paul? Don’t call out or we might also be arrested. Let us go quickly to Aquila and find out what has happened.”

Alarmed and worried they arrived breathless at their destination. The servant who opened the door was annoyed to be brushed aside as they rushed through to the workshops at the back. To their surprise all was quiet and orderly, with Aquila bending over a bolt of new material, talking quietly to one of his workers.

Rufus burst out, “What has happened? Why has brother Paul been arrested?”

The blood drained from Aquila’s face and he held on to the man near him. “What did you say?” He could barely speak.

Rufus saw with increasing alarm the effect his news had on Aquila. “As we were coming here, we passed a troop of the city guard, and they had Paul and two or three other men shackled together.”

“Call Priscilla,” Aquila ordered faintly and sank onto a stool. Mark ran to the kitchen and ordered the maid to bring some wine and water.

Priscilla arrived and put her arm round him, “Are you all right, my husband?” She looked at Mark and Rufus.

They again described what they had seen. Priscilla’s practical mind saw the many implications of these arrests. She said to Aquila, “My husband, we must call the elders together.”

Aquila nodded, “Yes, you are right, send out the servants and call a meeting immediately.”

Timothy heard the raised voices and came to see what the noise was about. The news was so unexpected, he swayed and Rufus put out a hand to steady him.

It was still before noon when the elders arrived at Aquila’s house and were taken to the main room. The shock and consternation of the news filled every face. They had time to do some fruitless speculation before Aquila asked Rufus and Mark to repeat what they had seen.

Then Tychicus said slowly, “If they are arrested, someone must have laid charges against them, but what possible charges have they against brother

Paul, and why pick up Aristarchus and whoever the other man was and his slave? Does anyone know who he is?"

Aquila said, "I can't remember his name, but he was from Colossae and was looking for you."

"A man with a slave?" Tychicus was puzzled, "Was his name Philemon?"

Aquila shook his head, "No, it was nothing like that."

Rufus was impatient, "Let me go round and see what the charges are. At least the governor of the prison will have to tell us that."

Herodian said, "Let's hasten slowly. There is a lot more to this than meets the eye. Since Alexander was made president of the synagogue he has been planning something with some of the city elders. Brother Paul's preaching last year worries many of the citizens because they fear it will affect the feast of Artemas next month."

"But have you had trouble with either the Jews or the pagans since Paul left?" asked Mark.

"No, but I think there is a conspiracy here between some of the members of the synagogue and the city fathers. We all know of the growing opposition to the Christians and I'm particularly afraid for brother Paul." Ampliatus spoke for the first time.

"I agree with brother Herodian that Alexander has been planning something," Aquila said.

"The coming of Michael and Jeshiah may have precipitated action against brother Paul," Tychicus said slowly.

There were cries of protest.

"What possible charges have they against brother Paul? He's been away for nearly a year," Rufus remarked.

Tychicus looking grave said, "Most of you have not heard the full details of the terrible trouble brother Paul encountered in Corinth. Of course, you have known there has been dissension in the church, but when we arrived these two self-styled apostles had wormed their way into a position of leadership both in the church and amongst the Jews. They persuaded the Jews to beat Paul. This on top of what had gone before, threw the brethren into complete turmoil and brother Titius arranged for us to go to his estate in Illyrium. He suggested Paul would have time to recover and the brethren would have time to restore their fellowship. Wherever those two men have gone, they have left conflict and trouble behind."

Herodian looked grim, "And now they are here in Ephesus?"

Tychicus nodded, "When we arrived in the afternoon, we saw Michael and Jeshiah on the steps of the synagogue talking with Alexander."

“Alexander!” Herodian said, “Now you have the connection with the city authorities.”

Aquila nodded his agreement. Epaenetus looked puzzled, “What do you mean, what’s the connection?”

“Alexander is on the Guild of Coppersmiths, and you know how powerful this is. Over the past two years they have been increasingly worried that the growth of the church is undermining the worship of Artemas and will affect their profits.” Herodian looked deeply worried.

Epaenetus said, “But he is a Jew and I thought Jews would never worship idols.”

“He is a Jew and you are right he could never make idolatrous images,” answered Aquila, “But he has had no love for the Christian gospel and he was last year’s president of the Guild of Coppersmiths. I expect he makes a good profit during the feast of Artemas.”

“If brother Paul has been arrested, I must see him,” Timothy had stood up unable to bear all the talk and no action. “I want to go to the jail and see if he is there.”

Aristobulus, a wine merchant with contacts in many of the rich and powerful households of Ephesus spoke for the first time. “You know my brothers, we must go carefully in this matter. Brother Paul has some powerful friends amongst the Asiarchs, but he also has many powerful enemies. If he has been arrested, and we go about it the right way, we may be able to get him released.” He turned to Timothy and said kindly, “It won’t help him if you rush into something and stir up the authorities still more. You may even end up in jail with him.”

“Then at least I could serve him there.”

Aquila turned to him, “Gently, my son, we must act wisely. It will not serve the church if there are wholesale arrests. Go to Priscilla and ask her to call the sister’s together to arrange for food to be sent in. Tell her not to act until we have decided what is the best thing to do.”

Glad to have something to do other than listen to endless discussion, Timothy went out.

Rufus watched him leave then said, “You know, we need to find out why brother Paul is arrested and what the charges are. I think I should go round and see the captain of the prison guard. Then at least we can decide what can be done to help the brothers with him.”

“My brother, if you don’t mind me saying it, I think it would be wiser if you who are Jewish do not expose yourself to the authorities.” Aristobulus remarked.

The other Gentile brothers nodded agreement and then Ampliatus said, “I would be willing to go, if someone will come with me.”⁵⁴⁹

Epaenatus said, “I will come with you. They will be in the common cell, but if we pay the jailer he will provide a separate room for them.”

They quickly made a collection and handed it Ampliatus.

Tychicus said, “Let us pray for guidance .”

There was a moment of silence before Tychicus began, “We give thanks to you, O God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. For in union with Christ you have blessed us by giving us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly world. Even before the world was made, You have already chosen us to be your own, through our union with Christ.⁵⁵⁰ And now Lord we ask you to stretch out your hand to defend and protect our brothers who have been arrested and to give us courage and boldness to stand up against the Devil’s evil tricks. Let us put on God’s armour now, then we will be able to resist the enemy’s attacks and hold our ground.⁵⁵¹ To him who by means of his power working in us is able to do so much more than we can ever ask or even think of: to God be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus for all time for ever and ever.”⁵⁵²

The brethren said “Amen.”

Heartened by the prayer, they embraced each other before Ampliatus and Epaenetus left to approach the prison authorities. They neither felt very confident of the role they had chosen.

In the meantime Paul and his companions were shackled against the wall in a long cell already full of prisoners. Men lay in filthy conditions, some of them with suppurating shackle sores. The stench was indescribable, a long ditch ran the length of the room which was full of urine and excrement. This was washed out once a day by specially designated prisoners, but the floor where they lay was also damp and soaked in urine. Those prisoners that had any clothing were worse off than those who were naked because the material soaked up the filth. The two men with Paul and the slave were separated as the jailer shoved them in where he could, freely using his whip to create enough space for yet another body.

The hours of that miserable day dragged by. While they could, they remained standing or leaning against the walls, but the time would come, they knew, when they would fall asleep and sink to the filthy ground. The only light came through the bars of the door and so darkness fell long before the sun had set. They lost all count of time.

⁵⁴⁹ Ampliatus: Member of Ephesian Church – Romans 16:8

⁵⁵⁰ Ephesians 1:3-4

⁵⁵¹ Ephesians 6:10 -

⁵⁵² Ephesians 3:20-21

Ampliatius and Epäenetus arrived at the city jail as the sun was sinking over the harbour. The gate was shut and they had to shout to get a guard to open it. When they walked through they asked for the prison governor, only to be told he was out. They then asked for the jailer and were taken to a room outside the cells.

The jailer, a huge man, running to fat, scowled at them. Ampliatius spoke with more confidence than he felt, "We have come to see on what charges our brother Paul and his companions have been arrested."

The man spat, "I don't arrest criminals, I only make sure they don't escape before they get sentenced to the circus," he spoke with a thick, coarse accent.

"Are they in the common cell?" asked Epäenetus.

The man scratched his stomach and spat again.

Ampliatius tried again, "Do you have private cells for paying prisoners?"

Surly and silent, the jailer put out his hand. Ampliatius counted out some coins. The jailer looked at them and spat again. Ampliatius added another two coins, then the jailer turned and entered the common cell.

It was nearly sunset when the jailer and two guards went through the heavy barred door and without a word unshackled Paul, Aristarchus, and Ephaphros.

As the men stood blinking in the light of the setting sun, they heard a voice saying, "My brothers, thank God we have found you."

They turned and found Ampliatius and Epäenetus waiting for them. The prisoners held back from hugging them, aware they were stinking and dirty, but the two men warmly embraced each one before turning to the jailer and saying, "Well, where are you going to put them?"

The jailer pointed to a row of cells across the courtyard. They walked across and found an empty room which was at least dry.

Ampliatius said, "Do you know on what charges you are being held?"

The three men looked at one another and shook their heads. Just before they entered the cell, Ampliatius managed to tell them the elders would be meeting again in the evening. He looked at Paul and Aristarchus, saying over the jailer's shoulder, "I will try to discover the charges. We will be back as soon as we can."

The jailer slammed the door and shot the bolt home. Ephaphros shouted through the grill, "What about my slave?"⁵⁵³

"What about him?" The jailer turned.

"Surely you have no charges against a slave who only arrived with me a few days ago. If I am to be jailed, he can wait on us." Ephaphros spoke with

⁵⁵³ Ephaphros: Jailed with Paul – Philemon 23

the conviction of someone totally convinced of his own innocence and mistaken arrest.

“He may be required to be put to the question.” The jailer, surly as he was, could see these were men of good standing, and felt uneasy. There was something going on here he did not understand. These were not common criminals.

Ephaphros saw the man’s uncertainty and said, “Before you put him to the torture, you can ask me anything you want. I have nothing to hide.”

The jailer grunted and left them without saying anything, but presently the door re-opened and the slave in question ran to Ephaphros and flung himself at his feet. “I will do anything for you my master.”

Ephaphros was embarrassed, “Yes, well, you can serve us while we are shut up in here. I gave my undertaking you would not run away, but since you’ve already run away once, it seems likely you will do so again.”

Paul and Aristarchus listened to this exchange with a good deal of interest.⁵⁵⁴

Paul asked, “Who is this man?”

Ephaphros replied, “I found him helping unload a wagon of amphorae outside a wine shop and recognized him. He belongs to Philemon, one of the elders of our church in Colossae.”

“How did he come to be in Ephesus?” Aristarchus asked.

“That’s what I wanted to know,” replied Ephaphros. “He better explain it himself.” He turned to the slave still crouching at his feet. “Come on Onesimus, tell these brothers why you ran away.”⁵⁵⁵

The slave made no effort to rise. He was plainly terrified. The punishment of an escaped slave was severe. He spoke in such a low voice they strained to hear him. “I was going to seek sanctuary at the temple of Artemis here in Ephesus, when my lord Ephaphros saw me.” He stopped. “I was hungry and hoped to earn a few leptas.”⁵⁵⁶ He fell silent.

“Well, come on. Did you run away from your master?” Aristarchus demanded.

Onesimus nodded miserably, and then volunteered, “It was the biggest mistake I ever made. I wish I could go back.”

“Why did you run away in the first place?” Paul’s voice was gentle.

The young man looked up at the new speaker and saw an older man. Later he would see signs that he had been badly beaten at some time.

⁵⁵⁴ Aristarchus: *In jail with Paul – Colossians 4:10*

⁵⁵⁵ Onesimus: *Escaped slave – Philemon 9*

⁵⁵⁶ *Lepta is what was called the ‘widow’s mite’ in Mark 12:42*

“I fell asleep when I should have been working, then I woke up and saw I had ruined a whole vat of wool, I was afraid,” his voice dropped.

Ephaphros said, “I take it you ruined a batch of wool you were supposed to be dyeing.”

Onesimus nodded, “It was a special order, I over-boiled the wool and it felted in the vat.” His voice sank to a whisper. “I never thought what running away would mean, I just thought of the beating I would get so I just grabbed my cloak and sandals and ran away.”

“It’s lucky I found you before you became enslaved to the goddess,” remarked Ephaphros.

The days passed and fell into a routine. Onesimus would bring them water in the early morning and help them wash. They would then have a time of prayer. Soon the jailer saw he could trust them and would leave the door of their cell open. They then moved into the middle of the courtyard so other prisoners could hear them sing and pray. Some of the guards would hang around listening, so Paul began to preach and the others would give their testimonies. After one of these sessions, Onesimus suddenly fell on his knees before Paul and asked for baptism. Ephaphros raised him to his feet and hugged him.

At midday two of the brothers would arrive at the prison with food which had been prepared by the women. The jailer let them in and for a while they could sit and talk. Ampliatus explained how Aristobulus was in touch with the Asiarchs to find out what the charges were against Paul his companions. So far little had been discovered. No one was talking.

Another day Nereus came with Epaenetus. He told them how Priscilla called together the women, including his sister, Julia and many others. They shared in providing the food, but the twin sisters, Tryphaena and Tryphosa⁵⁵⁷, insisted on preparing it at their home – each day they sent their love and prayers for the swift release of the prisoners.

Ephesus was beginning to fill up with athletes, actors, traders, pilgrims, sightseers and travellers who made a point of arriving in good time for the numerous events which took place in the Roman month of May during the festival of Artemis. The temple to the goddess Artemis was famous all over the world for its size and beauty.⁵⁵⁸ Not even the Parthenon in Athens could compare with it. Artemis was particularly sacred to women and unlike some of the rites in other cities, the Ephesian rites were not wildly orgiastic. Women who were unable to fall pregnant came to the festival, young women

⁵⁵⁷ Tryphaena means ‘dainty’ and Tryphosa means ‘delicate’. The root of their names means ‘live luxuriously’. They indicate a noble Roman family. They were probably twin sisters or close relatives. (International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia Vol 4 Page 928)

⁵⁵⁸ Artemis: Goddess of Ephesus – Acts 19:28

ready for marriage also came. Those who had survived difficult child birth came to give thanks to Artemis.⁵⁵⁹

Discreet enquiries on behalf of the prisoners only confirmed their fears that there was a conspiracy to silence Paul and frighten the Christians. Narcissus had approached his fellow Asiarchs, but there must have been powerful forces at work because he could not discover the charges against Paul, nor who had brought them. As the days went by, the brethren were increasingly uneasy that no trial was planned and the men would be taken to the arena for the wild animal spectacles towards the end of the month, but surely they could never send Paul, a Roman citizen to such a fate?

The brethren prayed continuously for their release. In the meantime the prisoners themselves now had two rooms for their use and had the free run of the prison courtyard. Provided they had only two visitors at a time, they could see whom they liked. Luke had arrived in Ephesus and was a constant visitor.

Each evening Ephaphras spent a long period in prayer. Often in agony of spirit, he would pray aloud and Paul could hear his concern for his family and the Christian community in Colossae.

It was during the second week of their imprisonment that Ephaphras spoke to Paul about Onesimus's future. "What will happen to him when we are released?"

Aristarchus, who overheard remarked grimly, "What will happen if we are not released?"

Paul had not seen the urgency of the situation. He believed they must be freed since there was no proper charge against any of them, and especially nothing against Aristarchus and Ephaphros. "You are right my brothers, we must decide what is the Lord's will in this." He called to Onesimus who was busy washing some clothes. "My son, it is time you returned to your master. It is not right for me to use your services when you need to make your peace with your brother in Christ whom you have wronged."

Onesimus went white, "Have I displeased you in something I have done?"

Ephaphras said, "We have no way of knowing how long we will be held in jail. I am troubled that if the authorities discover you are an escaped slave, you will be sent to the arena next month. It would be better if you returned now and made your peace with brother Philemon."

"I fear to return, he will punish me." Onesimus was horrified at the thought and distressed also by leaving these new friends he was serving.

"My son, I will write to your master and tell him you now are a servant to Christ Jesus," Paul assured him.

⁵⁵⁹ For various details of the Artemisia see *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, and *Cults of the Greek States*.
L.W.Farnell M.A published Oxford at the Clarendon Press 1896

Ephaphras expressed his own concern, “My family will be looking for me to return soon, and I had promised I would visit the churches in Laodicea and Hierapolis. Archippus was coming with me.” He thought a moment, “It would greatly encourage the brethren in Colossae if you wrote to them as well, they have had reports about you and respect what they have heard. You could perhaps give them advice on some of the issues which are causing dissension amongst them.”

He had Paul’s full attention, “What are those?”

Ephaphras hesitated, “Do you know how the churches in Colossae and Hierapolis came into being?”

“No,” said Paul. “I just know that there are groups who have become believers.”

“I will tell you how they came about, then you will understand why we are in need of help,” replied Ephaphras.

“I had been attending the synagogue in Colossae from time to time. I had no desire to become a Jew, but I found the ethical teachings of your people refreshing. Then on a business visit to Ephesus I heard people talking about this dynamic new man, lecturing at Tyrannus’s Hall. At first I wasn’t interested, but one day Stachys, who is a distant relative of my wife’s, insisted I come with him to hear you lecture.”

Aristarchus was grinning.

“You were speaking about your own people. Obviously this was one of a series of lectures because at first I couldn’t make out what it was all about. Then you said such a surprising thing, ‘How I wish with all my heart that my own people might be saved!’ I can tell you that made me sit up and take notice! I thought all Jews were automatically saved because they were ‘God’s people’ and they only had to obey the Law! But no, you said that while they are deeply devoted to God, their devotion is not based on ‘true knowledge.’ Then you said they didn’t know about God’s way of putting people right with himself.⁵⁶⁰ Well, you could have fooled me. The way they talk in the synagogue at Colossae, no one but the Jews know the true God. Then you said the most amazing thing, ‘Christ has brought the Law to an end, so that everyone who believes is put right with God,’ and you added, ‘If you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from death, you will be saved.’⁵⁶¹ Now you had me completely fuddled. Who was Jesus?”

His listeners laughed.

Ephaphras grinned back, “I had to listen a whole lot more before I discovered who he was, and it was really Stachys who explained the

⁵⁶⁰ Romans 9, 10 & 11

⁵⁶¹ Romans 10:9

significance of what brother Paul was talking about. At any rate after that whenever I could, I would come to listen to you preaching. Then I started going with Stachys to the fellowship meals and finally I asked for baptism from brother Timothy. This took about a year, because I come to Ephesus fairly regularly by way of trade. It was after this that I began to share what I heard with Philemon and his wife, Apphia. Soon we had a little group going. But who was I to teach them about a Jewish Saviour? It seemed very presumptuous but I did the best I could. Then I met brother Apollos in Ephesus and asked if he wouldn't come and tell us more. So he preached in the synagogue and suddenly many of my Jewish friends joined us. So our group grew. But you know how it is, with no one to guide us, people seem to think anything goes."

Paul, who had been listening intently, "What do you mean?"

Ephaphras paused a moment and then said, "It is difficult to explain exactly, but there were a group of Jews belonging to the synagogue who insist that it was through angelic beings that the Law was given. If people break the Law, we are brought into bondage to these beings and the only way to placate them is by practicing asceticism. Now I have never heard you talk of such things, but these brothers insist we must not eat certain foods or do certain things, so we can gradually be freed from the material world. We will finally become 'enlightened' and then we are transported from the material to the spiritual world, from the domain of darkness to the realm of light. Quite honestly I don't understand them, and what they teach doesn't seem anything like the simple truth that I have come to know about the Lord Jesus, that through him, I can be reconciled to God."⁵⁶²

Paul looked at Aristarchus, "Have you heard this kind of nonsense too?"

"Not exactly, but some Jews say that Jesus must be inferior to the angels because he was made to suffer and died, whereas angels, who are God's holy messengers, are forever immortal and neither suffer nor die."

Paul made an exclamation of disgust, "These are only elemental spirits and have no share at all in Christ, who is the very image of God." He turned to Ephaphros, "Yes, my brother it would give me great pleasure to write to the brethren at Colossae."

Paul sent a message that same day, asking Timothy to come and bring his writing materials. Later that afternoon Paul dictated the letter to Philemon. He discussed with Timothy who might be available to accompany Onesimus back to Colossae.

"I'll talk to Demas, he was saying he would like to visit some of the other churches."

⁵⁶² See *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* Vol 1, page 734

“Talk also to Tychicus, he has great spiritual wisdom, and maybe he would be the right one to deal with this matter.”

Timothy nodded and gathered up his writing materials, “Have you all you need?” He looked anxiously at Paul. Yet the older man did not seem to be chafing at his imprisonment.

Paul smiled and said, “All I need is for you to return tomorrow to take down a letter for the brothers in Colossae.”⁵⁶³

When Timothy returned the next day he said he had spoken to both Demas and Tychicus and they would be coming down to see him later on. By the time Julia and Priscilla brought their food for the day Paul was well on into his theme. Timothy was glad to take a break while Priscilla regaled the prisoners with the news.⁵⁶⁴

Later during the heat of the day, when everyone took time off to rest, Tychicus and Demas arrived together and discussed at length with Ephaphras the problems encountered amongst the brethren in Colossae. Then they widened the discussion to the believers in Laodicea and the need to give them encouragement.

“While you are writing to Colossae, it looks as if you should also write to these other churches,” remarked Tychicus to Paul.

“Brother Paul is really writing a letter on Onesimus’s behalf. We feel he should return as soon as possible to brother Philemon, especially as our own future is so uncertain,” Ephaphros explained.

“Even so,” said Demas, “If someone is taking a letter to Colossae, it seems logical to include Laodicea, you have to go through there anyway.”

“Are you able to go?” Paul asked.

“Much as I would like to, I don’t think I can leave at this time.” Demas spoke reluctantly. He hoped Paul would not question him too closely on why he needed to stay.

Tychicus said, “I would be free to go, if you felt I was suitable, maybe Timothy could come too.”⁵⁶⁵

Paul shook his head, “Perhaps you could find someone else, but it is my intention to return to Corinth as soon as Titus brings news of the situation there. I would like Timothy to come with me.”

“Will you write to Loadicea, then?” Tychicus asked.

“If there is time, yes,” answered Paul, “But I think you should plan to leave in two or three days time. Ask Timothy to come back later this afternoon, we will finish the letter to the brethren in Colossae by tonight.

⁵⁶³ Paul: Writes letter to Colossae – Colossians 1:1

⁵⁶⁴ Timothy: Writes letter to Colossae for Paul – Colossians 1:1

⁵⁶⁵ Tychicus: Takes Paul’s letter to Colossae – Colossians 4:7

Then we can start one to the Laodiceans. In the meanwhile you might look to who could accompany you to Laodicea.”

“Please give them my greetings,” said Demas, as they rose to go.⁵⁶⁶ They hugged each of the brothers before walking to the guard at the gate, requesting to be let out.

When Timothy returned later to continue writing, to Paul’s surprise and pleasure, Mark came with him. “I thought if he got tired of writing, I could give him a rest.” Mark smiled. “Tychicus says you have another letter to write and you want him to leave as soon as possible.”

It was indeed getting late when Paul came to the final greetings, “Our dear brother Tychicus, who is a faithful worker and fellow-servant in the Lord’s work, will give you all the news about me. That is why I am sending him to you, in order to cheer you up by telling you how all of us are getting on. With him goes Onesimus, that dear and faithful brother, who belongs to your group.”

Paul looked across where Onesimus lay rolled up in a cloak. Onesimus turned when he heard his name and in the dim light, Paul could see a broad grin spread across his face.

“They will tell you everything that is happening here. Aristarchus, who is in prison with me, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas.”⁵⁶⁷

Mark nodded his thanks as Paul added, “You have already received instructions to welcome Mark if he comes your way.” Perhaps Mark could go with Tychicus, the thought crossed Paul’s mind. He saw Timothy was ready for him, what else must he say? Oh, yes, “Joshua, also called Justus, sends greetings too. These three are the only Jewish converts who work with me for the Kingdom of God, and they have been a great help to me.”

Epaphras said, “Please convey my greetings to the brethren.”

Paul nodded and continued, “Greetings from Epaphras, another member of your group and a servant of Christ Jesus. He always prays fervently for you, asking God to make you stand firm, as mature and fully convinced Christians, in complete obedience to God’s will. I can personally testify to his hard work for you and for the people in Laodicea and Hierapolis. Luke, our dear doctor, and Demas send you their greetings.”

Paul turned to Epaphras, “Is there anything else we should mention?”

“I was planning to visit Nympha in Laodicea on my way home from Ephesus. I had asked Archippus to go there in the meantime and give them

⁵⁶⁶ Demas: Sends greetings to Colossae – Colossians 4:14

⁵⁶⁷ Mark: Sends greetings to Colossae – Colossians 4:10

support and teaching, but I am worried he may have felt he couldn't go alone."

"Who is Archippus?" asked Paul.

"He helps me in preparing people for baptism. He is not a great preacher, but he is loving and supportive and has a gift for explaining exactly what being a follower of the Lord Jesus requires, particularly to people with a pagan background."

Paul thought a moment and continued, "Give our best wishes to the brothers in Laodicea and to Nympha and the church that meets in her house. After you read this letter, make sure that it is read also in the church in Laodicea."

Then he added, "At the same time, you are to read the letter that the brothers in Laodicea will send you." He paused for Timothy to catch up, "And say to Archippus, 'Be sure to finish the task you were given in the Lord's service.'"

He looked at Epaphras who nodded and smiled, "That should take care of everything, thank you."

"Here, give me the pen and let me write my name." Timothy handed him the pen and moved the table he was writing on for Paul, who added; "With my own hand I write this: Greetings from Paul. Do not forget my chains! May God's grace be with you." He handed the scroll back to Timothy, "There, tomorrow we will start a letter to Laodicea, God willing. Go now my sons, it is late."

It was indeed late, sounds of revelry and drunken laughter could be heard outside the prison. Timothy was grateful for Mark's company as they asked to be let out of the jail.

Paul had felt extremely tired by the time Timothy left. He rolled himself up in his cloak and lay down on his sleeping mat but sleep evaded him. His body ached and his head, he now noticed was pounding.

The next morning Timothy arrived early to find Paul shivering miserably. He took one look at him and said, "I will call brother Luke," he turned to leave.

"No! No! Wait!" Paul struggled to sit up, "We must write the letter to Laodicea so Tychicus can leave as soon as possible."

Timothy looked doubtfully at him, and Aristarchus said, "You need to rest, my brother. You know these fevers are dangerous to you."

Paul tried to rise, but fell back shivering and exhausted. Timothy hesitated no longer, "I will fetch Luke."

Too sick to protest further, Paul said weakly, "ask Tychicus to come too. He can write to Laodicea for me. I will just tell him what needs to be said."

Timothy hurried round to where Luke was staying and told him of Paul's fever.

When he returned with Tychicus it was obvious to everyone that Paul was in no condition to tell him anything. He hardly seemed to be aware of his surroundings.

Tychicus knelt next to Paul and took his hand, which felt hot and dry, Paul did not stir and Tychicus looked anxiously at Luke, who said, "I have given him something to reduce the fever and make him sleep. Aristarchus tells me he was ill at the end of last year. These fevers are dangerous to a man of his age."

Timothy asked, "Will he be all right?"

"If nothing more occurs to worry him and cast him down, he should recover. He will be as quiet here as anywhere and you can all help to nurse him. Give him plenty of water, but nothing to eat until his fever abates. Then Priscilla's team can use their skills to cook simple strengthening meat broths."

"What about the letter he wants written?"

"You can see he won't be writing anything for some days." Luke replied.

Timothy looked at Epaphras, "What shall we do, my brother? Do you think Tychicus must take Onesimus and leave? Or should they wait?"

"Did he say what he wanted written to Laodicea?" asked Tychicus.

Timothy shook his head, "I think he only thought of writing a separate letter to Laodicea when he heard brother Ephaphros say brother Archippus of Colossae was to have gone to Laodicea and meet him there. Perhaps he thought since you have to go through there on your way to Colossae, you might as well take a letter to them as well. He tells the brothers in Colossae to exchange letters with the Laodicean brothers."

"Do you think that together we can prepare a letter, and perhaps by the time it is finished, he may be able to approve it?"⁵⁶⁸

Timothy looked doubtfully at Tychicus. "I suppose we could try."

"In that case let's go and get started."

They left and Luke told Onesimus to fetch some lukewarm water. Making sure the rest of his body was well covered, he showed him how to wash and dry each limb in turn, legs first and then his arms.

⁵⁶⁸ *The Letter to the Ephesians is unlike Paul's own style, which is crisp and to the point. The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia quotes A.M.Hunter as saying in Ephesians the style is "massive and ponderous with the pressure of heaped synonyms, the piling of defining genitives, and frequent amplifications of individual words and thoughts," and "The marvellous spiral of Ephesians 1:3-14 is probably without rival in Greek literature." However all the way through, there are direct quotes from Paul's letter to the Colossians.*

Luke then told Aristarchus how to mix the dose for the medicine he was leaving, telling him to repeat the dose at midday and in the evening. He promised he would return later in the day.

During the next two days, while Paul was lying desperately sick, Timothy and Tychicus wrestled with the letter.

The day they started the letter the festival to Artemis began and the noise of the grand procession of the goddess around the city made letter-writing difficult. Aquila's house was fortunately off the main thoroughfare, but it seemed as if only the Jews and the Christians were avoiding the crowded streets. The goddess was taken from the great temple on a waggon drawn by stags and accompanied by the whole hierarchy of her servants, preceded by heralds and followed by the priests, eunuchs and virgins. Drummers and flute players accompanied her together with the priestesses, trumpet players, acrobats. The goddess entered the city through the Magnesians gate and all those who were visiting the city for the festival joined in the procession singing her praises and dancing. They turned towards the theatre before leaving the city by the Coressian Gate and returning to the temple. The end of the procession passed long after the goddess had returned to the temple, such were the crowds following. The shouting and singing became mixed with the drunken songs of those who honoured Dionysus rather than the Great Mother, and so the city was given over to carnival and pleasure.

Against this background of noise Tychicus asked Timothy, "Have you got the letter there that he wrote to Colossae?"

Timothy went to fetch it from his room and handed the rolled scroll to Tychicus, who opened it and said, "You better start as he did here, 'From Paul, who by God's will is an apostle of Christ Jesus.'" He stopped and looked at Timothy, "I see he's included you in the opening greeting. Do you want to add your name as well?"

Timothy shook his head without answering. Tychicus nodded and went on, "To God's people who are faithful in their life in union with Christ Jesus: May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace."

Tychicus read the beginning of the letter to the Colossians and then closed his eyes. He was silent a long time, finally, without opening them he began slowly and thoughtfully. Timothy was easily able to keep up. As the letter developed, Timothy marvelled at the power of Tychicus's imagery and the way he took Paul's themes and richly embroidered them. The sounds of revelry outside could not penetrate the tranquillity of spirit which filled the two men as they became engrossed in their work.

Late on the afternoon of the second day, having checked yet again that he had not left any vital points from Paul's letter, Tychicus added the substance of many of his homilies about putting on the whole armour of God. "So stand

ready, with truth as a belt right round your waist, with righteousness as your breast-plate, and as your shoes the readiness to announce the Good News of peace. At all times carry faith as a shield; for with it you will be able to put out all the burning arrows shot by the Evil One. And accept salvation as a helmet, and the word of God as the sword which the Spirit gives you. Do all this in prayer, asking for God's help. Pray on every occasion, as the Spirit leads. For this reason keep alert and never give up; pray for all God's people."⁵⁶⁹

Tychicus stopped and Timothy, his hand flying across the papyrus, came to the end, put down his pen and lent back and smiled at the elder man. "Do you think he will mind that last piece?" Tychicus asked.

"You know he won't." Timothy grinned back, "It will really stir up anyone who hears it!"

"Come then, let's go and see if he is well enough to listen." They left and making their way through the crowds, walked out to the prison. The usual payment gained them entrance and they went to Paul's room, where they met Luke just coming out. He shook his head and put his finger to his lips.

"He has just fallen asleep. I don't want him disturbed."

"Is he any better?" Timothy asked anxiously.

"He's very weak, but he is able to take a little broth and if nothing else happens to upset him, he will improve slowly."

"We have drafted a letter to the brethren in Laodicea and would like Paul to hear if it is what he wanted," Tychicus remarked.

"Come early tomorrow, he will be rested and be feeling better," Luke advised.

The next morning Timothy and Tychicus once more presented themselves at the prison to find Paul's bed had been put in the sun. He looked extremely weak but when he saw them his eyes lit up, "Come, my brothers, I hear you have been writing to the brethren in Laodicea, get a stool and read it to me."

Timothy grasped Paul's hand and anxiously searched his face.

Paul gave a weak smile, "No! I am not yet going to join our Lord Jesus! He still has much work for me!"

Onesimus brought benches and Aristarchus and Ephaphras gathered round to hear Timothy reading the letter. When he got to the end no one spoke. They were all deeply moved.

Then Paul put out his hand to touch Tychicus and said quietly, "Thank you my brother, the Holy Spirit truly has spoken through you," he looked at Timothy, "Have you got your pens?"

⁵⁶⁹ Paul often repeats his imagery in his letters, but not this one, of the whole armour of God and it seems possible that it belonged to whoever wrote this letter that we call 'Ephesians'.

Timothy nodded and proceeded to take his writing materials out of his bag.

“Just add, ‘and pray also for me, that God will give me a message when I am ready to speak, so that I may speak boldly and make known the gospel’s secret.’” Paul was suddenly overcome by a fit of coughing which left him breathless and weak. Onesimus ran to fetch some water boiled with thyme, which he helped Paul sip. Paul lay back with his eyes closed for a moment. “For the sake of this gospel I am an ambassador, though now I am in prison. Pray that I may be bold in speaking about the gospel as I should.”

Paul then turned to smile at Tychicus before continuing, “Tychicus, our dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord’s work, will give you all the news about me, so that you may know how I am getting on. That is why I am sending him to you – to tell you how all of us are getting on and to encourage you.”

He once more shut his eyes and lay a few moments, then with new strength he added the closing words, “May God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give to all Christian brothers peace and love with faith. May God’s grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with undying love.’ There now, that’s enough. When do you plan to leave?”

Tychicus was just about to reply when the doors to the courtyard were thrown open and the jailer came in with the officer of the city police. He came over to the group gathered around Paul, “Which of you is Paul of Tarsus?”

Paul raised his hand, “That’s me.”

“Aristarchus of Thessalonica?”

Aristarchus replied, “That’s me.”

“Ephaphras of Colossae?”

“That’s me.”

“Well, you are all free to go. Charges have been withdrawn. I suggest you all leave the city and return from whence you came.” He turned and marched out.

The brethren looked at each other in astonishment.

Aristarchus remarked, “I wonder what charges have been withdrawn, since we’ve never been told what they were?”

The jailer said darkly, “You’d best be going before someone else finds out.”

This seemed like sound advice, but what to do with Paul? Timothy was suddenly galvanised into life, “I’ll go and get a litter from brother Sosthenes.” He turned and sped off.

The rest gathered their few possessions and then began a prayer of thanksgiving and praise. When Timothy returned, Luke was with him and he

saw to getting Paul safely into the litter carried by two sturdy slaves. The whole group hurried to the home of Aquila and Priscilla. The news had spread to all the brethren and by the time they arrived, there was a joyous gathering to welcome the freed prisoners. Priscilla was delighted to see them but begged the crowd of well-wishers to depart and not draw attention to Paul's release. Reluctantly they left.

Paul was exhausted and Priscilla saw that he was quickly transferred to his bed and left with Luke quietly ministering to him.

The rest of the party collected in the large room used by the brethren for their weekly breaking of the bread. Aquila greeted them, then said, "You are in grave danger and we should make arrangements for you to leave as soon as possible."

Aristarchus said, "How did we get our release?"

"That is just the point," replied Aquila, "Your arrest was initiated by Demetrius, the president of the silversmiths.⁵⁷⁰ Alexander contacted him when he saw Paul had returned and they must have hatched this plot together. They have the support of a large section of the city. However Narcissus and two of his friends discovered there were no formal charges against you and after much trouble, they managed to get your release. But we are sure those who had you arrested are not likely to take this lying down and Aristarchus and Ephaphros should leave as soon as possible."

"What about Paul? He's the one they really want to catch." Ephaphras was obviously worried.

"He is too sick to move just yet, but as soon as he is fit, he also must go." Aquila spoke decisively.

Luke who came in and heard this said, "I agree with you, my brother. He must go. We can't risk having him re-arrested."

Early the next morning the brethren took leave of Tychicus, Ephaphras and Onesimus. Paul, who had slept well, was looking much better and was able to give them his blessing. He added, "One day I would like to visit these churches in Laodicea and Colossae, but first I must return to Corinth as soon as Titus returns with news. Go in Peace, my sons."

When they had left Aquila turned to Aristarchus and Gaius, "When do you plan to leave brothers?"

Gaius replied, "We have decided to wait until brother Paul has recovered and then accompany him. He will need help on the journey."

Aquila looked dubious, "The festival of Artemas has already begun, and those who arrested Paul will not be satisfied until they destroy him, and since you have already been in jail, Aristarchus, I think you too could be in danger."

⁵⁷⁰ Demetrius: Silversmith in Ephesus – Acts 19:24

Aristarchus replied, “That may be true, but it is not me they are after and if there is any way I can help brother Paul, I would rather stay,” he thought a moment, “I think it might be wise if we moved him from your home until he is fit enough to leave. The authorities know he stays here.”

Aquila nodded agreement, “I hadn’t thought of that, but you are right. I will talk to Priscilla, she will know where he can have a time of peace and quiet.”

“Will he agree to go?” Gaius asked.

“He will if Priscilla has anything to do with it!” Aquila smiled and then added, “She can be very persuasive when she wants to.” He saw Priscilla bustling down from Paul’s room and called her. “Come here, my dear, we are talking about finding somewhere safe for brother Paul until he is fit to leave Ephesus. Where do you think he should go?”

Priscilla came in, “I had been wondering the same thing. I am sure the authorities won’t leave matters as they are when they know Paul has been released from jail.”

“I’m sure Tryphaena and Tryphosa would be delighted to take him in.”

Aquila looked dubious, “They will flutter over him like a couple of butterflies, you know how Paul hates to be coddled.”

“Hmm, you’re right. What about Tamar?” Priscilla said suddenly. “Paul respects her and while they are devoted followers of the Lord, they are not so close to the centre of things.”

“That’s a good idea. Timothy can go and ask her to get a room ready for him. You can tell her I will discuss with Luke the best way to get him there without being seen. If possible we must move him today,” he turned to Aristarchus and Gaius, “It maybe wise to find you other accommodation too.”

Paul was safely transferred to Tamar’s home.

This period was the calm before the storm. The news of Paul’s release took a day or two to become generally known. When it came out, Demetrius called together the Silversmith Guild and other guilds, all whose prosperity depended on the sales they made through the Artemisia. Their shops lined the streets alongside the theatre and Demetrius addressed them, “Men, you know that our prosperity comes from this work. Now, you can see and hear for yourselves what this fellow Paul is doing. He says that man-made gods are not gods at all, and he has succeeded in convincing many people, both here in Ephesus and in nearly the whole province of Asia.”⁵⁷¹

There was a growl of anger and shouts of “Get rid of him. Down with the foreigner!” Demetrius knew he had rightly gauged the mood of his fellow artisans.

⁵⁷¹ Demetrius: Addresses crowd in Ephesus – Acts 19:25

“There is the danger, then, that this business of ours will get a bad name,” again the crowd reacted with shouts and shaken fists.

“Not only that, but there is also the danger that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will come to mean nothing and that her greatness will be destroyed – the goddess worshipped by everyone in Asia and in all the world!”

At this the crowd became furious and began the sacred chant, “Great is Artemis of Ephesus! Great is Artemis of Ephesus.”⁵⁷² They spilled out of the street where Demetrius had been speaking and into the main thoroughfare. Demetrius was in the lead with some of his cronies. They were making their way to where they knew Paul stayed, and as they went the crowd gathered momentum and size.

They came to Aquila’s home, but long before they arrived, the sound of the approaching mob could be heard. Aristarchus said to Gaius, “They’ve come for Paul.”⁵⁷³

“How can you tell? It sounds like the day they dedicated the city to the goddess.”

“If you are a Jew, you can always tell when a mob is howling for blood.”

“Then we better go out and tell them Paul is not here, otherwise they may tear Aquila’s home apart.”

Priscilla heard them talking and begged them not to expose themselves, “If we keep quiet they may go away.”

Gaius looked fondly at her, “My sister, you know they will never go away.”

Aquila had joined them, “Well, I will go out and invite one or two of them to search our house to show them Paul is not here.”

Aristarchus said quietly, “No, my brother, you and our sister here are too precious to the brethren to risk being burnt or arrested. We will go out, the Lord’s hand will be over us.”

With that they let themselves out through the front door telling Aquila to lock it after them. Quietly they stood waiting while the mob approached them. The street was too narrow for the whole mob to enter.

Demetrius demanded, “Where is Paul the trouble-maker?”

Gaius replied, “He is gone from here.”

One of the men with Demetrius shouted, “Grab them, they can be made to tell us where he is.”⁵⁷⁴ Roughly the two men were surrounded. There was some dispute as to where they should go, but once more Demetrius’s

⁵⁷² *Ephesus: Riot – Acts 19 -*

⁵⁷³ *Aristarchus was a Jew Colossians 4:10-11*

⁵⁷⁴ *Aristarchus & Gaius: Seized in Ephesus – Acts 19:29*

commanding voice rose above the noise and confusion saying, “Take them to the theatre.”

The cry was soon taken up, “Yes, to the theatre!”

The crowd streamed through the narrow streets once more shouting, “Great is Artemis of Ephesus.” The sound echoed off the flanks of Mount Pion and spread throughout the city. People came streaming out of their homes and streets asking what was going on and being told “We go to the theatre!” Except for those in front, no one knew what was happening.

Once the crowd had moved off, Aquila sent a message to Rufus about what had happened and how Gaius and Aristarchus had been seized by the mob which appeared to be headed for the theatre.

Luke, Mark and Timothy were with Rufus when the message arrived and were shocked by the news. Their agitated voices caught Paul’s attention, he called out to them, but when no one seemed to hear him, he walked slowly down to the atrium to see the men talking amongst themselves. They could not keep the news from him. Immediately he said, “I must go to them. They have sacrificed themselves for my sake.”

Luke took Paul’s arm, “There is no way you can go down without making matters much worse.”⁵⁷⁵ The other men agreed.

Paul was adamant, “It is me they want, if I go, they will let my brothers go free.”

Rufus said, “You don’t believe that, my brother, for it did not prevent the authorities from keeping Aristarchus and Ephaphros in jail with you for nearly three weeks on no charge.”

“No, my brother,” said Luke, “You cannot go, but I am unknown in the city and look just like any Greek visitor to the festival. It will be easy for me to mingle with the crowd to find out what is happening. If Mark will come with me, and if there is any news, I will send him back to you. The rest of you had best stay inside until the city returns to normal.” Rufus and Mark agreed with this plan, and reluctantly Paul was persuaded to wait its outcome.

In the meanwhile the theatre was filling up with the excited crowd. Anyone asking what it was all about received confused replies. Some were chanting, “Great is Artemis of Ephesus.” Others were yelling, “Down with Paul.” The excitement was like a fire spreading throughout the city.

The Asiarchs, governors of the city and the province were summoned by the town clerk to an emergency meeting. It took some time before the cause of the uproar could be ascertained, and then they discussed what should be done. The meeting was full of acrimony.

⁵⁷⁵ Paul: Wants to confront the crowd – Acts 19:30

A man named Hyllus said, “If you hadn’t conspired to let that man Paul be released from jail, this would never have happened.”

Narcissus shouted, “If you hadn’t arrested those men without a charge, this wouldn’t have happened.”

There were angry shouts both for and against. Finally the town clerk spoke mildly, “What’s done is done but if we don’t find a way to calm the populace the Romans will accuse us of being unable to keep peace in the city, we don’t want to lose our status as a free city.”

There were grunts of assent, one man said, “Well, what do you suggest?”

“I think I might be able to quieten them down. I suspect most of the crowd has no idea what it is all about and they don’t really care one way or another.”

Hyllus remarked, “Well, I certainly don’t fancy trying to make myself heard above that row.” He had a point. The theatre was nearly four stadia from the Council Hall, yet the noise from the theatre reached them in waves.

After the meeting, the town clerk gathered an escort of city police and proceeded towards the theatre. Narcissus went home and asked his wife where Paul was staying. She was alarmed by the question, for although he had entertained Paul, he was not a believer she answered nervously, “I believe he is staying with Rufus and his mother.”

Narcissus turned and called one of his servants, “Go to Rufus of Cyrene and tell that man Paul, on no account is he to show himself today.⁵⁷⁶ If he plans to go to the theatre, insist that he keeps away. Hurry now.”

By the time the town clerk reached the theatre, the crowd had quietened down, and he was able to see a man was standing on the stage with his hand raised in an attempt to speak to the crowd.

The man began, “Fellow citizens of Ephesus.”

Suddenly a voice cried out, “That’s Alexander the Jew, he is one of them.”⁵⁷⁷ Down with the unbelievers.”

Whatever Alexander was about to say was drowned out with angry shouts of “Down with the unbelievers” which gradually gave way to “Great is Artemis of Ephesus.” The whole theatre took up the chant which assumed an hypnotic note as the men began to perform the steps of the sacred dance to Artemis.

The town clerk entered the theatre accompanied by the armed police forming a guard of honour. He proceeded to his official seat with impassive dignity and sat down. There was no way of quietening the mob at this stage and he gave the appearance of calmly waiting for the performance to end. Finally more than two hours later he detected signs that the crowd was

⁵⁷⁶ Paul in Ephesian riot: Governor warns to keep away – Acts 19:31

⁵⁷⁷ Alexander of Ephesus: Tries to calm the riot – Acts 19:33

wearing itself out, and nodding to the captain of the police he rose and descended to the stage.

With the police lined up behind him, he raised his hand for silence. The people were hoarse and growing tired. Thankfully they were glad to see this interruption as an opportunity to sit down and perhaps to find out what the whole thing had been about.

When there was complete silence, the town clerk addressed them, "Fellow Ephesians! Everyone knows that the city of Ephesus is the keeper of the temple of the great Artemis and of the sacred stone that fell down from heaven."

There was a further shout of "Great is Artemis.." But the town clerk held up his hand, "Nobody can deny these things. So then, you must calm down and not do anything reckless. You have brought these men here." He gestured to where Demetrius's strong-armed men were holding Aristarchus and Gaius. "Even though they have not robbed temples or said evil things about our goddess."

He saw he had the crowd listening and attentive, "If Demetrius and his workers have an accusation against anyone, we have the authorities and regular days for court; charges can be made there. But if there is something more that you want, it will have to be settled in a legal meeting of citizens."

A murmur went round the theatre, the town clerk correctly interpreted it as general agreement with what he was saying. He decided to take advantage of it, "After what has happened today, there is the danger that we will be accused of a riot. There is no excuse for all this uproar, and we would not be able to give a good reason for it."

With that he motioned that the crowd should disperse and then he turned and led the way out of the theatre, indicating that Aristarchus and Gaius should be released. Reluctantly their captors let them go, but not without Demetrius saying venomously, "We'll still get you lot, don't worry."

Luke and Mark formed part of the huge throng which streamed out of the theatre. It took them time to make their way back to Rufus's house. In the meantime Aristarchus and Gaius hurried back to tell Aquila and Priscilla how the Lord had protected them.

The news of the day's proceedings circulated round the streets. The brethren, who had heard the racket and kept fearfully in their homes, began to hear the details of what had taken place.

While waiting for Luke's return, Rufus had discussed with Paul the implications of the day's events. To his relief Paul said, "There is no doubt my presence here is a danger to the brethren. Those who hunt us, won't be satisfied until they have destroyed me and perhaps many of those who follow the Way of the Lord."

Then they prayed for the deliverance of Aristarchus and Gaius. It was late afternoon when Mark and Luke returned to tell them of the intervention of the town clerk and of the good news that they had seen Aristarchus and Gaius being released although they were too far away to be able to talk to them. All gave thanks to God for the happy outcome of the events of the day.

Then Paul said, “It would be wise if we give Demetrius and his gang no reason to harass the brethren on my account. I think I should leave Ephesus first thing tomorrow before they have time to regroup and think up some more mischief. Can you call the brethren together this evening, then I can tell them my plans.”

Luke looked deeply concerned. He knew that Paul was far from well, but he also knew that Paul was right in removing himself as the focal point of the anger of people like Demetrius.

Later, after the evening meal, the brethren began to arrive. When Aristarchus and Gaius came Paul rose from the couch on which he had been lying and embraced them. “Praise to our Lord for your safe deliverance. You took the burden that should have been mine.”

“Have I not heard you say, ‘Help to carry one another’s burdens, and in this way we obey the law of Christ’?”⁵⁷⁸ Gaius asked with a smile.

The room was filling up and when everyone had assembled Paul began, “You know I have been waiting for Titus to return. It has been my intention to go once more to Corinth and then visit all the churches in Macedonia to receive their collections for the brethren in Jerusalem. When the money has been safely delivered, it is my heart’s desire to visit Rome and strengthen the brethren there. Sadly, because of the events of today, it seems right that I should leave before Demetrius and his friends bring more trouble on us. I do not like to leave you in this way, but I know that without my physical presence here, you are not likely to suffer further persecution. When Tychicus returns from Colossae, tell him to come to me in Corinth. Appoint someone to come with him so they can bring your collection for the brothers in Judaea, for I intend to return to Jerusalem before the Jewish New Year.”⁵⁷⁹

He paused and looked round at the sombre faces, then he gave them one of his remarkable smiles, “Even though I may be far away from you in body, still I will be here with you in spirit.”⁵⁸⁰ You are all very dear to my heart, keep your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that in all things God works for good with those who love him⁵⁸¹. And now my friends, you are all tired from the events of this day, so I will not keep you, my brothers from Macedonia

⁵⁷⁸ Galatians 6:2

⁵⁷⁹ Paul: Leaves Ephesus after riot – Acts 20:2

⁵⁸⁰ 1 Corinthians 5:3

⁵⁸¹ Romans 8:28

and I will be leaving early in the morning. It would be well if I took my leave from you now.”

He rose and raising his hand he blessed them, “May God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give to you all peace and love with faith. May God’s grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with undying love.”⁵⁸²

The community said, “Amen.”

There were tears in many eyes as they came up to Paul to hug him and take their leave. Many put offerings of money on the table and then they hugged the men going with him, Aristarchus, Gaius, Luke and Timothy. “Go in peace,” they murmured.

⁵⁸² *Ephesians 6:23-24*

CHAPTER 28: PAUL'S ESCAPE FROM EPHESUS TO MACEDONIA

CE 56 May

*Acts 20
2 Cor. 1:16
2 Cor. 2:1-13
2 Cor. 7:5-7
2 Cor. 7:13*

Luke paid for their fare and asked if the after section of the ship was booked. The captain, a young man, whose beard fringed a cheerful face, said in almost unintelligible Greek, "Pay me and you're welcome." Luke haggled half-heartedly and managed to wring an apparently reluctant concession from the man. Secretly the captain was pleased, not many passengers were leaving Ephesus at this stage of the festival.

The ship sailed at first light and catching a light breeze negotiated the channel into the Caydus river and then out to sea. A light-hearted mood replaced their anxiety over getting Paul safely away. Only Paul lay withdrawn into himself propped up under a tarpaulin on the deck.

Luke seeing Paul did not share their relief, sat down next to him. After a while Paul spoke his thoughts, "You know how worried I am about the brethren in Corinth. I had hoped to wait until Titus returned with news and go straight over to them. By going first to Macedonia my visit there will be delayed. I wonder what keeps Titus?"

Luke checked making a bracing or reassuring answer. He was concerned for Paul's health and knew these worries would delay his full recovery. Instead he sat quietly for some time and then asked, "Are these not the Lord's own worries? Does he not have a plan? Surely in his good time, and if we are faithful and obedient to his will, he will reveal how these things will be put right?"

For the first time Paul looked directly at him, slowly the worry drained from his face, replaced by a faint smile. He struggled to get up and Luke helped him. "Thank you, dear brother." Paul gave his arm a rough thump of affection. "You are right, and what I hear the Lord saying right now is he needs me strong and well! Let us walk the deck. Perhaps we'll meet with Titus in Troas!"

The change in Paul was dramatic and they all said a thankful prayer. The trip to Troas took them four days. They sailed into the southern section of the

double harbour halfway through the afternoon. Paul was so much better that he insisted in walking to their lodgings. It was the same tavern Luke had stayed at when he was taking Agariste home.

The brethren arrived in Philippi three days later. Luke took Paul and Timothy home with him. Aristarchus and Gaius went to stay with Lydia. The morning after their arrival, the two of them hurried round to find Luke.

Paul was lying under a tree in the courtyard, after a brief greeting Aristarchus asked, "Where is brother Luke?"

"He is with his father. What's the matter, is someone sick?"

"No, nothing like that, we just wanted to ask him something."

Paul closed his eyes as they went in search of Luke. It was so peaceful here. Timothy came to see who had arrived and Aristarchus motioned silently to him to follow them.

When Luke heard of their arrival he excused himself from his father's rooms and followed them into the house.

"What's happened?" he asked, "Have there been arrests here?"

"No, nothing like that," Aristarchus reassured him, "But it appears that Sister Lydia always baked the bread for the fellowship meals. Two weeks ago, she took the loaf as usual to brother Clement's home where they meet." He stopped, embarrassed at the triviality of the affair."

"Well, come on, what happened?" Luke was impatient.

"I understand that sister Syntyche feels offended that her bread is not good enough for the fellowship meal, although the meeting is in her house. She gave sister Lydia's loaf to their slaves and substituted her own. When the loaf was uncovered in preparation to breaking it, sister Lydia thought there had been some mistake. It was only later she heard from her servants what had happened to her loaf. She is so furious she refuses to enter Syntyche's house or attend fellowship meals. In fact from what I can see the whole church is divided into two angry factions, and they cannot meet without screaming at one another."⁵⁸³

Luke groaned. This was the last thing any of them needed at this time.

The news could not be withheld from Paul and when Luke explained the situation, it was like a mortal stab wound to his spirit.⁵⁸⁴ Luke looked compassionately at his friend and said gently, "I am calling a meeting of the elders this morning, I want to hear how they have tried to restore the relationships. Then I thought we might call the whole church to meet here tonight and try to bring them to repentance and forgiveness."

⁵⁸³ Philippi: Trouble in the Church – 2 Corinthians 7:5

⁵⁸⁴ Paul: Trouble Philippian Church – 1 Corinthians 7:5

Paul looked gratefully at Luke, "I should be glad if you could see the elders. I will pray for them in the meantime."

As Luke was about to leave, Paul said, "Tell Timothy, Aristarchus and Gaius to spend the day visiting each home to listen and pray with the family." Luke nodded and went to arrange it.

Luke's calm and loving spirit brought a measure of relief to the hard pressed church. The meeting he had with the elders lasted well into the afternoon and it was decided that the gathering of the church would take place the following evening.

By the afternoon of the following day, every household had been visited. The brothers and sisters began to arrive at Luke's home soon after sunset. As each family arrived the tension grew. Paul was praying in his room when Timothy came to tell him everyone was waiting for him. Paul felt heavy, for in spite of much prayer, he could find no clear guidance from the Holy Spirit.

When he entered the room, his eyes fell on Luke. There was a brightness in his face and while everyone waited for Paul to lead them, he turned to Luke, "My brother, will you give us the reading and lead us in worship."

Luke did not usually take a leadership role. He had been filled with grief for the divisions which were tearing his friends apart. Paul had caught his expression just at the moment he remembered Jesus's words about forgiveness. It was as if a great light had burst on his mind and so willingly he rose and opened the book of Jesus's sayings to find the place. Then he glanced round the room and smiled. The people sitting before him looked gloomily back. They all felt uncomfortable, Lydia looked angry. He glanced at Syntyche and thought she looked smug.

Luke asked Timothy to lead them in a psalm and he started; "Praise the Lord, my soul!"

Aristarchus took it up, "All my being, praise his holy name!"

After a moment of astonishment, the brethren joined in half-heartedly,

 "Praise the Lord, my soul,

 'And do not forget how kind he is.

The tune changed and slowly the words began to reach them.

 'He fills my life with good things,

 'so that I stay young and strong like an eagle."

The tune changed again and the singing became more and more whole-hearted.

 'But for those who honour the Lord,

 his love lasts for ever,

 and his goodness endures for all generations

 of those who are true to his covenant

and who faithfully obey his commands.”

The tune returned to the original one of joyousness

‘Praise the Lord, you strong and mighty angels,
who obey his commands.

Who listen to what he says.

Praise the Lord, all you heavenly powers,
you servants of his, who do his will!

Praise the Lord, all his creatures in all the places he rules.”

And with a great shout of thanksgiving they ended, “Praise the Lord, my soul!”⁵⁸⁵

The words had reached to convict and heal many hearts but none so dramatically as in Paul himself. For a moment the whole room seemed to disappear as he was caught up in a wonderful picture. The words of the psalm ‘As far as the east is from the west’ suddenly made him aware that while God might remove sin from a sinner; nothing, NOTHING, the word reverberated in his mind, could separate from him the love of Christ.

Paul found himself asking,

‘Can trouble? No!

Can hardship? No!

Can persecution? No!

Can hunger? No!

Can poverty, or danger or death? No, no and NO!’

He knew if nothing he had so far endured had been able to separate him from Christ, then surely not even the quarrels and disputes within the churches could destroy this relationship either.

While Paul was caught up in this moment of wonder, Luke had begun, “Listen to what Jesus taught, ‘I tell you who hear me; Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who ill-treat you.’”

Luke looked across the room at Syntyche and Lydia and continued reading,” ‘If anyone hits you on one cheek, let him hit the other one too; if someone takes your coat, let him have your shirt as well. Give to everyone who asks you for something, and when someone takes what is yours, do not ask for it back. Do for others just what you want them to do for you.’”

He looked up and found nearly everyone was listening, Syntyche however was looking out of the window and Lydia did not appear to be paying attention either. He sighed and turned the page, paused and then read slowly and with great emphasis, ““Do not judge others, so that God will not judge

⁵⁸⁵ Psalm 103

you; do not condemn others, and God will not condemn you; forgive others, and God will forgive you. Give to others, and God will give to you. Indeed, you will receive a full measure, a generous helping, poured into your hands – all that you can hold. The measure you use for others is the one that God will use for you.”

He closed the book and was thankful to see that both Lydia and Syntyche were looking intently at him. “To you, my sisters I would remind you that if you do not forgive each other from your hearts, then God himself will not forgive you. Do you not remember the words we say together from our Lord’s prayer? ‘Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us?’ Can you, my sisters, risk another day, yes even another moment, without offering and receiving forgiveness from one another?”

He turned to the rest of the group, “And you my brothers and sisters, have you not each one been infected, like a wound, with the evil which causes wounds to suppurate and spread their infection until the limb itself kills the whole body? Can you risk holding to the anger which spreads and infects more each day?”

He noticed there were tear-filled eyes and shaking heads. “You all know that this unfortunate incident has destroyed your fellowship and caused the Evil One to take residence in your hearts and homes. You know that each one of you must forgive one another from your hearts, even as Jesus taught us, when you have done that, then Christ himself will take up his abode amongst us once more.”

Luke went to sit down next to Paul. Paul put out his hand and gripped him momentarily. There was a time of intense silence and then Lydia reluctantly rose to her feet and crossed the room. She gave Syntyche a long hard look and then said, “My sister, I forgive you for hurting me, will you forgive me for being so angry with you?”

Syntyche was not someone who could admit she was wrong, but even she was not insensitive to the atmosphere in the room and she said, “I forgive you my sister.” Somehow that sounded, even to her ears, a bit self-righteous. She had known her action would infuriate Lydia, but had not meant to cause such a terrible split in the church, after a pause she added, “You must forgive me for my hurtful action.”

Then the two women were in each other’s arms. Suddenly people were laughing, crying and hugging one another. Several people crossed the room to beg forgiveness for some other hurt or resentment. There was a great outpouring of love and joy.

This happy outcome did not satisfy Paul’s anxieties for long. He was restless and unable to settle to anything. Finally he tackled Luke, “I think I

must go on to Thessalonica, after all, Aristarchus and Gaius here are wanting to get home.”

Luke could see that this was true. He himself intended to stay for some time longer in Philippi. He thought a moment, “My brother,” he said finally, “I know you long to return to Corinth, but I think it would be wise to wait for news first. If Titus is following you, by moving on, you make it more difficult for him to catch up with you. Wait a few more days. If our brothers here want to go home, why not let them go ahead?”

Paul could see the good sense in Luke's advice, he turned to Aristarchus, “Do you and Gaius want to go on ahead as Luke suggests?”

Aristarchus looked at Gaius, it was certainly an attractive idea. They both had families they wanted to see and in three days they could be home. “How long do you plan to wait here in Philippi, my brother?” Aristarchus prevaricated.

That stopped Paul. He had not given it much thought, and yet, what was the hurry? He knew a visit to Corinth without news from Titus was not to be considered. “I think I shall take brother Luke's advice and wait here for Titus,” adding hopefully, “He must come soon.”

Gaius and Aristarchus decided to leave that day and Paul settled down to wait with as much patience as he could muster. Suddenly he called Timothy to him and said, “I will write to the brethren in Corinth.”

Timothy felt dubious about the wisdom of beginning a letter when they still had no idea how things stood in the Corinthian church, but he realised it would give Paul something to do, so he went to his room to collect his writing things. When he returned, Paul began his letter to Corinth he wanted very much to take a different theme from his previous letter to them.^{586;587} He remembered his agonized outpouring and felt ashamed.

Timothy completed the greetings and Paul said, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.”

He was pacing slowly up and down, unaware of his surroundings, withdrawn into himself, listening to an inner voice, “For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are

⁵⁸⁶ Paul: 4th letter to Corinth – 2 Corinthians Ch 1-9

⁵⁸⁷ 2 Corinthians Chapters 1-9. This text is from the New International Version rather than the Good News Bible. Slight differences in wording are significant. e.g 2 Cor.1:8 in the Good News Bible reads ‘We want to remind you, brothers, of the trouble we had in the province of Asia.’ In the NIV Bible it reads ‘We do not want you uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia.’

comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer.”

Paul felt that in his previous letter he had centred too much on himself. Perhaps that is why he could only think of that letter with uneasiness. This time he wanted to share the source of their common life, Christ Jesus.

He continued, “And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.”

Of course, thought Paul, they need to know what happened in Asia, but I must use that to show them how Christ is there no matter what happens. He thought and then began again, “We do not want you uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia.⁵⁸⁸ We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril.”

Paul sat down, deep in thought. He had planned to return to Corinth and then go on Macedonia, instead he had come first to Macedonia, he needed to explain that. He waited for Timothy and then started, “Because I was confident of this, I planned to visit you first so that you might benefit twice. I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judaea. When I planned this, did I do it lightly? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say, ‘Yes, yes’ and ‘No, no’?”

His plans had changed by the circumstances of the riot in Ephesus and the need for him to depart from there as soon as possible. Paul continued to struggle with his letter to Corinth and so did Timothy, who found Paul’s convoluted reasoning difficult. In particular Timothy could make neither head nor tail of forgiving some man who had done something or other. Timothy only hoped they would know what Paul was talking about. It made no sense to him. In fact Timothy wished Paul would leave off dictating. He was jumping around all over the place. From the man they should forgive, he jumped to looking for Titus in Troas and then to smells. He was thankful when they finally broke for the midday rest. Not that Paul wanted to stop, but Luke had come in and insisted he ate his meal and took a break.

Later when they resumed Paul was a little more coherent and Timothy continued taking down Paul’s dictation until the shadows lengthened and finally the light grew dim. Once more Luke came in to tell them the evening meal was about to be served.

⁵⁸⁸ Note how Paul always speaks of ‘Asia’ when he refers to Ephesus.

Halfway through the meal Luke decided to find out Paul's plans, "About this collection for Judaea, when you finally leave for Corinth, do you intend to return through Macedonia on your way to Jerusalem? How will we know when you plan to leave?"

"I left a message that as soon as Tychicus returns from Colossae, the Ephesian brethren should choose someone to come with him and they must join me in Corinth. As for the churches of Macedonia, you can send your contributions and delegates to join me in Corinth just before the sailing season begins next spring."

Early in the morning, with sinking heart Timothy waited for Paul to continue his letter. Paul spoke at considerable length on his own ministry and attitude to Christ. "No longer, then, do we judge anyone by human standards. Even if at one time we judged Christ according to human standards, we no longer do so. When anyone is joined to Christ, he is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come. All this is done by God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into his friends and gave us the task of making others his friends also. Our message is that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ."⁵⁸⁹

This was more like the old Paul, thought Timothy, but it did not last, Paul soon reverted to his own sufferings and then went on to warn on pagan influences, Paul had just cobbled together three different passages from the prophets to emphasis a point.

Suddenly from downstairs there came the sound of voices and joyful greetings. Paul and Timothy, concentrating on the job in hand, and used to various visitors coming and going, paid no attention.

Then Luke's voice rose to them, "Praise to the living Lord, my brother, you've come!" The salutation was greeted by a familiar laugh. Paul stopped and looked at Timothy, "Titus!" He exclaimed and jumped to his feet, followed closely by Timothy. They met on the stairs and Paul embraced Titus with tears streaming down his face, "Thank God, you've come! Is all well?"

Titus, looking tired but well, saw the signs of strain and suffering in Paul's face and said quietly, "Yes, all is well, my brother. They long to see you again."⁵⁹⁰

"Come and tell me all." Paul took his arm to return to the room he had just left.

"Steady, my brother," chided Luke, "It is my guess he has been travelling hard to find you."

⁵⁸⁹ 1 Corinthians 5:19 This line is from the *The New International Version of the Bible* and not from the *Good News Bible*, which reads 'that God was making all mankind his friends through Christ.' The Greek word is 'World' and not 'mankind'.

⁵⁹⁰ Titus: Arrives in Philippi – 2 Corinthians 7:5

Titus gave a rueful smile, "I returned to Ephesus as soon as I could and found you had left for Troas. I came to Troas and you had gone to Philippi. I began to despair of finding you!"

"Oh, my dear son, you have no idea how worried I was when we had to leave Ephesus before your return and how each day we have waited has seemed to be a lifetime of anxiety."

Luke demurred, "Let him at least have something to eat and drink before you squeeze every last bit of news from him."

While Titus had a meal, Paul and Timothy returned to the room where they were working, "Take down this, 'Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one; we have ruined no one, nor tried to take advantage of anyone. I do not say this to condemn you; for, as I have said before, you are so dear to us that we are always together, whether we live or die. I am so sure of you; I take such pride in you! In all our troubles I am still full of courage; I am running over with joy.' There, now we will wait for Titus to tell us the full story of his mission, before finishing off."

Timothy, who had struggled to keep up with the jubilant Paul, finished the sentence and then looked up puzzled, "Surely you do not need to send them a letter now? Won't you be leaving directly?" It had been so difficult to restrain Paul from returning to Corinth before Titus's return and now he seemed to be putting off leaving immediately.

"If the news is good, then there is no hurry. I will complete my visits to Thessalonica and Berea and to the villages around, and then I can spend the winter in Corinth. I had planned on spending last winter there." Paul spoke decisively. Timothy shook his head to himself.

Later in the shaded garden Paul, Luke and Timothy sat listening to Titus's report. He still looked tired, but not so exhausted as when he arrived.

Titus sat down on a marble bench, closed his eyes a moment and then began his report, "The church in Corinth is deeply ashamed over the treatment you received when you were last there. They know they have been led astray from the true Gospel which they received from you at the beginning and they long to see you again."

Paul breathed, "Thank you Father!" Then he asked, "How did they receive my last letter to them?"

Titus smiled, "They know they have been torn apart by false teachers, by their own inclinations and now they are determined to return to your teaching. They need your guidance to help them regain their lost unity. They understood how hurt and angry you were. In fact, the elders have come together and tried to apply all the advice you gave them in that second letter you wrote last year.

"Are they still divided into separate groups?" Paul asked anxiously.

"No, not really. You know how it is in all the churches, the Jewish believers tend to stick with each other and the Gentiles come from different philosophies, but there is a new fervour and desire to follow the Way."

Happiness flooded Paul's spirit. "Then I will finish my letter, and you shall return to Corinth taking it with you, you can tell them how happy I am and that I will spend the winter with them."

They all looked at Paul in amazement. Luke voiced their surprise, "I thought you would be off in the morning now Titus has returned."

"If all is well, there is no need for me to make haste to return to Corinth, but there is every reason to complete my visits to the churches of Macedonia. I had planned to spend last winter in Corinth, and was prevented. Well, I shall spend this winter with them instead!" Paul announced firmly.

"Timothy, you can go back to Corinth with Titus. I feel you can spend the intervening months fruitfully teaching and strengthening them."

It was Titus who felt overwhelmed by the prospect of rushing back to Corinth once more. His mission there had not been as easy as his report made it sound. The church still had problems, although he felt he had gained the trust of all the brethren, yet he felt let down that Paul should delay his return.

Paul must have sensed Titus's mood because he turned to him, "The Lord has used you, my brother and I thank you for all you have done. I know you are tired now, if by tomorrow, you feel this is too much for you to undertake, then tell me."

Titus did indeed feel exhausted. "I would like to sleep on it, brother. Just at the moment I feel I have travelled enough for a lifetime! Let me also pray about it and I will give you my answer in the morning."

With this less than enthusiastic reply, Paul had to be satisfied. However after a good night's sleep, Titus revived and he joined Luke and Timothy in the upstairs room to hear Paul's revised plans for the great Judaeian collection and his final visits to the rest of the Macedonian churches.

"I want each church to collect as much as they can, then they must appoint one or two of their number to accompany me when I leave for Jerusalem. I want the brothers in Judaea to know that these Gentile churches live by the same Gospel that they do. There is still much talk in Jerusalem that the Gentile churches are not truly followers of the Lord Jesus. Some of them are ever ready to point fingers and find fault."

"How many people do you expect to accompany you to Jerusalem?" Luke asked.

"Well, if we include Ephesus, there's Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea and Corinth. I don't think we can expect the brothers in Troas to join, so I would expect about ten men."

"How do you propose to leave for Jerusalem? Will you come back through Macedonia?" asked Titus.

"No, I am hoping to spend more time in each church to give firm teaching to the elders concerning the care and discipline of their charges. The time is coming when there will be persecutions and troubles, each church must be strong in faith and obedient to the call which has been given through our Lord Jesus Christ. They must learn how to discern false teachers from the true, so that the confusion of last year is not repeated." Paul was obviously thinking as he spoke, for he suddenly broke off and smiled at his listeners.

"I haven't answered your question, have I? I would like to leave directly from Corinth, visit Ephesus and be back in Jerusalem for Passover."

"Then how will the delegates from each church know when and where to join you?" Luke felt Paul was making things very complicated.

"I will instruct each church to send their contribution with two brothers to join me in Corinth in good time to catch one of the first ships leaving in spring."

"So they should aim to get to Corinth by the middle of March?" Luke persisted.

"Let me think," said Paul, "No, I would like them there earlier, if the weather is favourable we could leave earlier."

Titus spoke, "You asked me last night if I would return to Corinth to arrange that they have the collection ready in good time for when you come. If this is what is needed, I am happy to go back again and it would be good to have Timothy with me."

Paul beamed at him, "Thank you my son. Timothy let us finish that letter and then you can leave tomorrow." They recognized their dismissal and rose to leave Paul to his letter.

Timothy fetched the scroll. Paul asked him to read the last words he had written, then after a moment's thought he began, "Even after we arrived in Macedonia, we had no rest. There were troubles everywhere, quarrels with others, fears in our hearts. But God, who encourages the downhearted, encouraged us with the coming of Titus. It was not only his coming that cheered us, but also his report of how you encouraged him. He told us how much you want to see me, how sorry you are, how ready you are to defend me: and so I am even happier now."

Paul continued by referring to his previous letter, and how happy he was that even if it had made them sad, it had helped them to change their ways. Timothy noted how Paul kept coming back to Titus and how eager he was to help them. Paul then told them how keen the churches in Macedonia were to contribute to the collection for Judaea and he challenged them to match their generosity. He elaborated on the need for them to give generously ending

with “For this service you perform not only meets the needs of God’s people, but also produces an outpouring of grateful thanks to God. And because of the proof which this service of your brings, many will give glory to God for your loyalty to the gospel of Christ, which you profess, and for your generosity in sharing with them and everyone else. And so with deep affection they will pray for you because of the extraordinary grace God has shown you. Let us thank God for his priceless gift!”

Timothy sighed thankfully, Paul seemed near the end of his muddled letter. It was not his usual crisp, direct style and Timothy realised it reflected Paul’s inner turmoil while he waited for Titus and the relief which he felt at the reassuring news Titus brought concerning the church at Corinth.

“I will be coming to you after I have finished my visits through Macedonia. I hope to spend the whole winter with you, then I plan to return to Jerusalem in time for Passover, taking with me your gift and those of the other churches.

“The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

“My love be with you all in Christ Jesus.”⁵⁹¹

After Titus and Timothy had departed, Paul continued his teaching in a happier frame of mind. Before he left Philippi, Luke said, “I will not come with you now, my brother, but the Lord has put it on my heart that I should come with you to Jerusalem to research all I can amongst those who knew the Lord Jesus while he was yet on earth.”⁵⁹²

Luke sent his servant Nicias to look after Paul as he travelled through Macedonia. He gave him strict instructions to see Paul did not over-exert himself. Nicias was hard put to carry out his orders, since Paul went to each group throughout the province, checking on the elders and instructing them.

⁵⁹¹ 1 Corinthians 16:5,23,24. It should be noted that the outside of scrolls tended to become scruffy and worn. If the end of this letter was lost and the beginning of Letter C (2 Corinthians 10-13) was also lost, then someone compiling Paul’s letters at a later date could easily have joined these two together in the wrong order.

⁵⁹² Note that the ‘we’ passage only starts again after Paul returns from Achaia (Corinth) Acts 20.6

CHAPTER 29: PAUL'S THIRD VISIT TO CORINTH – LETTER TO ROME

CE 56/57 Winter

Acts 20:2-38

Acts 21:1-15

Romans

Paul arrived in Corinth in mid-November.⁵⁹³ The welcome they received was warm and loving. Stephanas and Chloe told him how long and difficult it was to bring about forgiveness and reconciliation between the different parties, but they said Paul's poem on love in his second letter continued to be a source of inspiration and healing for them all, it was still read regularly in their reunited fellowship meals.

Gaius invited Paul to stay.⁵⁹⁴ He had been one of the leaders of 'Peter's party', but was a close friend of Erastus and Titius Justus. With the reconciliation taking place amongst the Christians, Gaius knew he had one of the few rooms large enough to accommodate all and he felt it would be easier for Paul if he did not have to go out in the cold, wet evenings.

His large villa was entered through a marbled-floored atrium, from here many rooms led off but at the far end an archway led into a large reception room. The arch was closed off during the cold weather by thick woollen curtains. Within the reception room were couches and chairs. For all the extra people, cushions and rugs were scattered on the floor. Two braziers burning charcoal kept the room warm.

The whole church came together on First Day evening⁵⁹⁵ to listen to Paul whose whole talk redirected each one away from themselves and back to God. There were tears in many eyes. Somehow the hates and furies which had tossed every single one of them during the past year were draining away and a sense of love and peace filled them.

Speaking from the pain of his own persecutions, Paul said, "Ask God to bless those who persecute you – yes, ask him to bless, not to curse. Be happy with those who are happy, weep with those who weep. Have the same concern

⁵⁹³ Paul: Corinth Winter CE 56/57 – Acts 20:2. Paul's 3rd visit.

⁵⁹⁴ Paul: Stays with Gaius in Corinth – Romans 16:23

⁵⁹⁵ This would be Saturday evening according to modern reckoning. It is difficult to realise that the seven-day week was a Jewish invention which was foreign to the Roman world. People marked short periods of time according to market-days, feast-days of the gods etc...Since the Jewish day started at sundown. The 'First Day of the Week' began Saturday evening.

for everyone. Do not be proud, but make friends with humble people.⁵⁹⁶ Do not think of yourselves as wise.”

Paul looked lovingly round the room. He was nearly finished. “If someone has done you wrong, do not repay him with a wrong. Try to do what everyone considers to be good. Do everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody. Never take revenge, my friends, but instead let God’s anger do it. For the scripture says, ‘I will take revenge, I will pay back, say the Lord.’ Instead, as the scripture says; ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for by doing this you will make him burn with shame.’ Do not let evil defeat you; instead, conquer evil with good.”⁵⁹⁷

Paul sat down and a song of joyful thanksgiving filled the room. Then there came a time of prayer in which many confessed to past anger and asked for forgiveness, often mentioning someone by name. Many were quietly weeping and those who had become estranged and full of hate got up and made their peace with one another. Finally with a sense of deep thankfulness Gaius rose to proclaim the blessing over the bread and wine.

In the happy days which followed, Paul began to think more and more of his future plans. He was well-satisfied with the arrangement to take a large gift of money from these Gentile churches to the brethren in Judaea. He longed to see the bonding between Jew and Gentile Christians and knew many in Judaea took the narrow view. He hoped his planned visit to Jerusalem next Passover with representatives from each church would finally seal their common unity in Christ. After Passover I shall go direct from Judaea to Rome. In that case I must write to tell the brethren in Rome.

He got up to look for Timothy. He learnt from one of the slaves that Timothy had gone to the gymnasium with Gaius and his two sons. Thwarted for the moment, Paul returned to his room to think what he wanted to include in his letter. Lost in thought, a prayer of praise filled his spirit with thanksgiving. Timothy found him much later unaware of his surroundings, seemingly caught up in the heavenly realms.

Later over the first meal of the day, Paul still seemed abstracted. The joking and conversation washed round him. At the end of the meal, he rose and said to Timothy, “Come to my room and bring your writing things.”

When Timothy arrived, he asked, “Have you brought the notes on my lectures in Ephesus?”

Surprised Timothy answered, “I keep everything I can, and yes, I have all my notes with me. I also have copies which Titus and Urbanus made when I was away.”

⁵⁹⁶ Romans 12:16 Alternative reading ‘accept humble duties’: or ‘make friends with humble people.’ Good News Bible.

⁵⁹⁷ Romans Chapter 12

“Good,” Paul was pleased, “Fetch them and let’s get started.”

Timothy returned carrying a bag which proved to be full of neatly rolled scrolls of various lengths.

“I want to write to the brethren in Rome. If God protects me, when I have been to Judaea, I want to visit there and after that go to Spain.”

Timothy was not surprised. He knew Paul had been trying to settle the affairs in all the churches he had founded before moving to new places, and a visit to Rome was very close to his heart, however a visit to Spain! What other barbaric places did Paul have in mind after that?

“First let’s see what you have in that bag of yours.”

Timothy began to untie each scroll and hand them to Paul. Paul squinted at them and then said, “No, your writing is too fine for me, read a few lines and let me see what you have.”

Timothy read, “It is God’s power to save all who believe, first the Jews and also the Gentiles.”⁵⁹⁸

“Yes, I will use that.”

Timothy put it on one side and unrolled another and read, “Christ has brought the Law to an end, so that everyone who believes is put right with God.”⁵⁹⁹

“That’s good, go on.”

Timothy’s eyes ran down the next scroll, “Um, here is a lecture you gave on the relationship between the Jews and Christ. You said how great is your sorrow and how endless the pain in your heart for your own people, your own flesh and blood.”

“Oh, yes I remember that. Put it down, we’ll see later if it fits in.”

Gradually they worked through the pile of scrolls, a few Paul rejected, it seemed to Timothy, he wanted to use most of his major teachings over the past few years.

When all the scrolls had been checked Timothy said, “The last lot of notes I took was your talk at the fellowship meal. I’m afraid it is still on the wax tablets, but I could quickly write it out.”

“Can you work direct from the tablets?” asked Paul.

“Yes, it won’t be difficult.”

“All right. Let me think if there is anything else.” He thought for a few minutes, “There was a talk I gave last year in Thessalonica about life in the Spirit. Take your tablets and let me try to remember what I said.”

⁵⁹⁸ Romans 1:16

⁵⁹⁹ Romans 10:4

Timothy jotted down what Paul could remember of his talk, when he had finished Paul said, “There, I think I’ve remembered everything.”

Over the next few weeks, Timothy and Paul spent every morning drafting what proved to be a long letter to the church in Rome. If Timothy regretted not joining in the visits to the gymnasium and baths, he gave no indication. This was a collection of all Paul’s major lectures and teachings he had given over the past few years. He re-drafted a good deal, but often he took a lecture or sermon as it stood. Slowly the document grew.

One morning they were finished and he dictated the end, “And so I have been prevented many times from coming to you. But now that I have finished my work in these regions and since I have been wanting for so many years to come to see you, I hope to do so now. I would like to see you on my way to Spain, and be helped by you to go there, after I have enjoyed visiting you for a while. Just now, however, I am going to Jerusalem in the service of God’s people there. For the churches in Macedonia and Achaia have freely decided to give an offering to help the poor among God’s people in Jerusalem. That decision was their own; but, as a matter of fact, they have an obligation to help them. Since the Jews shared their spiritual blessings with the Gentiles, the Gentiles ought to use their material blessings to help the Jews. When I have finished this task and have handed over to them all the money that has been raised for them, I shall leave for Spain and visit you on my way there. When I come to you, I know that I shall come with a full measure of the blessing of Christ.

“So I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love that the Spirit gives; join me in praying fervently to God for me. Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judaea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to God’s people there. And so I will come to you full of joy, if it is God’s will, and enjoy a refreshing visit to you. May God, our source of peace, be with you. Amen.”

Paul sighed and stretched, “There that’s all. We will send it off as soon as we know of someone leaving for Rome. Perhaps Erastus will know of a reliable person.” Paul looked fondly at Timothy, “And you my son can take some time off with Gaius’s sons. Leave the scroll here, I would like it read through before it goes.”

Timothy finished the last word and put down his pen. He smiled at Paul and thankfully rotated his stiff shoulders. Then carefully he put the stopper in his ink, collected all his things and went to put them away.

Later when Paul had just returned from the baths and was feeling invigorated and relaxed, Tertius, the young and cheerful son of Chloe, came looking for Paul.⁶⁰⁰ He had with him Phoebe of Cenchreae.⁶⁰¹

“Mother asked me to bring sister Phoebe to you. She intends to visit Ephesus and asked mother for advice as to where to stay. Mother thought perhaps a letter from you to the brethren in Ephesus might help her.”

Paul remembered Phoebe and embraced her, “How are you, my sister?”

Phoebe was a well-covered woman in her early forties. She had a round cheerful face, which was uncharacteristically nervous and anxious-looking. “I don’t mean to bother you, dear brother, but Chloe insisted you would be happy to help me. You know that Jason drowned at sea on his way home last autumn?”

Paul looked at her sympathetically, “No, I had not heard.⁶⁰² This must have left you with many problems, your children are still young, aren’t they?”

“If it hadn’t been for Chloe, I should never have managed. She knows how difficult it is for a woman to step into her husband’s shoes, no matter how good his slaves and agents may be. They know when the master’s hand is no longer in charge.”

“You have trouble with your husband’s agents then?”

“Not all of them, but I need to go to Ephesus to find out why certain payments have not been made for goods Jason delivered on his last visit there.”

“You’d like me to write a letter of introduction for you?”

Phoebe nodded, “If it wouldn’t be a trouble to you, brother.”

“Not only would it be no bother, it will give me an opportunity to greet the brethren in Ephesus. Tertius my son, have you writing skills? Timothy has just left and I have tired him out from many days of writing.”

“Mother makes me write all her letters,” Tertius gave a cheerful grin.

“In that case, I will fetch Timothy’s writing things and we can get started.” He turned to Phoebe, “Do you want to wait, or will you fetch the letter tomorrow?”

“I will fetch it tomorrow,” her round face was once more cheerful as she left Tertius to wait for Paul.⁶⁰³

When Paul returned with Timothy’s writing things, he said, “It seems we have finished all the scrolls, but there’s some left on the end of this letter. Write on this, I will get Timothy to cut it off later.”

⁶⁰⁰ Tertius: *Of Corinth – Romans 16:22*

⁶⁰¹ Phoebe: *Of Cenchreae – Romans 16:1*

⁶⁰² Paul: *Letter for Phoebe – Romans 16*

⁶⁰³ Tertius: *Writes letter for Phoebe – Romans 16:22*

Paul started off, "I recommend to you our sister Pheobe, who serves the church at Cenchreae. Receive her in the Lord's name, as God's people should, and give her any help she may need from you; for she herself has been a good friend to many people and also to me."

Paul thought this is a good opportunity to send special greetings to all the brothers and sisters in Ephesus, "I send greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow-workers in the service of Christ Jesus; they risked their lives for me. I am grateful to them – not only I, but all the Gentile churches as well. Greetings also to the church that meets in their house."

Paul then went through name by name all those he could remember. Tertius proved a quick efficient amanuenses and Paul was just finishing when Timothy arrived with Lucius, Jason and Sosipater. Paul greeted them and then said, "I took your writing things for Tertius to write a quick letter for our sister Phoebe. She is going to Ephesus, so I am sending greetings to all the brothers and sisters there."

"Send my greetings to them," Timothy said. The three men with him added theirs, as did Tertius for good measure.

Gaius also returned home bringing with him his friend and colleague, Erastus from the city treasury and Quartus another friend and member of the church. They added their greetings and left Paul to finish, while they went through to the smaller reception room where they were having a meeting of the church elders.

Paul ended the letter and turned to Tertius, "It is getting late, you better run home or your mother will be sending a search party for you."

Cheerful as ever, Tertius grinned. He put the pens and ink carefully back in Timothy's writing bag, rolled up the scroll and with his cloak swinging behind him, swept from the room.

Later Paul and Timothy joined the elders with Gaius for the evening meal. Paul asked Erastus if he knew anyone reliable leaving for Rome in the next few days who could take a letter to the brethren there.

Erastus said, "Yes, Clodius will be leaving early tomorrow with despatches from the governor. If I ask him, he would take a private letter for me."

Paul turned to Timothy, "In that case would you seal the letter you wrote and give it to our brother here to take with him tonight?"

Timothy had not noticed that Tertius had been writing on the spare piece of papyrus at the end of the scroll. He sealed it and put it in a bag and handed it over to Erastus.

Erastus said, "I will tell him to deliver it to Eubulus. He is easy to find."⁶⁰⁴

The next morning Phoebe came to fetch the letter. Timothy knew Tertius had written it and looked for the scroll, he then went to Paul and asked him for the letter for Phoebe. Paul looked at him for a long moment, gradually a look of utter dismay filled his face. Timothy, worried said, "Are you all right?"

Paul found his voice and asked, "Did you look at the letter to the Roman church before you sealed it last night?"

Surprised Timothy said, "No, I just rolled it up and put the seal on it."

"Then you have sent Phoebe's letter to Rome!" There was no amusement in Paul's face. "It is my fault, I forgot to tell you I couldn't find any papyrus and I told Tertius to use the end of the one you had been writing on."

Paul turned to Phoebe, "My dear sister, I do apologise for a stupid mistake, can you wait while Timothy writes another letter for you?"

Phoebe felt uncomfortable to be in such fine surroundings, but she wanted to leave, "It's all right, don't bother yourself teacher. I don't really need a letter."

"Of course you shall have a letter, dear sister. It was my stupidity that it is not ready for you. Timothy, quickly, fetch your writing things, our sister is in a hurry to leave."

While Timothy was gone, Paul said, "Sit down, sister, we won't be long."

Paul then dictated a shortened version of the previous letter which Phoebe received gratefully.

Winter passed and Paul waited impatiently for the coming of the representatives of the Macedonian churches. The collection in Corinth had exceeded all his expectations.⁶⁰⁵ It was an outpouring of love and support for Paul himself. The brethren realised that this visit to Jerusalem was fraught with danger for him. He had a great many enemies in Judaea, many of them within the company of the church there. Also the situation in Judaea had deteriorated under the Roman procurators, and people returning from attending the festivals in Jerusalem brought disturbing news of growing violence, especially amongst the sicarii.

Finally, one wet, windy day the whole party from Macedonia arrived. Paul was delighted, Luke had come from Philippi, accompanied by Gaius from Derbe and Tychicus who had brought Trophimus with him from

⁶⁰⁴ This rather elaborate account would at least explain how Romans 16, with greetings to people in Ephesus, came to be attached to the letter to the Romans. It seems incredible that someone who had never been to Rome should know the names of 25 members of the church. Whereas he had been 3 years in Ephesus and been through traumatic times with them. Furthermore we know Aquila and Priscilla lived in Ephesus – they moved there with Paul (Acts 18:18) and in Romans 16:5 Epaphroditus was the first convert in Asia. It can be noted that Romans Chapter 15 ends with "May God, our source of peace, be with all of you. Amen." (cf the ending of Romans 16:27.)

⁶⁰⁵ Collection for Judaea: In Corinth – Romans 15:26

Ephesus.^{606;607} There was a great deal for them to report to Paul. Then there were Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica and finally Sopater of Berea who came with greetings from his father, Pyrrhus.⁶⁰⁸ They had been unable to spare anyone else from the church to accompany him, but travelling with the party, he and the money he carried was well protected.

That evening they settled round the brazier in Gaius's reception room to hear all the news. The local elders were also invited to hear the reports.

When they were all settled, Paul turned to Tychicus, "Tell me how are things in Ephesus?"

Tychicus answered, "Not too good." Then seeing Paul's face added quickly, "No, the church is strong and sends you loving greetings. They are all well and Priscilla particularly sent her love and told you not to worry. The Lord's hand is over them."

"Well, what is the trouble?" asked Paul.

"The city council has issued an order that should you ever return to Ephesus you should immediately be arrested and put on trial for undermining the religion of the city."

Erastus of Corinth asked, "Whatever for?"

Trophimus smiled grimly, "Demetrius of the Silversmith guild together with the other guilds were furious when they found Paul had escaped from the city. For a while it looked as if they would attack all the Christian homes, but Alexander the coppersmith advised otherwise."

"You mean that Jewish man who was shouted down in the theatre that day?" Luke asked.

"The same," Trophimus replied, "He apparently said it would be enough just to catch Paul, for without Paul the rest of the 'Nazirite brood' as he termed it, would disappear!"

"How wrong he will prove to be," murmured Luke looking at Paul.

"Yes, but Praise to the Lord! A general persecution was avoided. I think Alexander was afraid that should one start, the Jewish community might be caught up in it," Tychicus remarked.

"How did your mission to Laodicea go? What happened to Onesimus?" Paul asked.

Tychicus grinned, "He was very nervous as we approached Philemon's house, but without waiting to read the letter, Philemon embraced him and said, 'You have returned! Thanks be to God!' Onesimus burst into tears and fell at his feet saying how ashamed he was. Then Philemon read your letter

⁶⁰⁶ Luke: *In Corinth* – N.B. 'us' in Acts 10:5

⁶⁰⁷ Gaius, Tychinus & Trophimus: *In Corinth* – Acts 20:4

⁶⁰⁸ Aristarchus, Secundus & Sopater: *In Corinth* – Acts 20:4

and then re-read it to Apphia. The whole household welcomed him back as a brother!”

“And the church at Colossae? How are they?”

“Obviously they would like a visit from you, but I found them a warm and loving group. It is true some of them practice extreme asceticism, but your letter helped them to see that outward asceticism doesn’t necessarily purify the soul. I also told them that it is more important to be bound together in love for one another.” Tychicus paused and added, “They are a fine group!”

“What about the brethren in Laodicea?”

Tychicus gave a sigh, “They are a mixed bunch and there is no Philemon to show them how the Holy Spirit can lead them into a new life. They seem to think they can receive the Gospel message AND keep to their old way of life!”⁶⁰⁹

The conversation spread to include the representatives from the other churches as they gave their reports, sharing their hopes and problems. The coming together of these people in Corinth pleased Paul in the sense of the oneness they obviously felt with one another. He hoped that the experience here would be repeated in Judaea with the Jewish brethren. He did not ask them the sums they had each collected, but he could see that while the poorer churches may have sent less, their simple testimony of love and concern would perhaps be a greater gift than the money they brought.

At the end of the evening Gaius asked, “When do you plan to leave for Judaea?”

“As soon as the first ships start sailing,” replied Paul, “I want to be in Jerusalem for Passover.”

“Then you better be ready to go, some of the vessels are already leaving.”

Paul nodded. He wanted to get the visit to Jerusalem over. He knew there would be difficulties, not only with the brethren but possibly with the authorities.

It was only two days later that three very worried Jewish brothers arrived early in the morning at Gaius’s house asking to see Paul.⁶¹⁰ Their spokesman was David, an older and respected member of both the synagogue and the Christian community. “Brother Paul, on no account must you travel by sea from here to Jerusalem! Sosipater here overheard Judas telling Daniel to call a meeting of the ‘group’.”

“He probably meant those taking the offering to Jerusalem, they must be leaving soon as well.” Paul remarked.

⁶⁰⁹ See Revelation 3:14-22

⁶¹⁰ Paul: Jewish plot in Corinth – Acts 20:3

“Well, yes,” Sosipater agreed, “I did think that, but then I heard him say, ‘Make sure Caddis comes.’ There is no way that Caddis would be included in the delegation taking the offerings to Jerusalem. The Essenes reject the priesthood of Jerusalem.”

“There must be something else than this to make you think there is a plot against me,” Paul challenged.

At this point Jason, a grave young man, spoke, “I live next door to Simon. My father has business connections with him. During the past week, Caddis and a few of his friends have been attending meetings at Simon’s house. This was so unusual even my mother remarked on it. Simon loathes Caddis’s group and all they stand for, yet it became obvious he was suddenly friendly with them.”

“I still don’t see that this has anything to do with me,” Paul was impatient with this disjointed account.

Sosipater said, “We discussed these strange meetings, and could make little of them, until I spoke to old Jethro. I thought he might give something away, he’s very vague these days. It wasn’t difficult to find out that there is indeed a plot against your life.”

“Did Jethro tell you that?” Paul asked amazed.

“No, of course not,” Sosipater replied, “But he chuckled away to himself. He is very confused, but if you are willing to listen long enough you get little bits of sense out of him. It seems they are sending two parties to Jerusalem this year, the first party will depart before you and wait somewhere for the second party, which will be on the same ship as you. Somewhere as opportunity offers, you will be disposed of.”

Paul nodded grimly. He could believe this. The situation was worse than he had feared because he had not expected active persecution before he reached Judaea.

Lucius said, “Perhaps you should not go to Jerusalem with the collection.”

Paul looked outraged, “How can you say that? This collection and the brothers that come with me is to seal the unity of all the churches under the headship of Christ Jesus. I know how many of the Hebrew brothers in Judaea reject the Gentile brothers, the Lord has laid it on my heart to bring about reconciliation.”

His three visitors looked unhappily at him. “I don’t think you should go.” Sosipater insisted.

“Let me pray about this,” Paul answered, “You call a meeting of the elders and those coming with me this midday.”

With that they had to be satisfied and they left to arrange the meeting. Paul went to his room and began praying.

Shortly after midday, Paul's party of eight men, together with the elders of the church, which included his host, Gaius, Lucius, Sosipater, Titius Justus, and three other men, gathered in Gaius's reception room.

Paul turned to Tychicus and said, "Pray for us brother, that we act according to the will of the Lord."

After Tychicus's prayer, Paul turned to Sosipater and asked him to outline what he had reported earlier. His report brought exclamations of anger and consternation from those present.

When the meeting had quietened down, Paul said, "It seems to me that the best way to thwart these people is if we return through Macedonia."

"But that means we will be too late for Passover," Timothy burst out.

Paul turned to him, "You are right but it will also mean that those who want to do us harm will have left Jerusalem by the time we arrive."

"So you are giving up the idea of arriving in time for Passover?" Tychicus was disappointed.

"We will arrive in time for Pentecost, and for the church this is far more significant than Passover," Paul said briskly.

Sosipater cleared his throat, "As you know we have chosen Jason and Stephanas to accompany you to take the collection for the Corinthian church. I know that neither of them will be able to make an extended visit round Macedonia to delay their arrival in Jerusalem until Pentecost."

"Can't you find two other brothers to replace them?" Paul was impatient at such a trifling problem.

"It was with great difficulty we were able to find two of our number to go with you," Sosipater spoke quietly.

The matter was debated back and forth for some time, until finally Paul said, "Well, it seems as if they must go on ahead and arrive in time for Passover as they intended."

"Won't that spoil your plans to have all the churches of Achaia, Asia and Macedonia coming together as a major delegation?"

"Yes, but the important thing is that the brethren in Judaea receive the gifts and meet representatives of each church as well," Paul said.

So it was decided that Jason and Stephanas would set out as planned, and since it was important that any change in their plans should not reach their enemies. The rest of the party left the next morning at first light.⁶¹¹

⁶¹¹ Acts 20:4 Gives the list of people who accompanied Paul to Jerusalem. There are NO representatives of the Corinthian church. One possibility is that they went on ahead.

Paul stayed with Luke in Philippi for Passover,⁶¹² while the rest of the party including Timothy went on to Troas and waited for them.⁶¹³ Paul was warmly welcomed by the brethren there. On his previous visit he had been distraught with worry about Titus, now he made up for it by teaching them daily about the Way. Paul planned to leave the day after the fellowship meal on the first day of the week. The brethren met in Carpus's home.⁶¹⁴ A well-built house of three storeys. They met in the room on the top floor and, after sharing the meal, Paul began to teach. As the words poured from him, it seemed he was giving a complete summary of all his main teachings. His listeners were sitting crowded together and one young man, Eutychus, was sitting in the open window.⁶¹⁵ The children fell asleep leaning on their parents and, truth to tell, some of the adults began to feel drowsy. Around midnight someone sitting near to Eutychus gave a startled cry and pointed to the window. Someone shouted, "He's fallen." People jumped up and made for the stairs. Some peered anxiously out and when those who had run down came to the young man they shouted up, "He's dead."

At this Paul went down. He pushed his way through the people crowding round. Paul flung himself on the young man's body and hugged him. Then he looked up and said, "Don't worry, he is still alive!"

There were cries of disbelief, but they picked him up and found he was indeed conscious. Paul directed that they should take him home, and chattering with amazement, for they had been sure Eutychus was dead, they took him home.

Paul in the meantime ate some bread before resuming his discussions with the brethren until dawn broke. Thereafter he said farewell to them and also to Luke and those travelling with him. They were to take the boat to Assos, but he wanted to be alone and decided to walk and meet up with them there.⁶¹⁶ Luke tried to dissuade him, but there was much on Paul's mind. He felt this visit to Jerusalem was inevitable, but he knew his enemies would try to discredit, if not kill him. In the close confines on board ship Paul found the good cheer of his companions a distraction. Much as he loved Timothy, Luke and Tychicus he needed time to be alone and declined their offers to walk with him.

It was during his walk he knew he must avoid re-visiting Ephesus. He would be in danger of arrest and he wanted nothing to delay his return to Jerusalem. In Assos he met up with his companions and joined them on the

⁶¹² Paul: In Philippi for Passover CE 57 – Acts 20:6

⁶¹³ Timothy: In Troas – Acts 20:4,5. Paul's 3rd visit – Acts 20:5

⁶¹⁴ Carpus: Of Troas – 2 Timothy 4:13

⁶¹⁵ Eutychus: Of Troas – Acts 20:9

⁶¹⁶ This distance is 50 kilometres

ship. They sailed from island to island and when they arrived at Miletus,⁶¹⁷ he sent Tychicus and Trophimus to call the elders from Ephesus to meet him.⁶¹⁸

The break in their journey enabled Paul to relax and rest until the elders from Ephesus arrived with Aquila amongst them, bringing messages of love and concern from Priscilla and the other women.

Paul spoke of the difficulties he had met in preaching the gospel and looking lovingly at them he concluded, “I have gone about among all of you, preaching the Kingdom of God. And now I know none of you will ever see me again. So I solemnly declare to you this very day: if any of you should be lost, I am not responsible,” he looked hard at Demas who was one of the delegation.⁶¹⁹

“For I have not held back from announcing to you the whole purpose of God. So keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock which the Holy Spirit has placed in your care. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he made his own through the death of his Son. I know that after I leave, fierce wolves will come among you, and they will not spare the flock. The time will come when some men from your own group will tell lies to lead the believers away after them. Watch, then, and remember that with many tears, day and night, I taught every one of you for three years.”

There were tears in many eyes as they listened to this little man. He had caused them much trouble, but also joy and knowledge of the Way of the Lord. They knew of no one like him. His teachings were clear and memorable. He himself could be obstinate but no one doubted his courage, and they knew something of the bravery which was required for him to take this journey to Jerusalem.

“And now,” continued Paul, “I commend you to the care of God and to the message of his grace, which is able to build you up and give you the blessings God has for all his people. I have not wanted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that I have worked with these hands of mine to provide everything that my companions and I have needed. I have shown you in all things that by working hard in this way we must help the weak, remembering the words that the Lord Jesus himself said, ‘There is more happiness in giving than in receiving.’”

Paul then knelt down and the brethren joined him as they prayed for him and for one another. They hugged and kissed Paul and the brothers going with

⁶¹⁷ Miletus: Paul’s visit – Acts 20:15

⁶¹⁸ Elders of Ephesus: Meet Paul in Miletus – Acts 20:17

⁶¹⁹ ‘Demas fell in love with this present world’ 2 Timothy 4:10

him. Everyone was crying as they accompanied Paul's party to their ship and watched it depart.⁶²⁰

Once more they sailed through the islands until they came to Patara, where they changed ships and boarded one sailing direct to Tyre. While the ship was unloading its cargo in Tyre, some of the party went ashore to explore the famous city. During their wanderings Luke and Timothy discovered there were believers living there. With great excitement they returned to the ship with an invitation for them all to disembark and stay with them.

Paul's party was a surprise to these simple folk, most of whom worked either in the harbours, or fishing, there were a few Jews amongst them, but most comprised of Syrian converts. Their hospitality was stretched to feed eight extra people. They were not a large group, but were devoted to the Way, and were intensely interested in the mixed group of people visiting them who not only bore witness to the wondrous Grace of God reaching far out into the Gentile world, but also brought men of great teaching ability such as Tychicus and Aristarchus as well as Paul himself. They had not heard of Paul of Tarsus, but soon recognized him as someone specially endowed.

After discharging its cargo their ship began loading cedar logs for Alexandria, it would stay in port for a few more days.

Meetings were held nightly and on the first day of the week, they broke bread together. It was during this time of worship together that an old man, leader of their group, suddenly turned on Paul and said, "Do not proceed to Jerusalem, you will be arrested and thrown into prison."

Paul seemed neither surprised nor alarmed, he asked quietly, "And what of my companions? Will they be arrested also?"

The old man held still for a while and then said, "No, they will be blessed and depart in peace."

The next day the ship was due to sail. Early in the morning the whole congregation including the wives and children accompanied Paul's party to the beach, where they knelt on the sandy shore and prayed for their departing guests. After blessing their kindly hosts, Paul and his companions walked to the Sidon Harbour.

When they arrived in Caesarea they went straight to Philip's house.⁶²¹ There Paul and his party were welcomed, even if the number of his companions gave his wife, Miriam worries about how to feed them all. She managed to send round to her neighbours for extra bread and placed before their unexpected guests an adequate meal. Their four unmarried daughters waited at table modestly with eyes lowered as they served their guests.

⁶²⁰ Paul: *Leaves for Jerusalem – Acts 20:38*

⁶²¹ Paul: *Arrives in Caesarea CE 56 – Acts 21:8*

Later, when it came to a time of prayer in the evening, the four girls surprised their visitors with their witness to the Way of the Lord.

Luke was delighted to meet someone who had been an ardent disciple of Jesus. Although Philip spent the day in his workshop, he was happy to have Luke ask him questions about the Lord. In fact, he finally abandoned all plans to complete the job he was working on, and gave his full attention to Luke.

After Paul's intense anxiety to reach Jerusalem in time for Pentecost, their arrival in Caesarea, with over a week to spare, saw him suddenly relax and he indulged Luke's intense pleasure at finding someone to talk to about the Lord.

While they were with Philip, Agabus suddenly arrived from Jerusalem.⁶²² Paul greeted him with great joy, remembering his visit to Antioch over ten years previously. Paul introduced his companions, "Here is Sopater from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Tychicus and Trophimus from Ephesus and Timothy, my spiritual son, from Lystra." He looked round and saw Luke was missing, "You will find our beloved doctor, Luke listening to Philip out in his workshop."

"You have quite a delegation with you my brother," there was an unspoken question in Agabus's remark. He was a severe man with little humour, his gift of prophecy would come upon him with compelling power and he took himself and his gift very seriously.

Aristarchus answered it, "We have brought a collection for the brethren in Judaea as a token of our love and gratitude for the blessings we have received through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Agabus nodded but said nothing. He turned to Miriam, who had come forward to greet him and said, "Have you room for me?"

"We are a little crowded, brother, but the weather is warm and you are welcome to sleep on the roof with the other brothers."

"Thank you, sister. That will be quite adequate." He seemed uneasy and disturbed about something, but saying no more, he followed the youngest daughter up to the roof, where she laid another sleeping mat under the shade of the large tarpaulin which had been spread for the other visitors.

Later when they were all gathered in the upper room, Agabus went over to Paul and untied his girdle from round his waist. Then he tied up his own feet and hands and said to Paul, "This is what the Holy Spirit says; The owner of this belt will be tied up in this way by the Jews in Jerusalem, and they will hand him over to the Gentiles."⁶²³

⁶²² Agabus: Visits Caesarea CE 56 – Acts 21:10

⁶²³ Agabus: Prophecy for Paul – Acts 21:11

Aristarchus said, "Then we must not go to Jerusalem. It is better if we hand over the collection to our brothers here in Caesarea and go home."

"He is right," said Philip gravely. "Since your arrival I have heard that the Jews consider you an apostate and traitor. You have, they say, turned people away from the true faith and broken the congregations wherever you go."

"Do you consider I have turned people away from the 'true faith'?" asked Paul, "Did our Lord not commission me to take the Good News of Salvation to the Gentiles?"

"No one can doubt that you received a special commission from our Lord," replied Philip gently, "But things are very unsettled in Judaea, the people are stirred up with anger against the Romans; the Samaritans and Galileans are constantly raiding each other so that it is unsafe to travel through these regions. The sicarii kidnap people in high places and trade them for their own people arrested by the Romans."

"I don't see what that has to do with me," Paul replied.

Philip sighed and looked at Agabus, who said, "The Apostles in Jerusalem are also under pressure. There are many priests and leading pharisees amongst the brethren there and they are totally opposed to the admission of Gentiles unless they are circumcised."

The men with Paul looked aghast. "It would be far better that you did not go, my brother, we cannot afford to lose you," Luke remarked.

"What do you say, brother Agabus?" demanded Paul, "Do you insist that Gentiles should conform to the outward Jew or be inwardly transformed by their baptism into the Lord Jesus?"

"We should preserve the seamless robe of the Lord," Agabus replied severely, which did not answer Paul's question.

Tears began to stream down Timothy's face and he turned to Tychicus and said, "Stop him, they will kill him."

"You remember how irrationally the Jews in Corinth treated you," Tychicus said, "And you can be sure that if those two trouble-makers have returned to Jerusalem they will use their influence to get you arrested yet again. You are needed, my brother. Let some of us take the collection to the Apostles in Jerusalem. We will tell them of your desire for unity amongst the whole body of Christ."

Aristarchus joined his voice to Tychicus's and with tears in his eyes he said, "Remember Ephesus, how bitter Alexander was against you, and how he conspired with other Guilds to bring you to ruin. Please don't go, my brother."

“What are you doing, crying like this and breaking my heart?” Paul said, “I am ready not only to be tied up in Jerusalem but even to die there for the sake of the Lord Jesus.”

Timothy turned in despair to Tychicus, sobbing uncontrollably. Many of the others were weeping, but Philip said, “May the Lord’s will be done,” and after a moment each one except Timothy, said, “Amen.”

Paul looked at Timothy and put his hand on his shoulder, “And you too my son, can you also say ‘Amen’ to the will of the Lord?”

Timothy wiped his eyes on his sleeve and still gulping his sobs, whispered, “Amen.”

CHAPTER 30: PAUL'S LAST VISIT TO JERUSALEM

CE 57 May

*Acts 21:17-48
Acts Chs 22-26*

It was a very sombre group that left Caesarea two days later. Three local disciples decided to accompany the party to Jerusalem. Before they left, there had been some discussion as to a safe place for them to stay. Mark's mother, Mary had died and another branch of the family was living in her house.

Someone suggested Mnason's name, and Paul pricked up his ears, "Do you mean Mnason of Cyprus? Is he now living in Jerusalem?"⁶²⁴

Philip asked, "Do you know him?"

"Yes, very well. Barnabas, Mark and I stayed with him when we visited Cyprus some years ago. What is he doing in Jerusalem?"

Agabus said, "After Barnabas's death, Mnason went back to Jerusalem with John Mark to break the news to Mary. I think he decided then to move to Jerusalem, partly for business reasons."

"He welcomes all the brethren who visit Jerusalem and his wife, Judith is a warm and loving hostess," Philip remarked.

The party joined the many others walking up from Caesarea to bring their thank offerings for the wheat harvest to Jerusalem. From every village along the road, more people joined the throng, which was happy and light-hearted.

Paul explained to his Greek companions that the festival of Pentecost was a week of weeks, counted each day from the second night of Passover until the day before Pentecost, then for Pentecost each household must bring a leavened loaf of a prescribed size made of wheat flour and two lambs.

"Where are the lambs?" Asked Sopater.

"Many people bring them from their own flocks, but those who have no sheep can purchase them at the Temple," Paul replied.

They spent the night on the road at Arimethea, where local disciples welcomed them and gave them food and a place to sleep.

The evening sun caught the Temple turning it to gold when they walked up the road to Jerusalem. They entered through the Gennath gate next to the Tower of Phasaël. The city was crowded and looked unchanged from when

⁶²⁴ *Mnason: Living in Jerusalem CE 57 – Acts 21:16*

Paul last visited. Mnason's house was in the street of Coppersmiths in the lower city.

Mnason and Judith hugged Paul warmly, delighted to see him again. If they felt any doubts about his companions, their welcome did not reveal it. The whole party accompanying Paul was now eleven, but the sudden arrival of so many extra people did not seem to worry Judith, who called the maids and sent them scurrying out to buy bread. When the food was prepared and put on the table, it proved to be more than enough.

Later the whole party sat round exchanging news and catching up on present problems in Judaea. The governor, Felix was loathed. He was high-handed and overbearing. People explained it by saying he was brother to Nero's freedman, Pallas, who was reputed to be all-powerful in Rome itself. Mnason said, "The country is very unsettled and unsafe for travellers."

"What of the brethren?" asked Paul, "How do they go on?"

"I think you should see James first thing in the morning. There have been problems between those who still hold all Gentiles must first be circumcised and those who accept all who confess Jesus is Lord, to be one in him."

"What of the decision of the Council of Jerusalem, eight years ago? Has it made no difference?"

"Not to the priestly believers and some of the Pharisees," replied Mnason.

It was just as Philip and Agabus had described in Caesarea. "It seems to me," he went on, "That they hope the whole nation would accept Jesus as Messiah, if they had proof that Gentiles accepted that salvation comes to them through the Jews."

Paul was so upset he jumped to his feet and was about to launch into a diatribe, but Mnason smiled at him and forestalled him, "You cannot be more upset than many of us. We know what Christ has brought to the Gentiles." He looked round the room at the strangers from Asia and Macedonia, "We know that in the Lord Jesus, we are one."

"Do you think our visit will strengthen your position or weaken it?" asked Tychicus.

"I'm not sure. There is a lot of opposition to Brother Paul in some quarters," he looked apprehensive.

The next morning when James had been warned of the arrival of Paul's party, they went to his house to find there a full gathering of the elders,⁶²⁵ James's greeting was warm as he embraced Paul, "Welcome, my brother, are you in health?"

"Yes, thanks be to God, I am well."

⁶²⁵ James: Paul visits James CE 57 – Acts 21:18

Paul greeted the assembled elders, embracing many whom he recognized, but there was a coolness on the part of some. James said, "Would you like to give your report, my brother?"

Paul turned to the gathering, which numbered some twenty-three men,⁶²⁶ "I greet you, my brothers in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. You know that I was made an Apostle to the Gentiles, like one who is born out of time. Nine years ago you confirmed my mission to the Gentiles and gave Barnabas and myself instructions concerning what was required of Gentiles who became followers of our Lord.

"Now I have come to report to you, together with these brothers from the churches of Macedonia and Asia that God has honoured his promises that those who come to him through faith in his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, shall be called his children."

Paul then reported in a fair amount of detail the establishment of the various churches throughout Asia, Macedonia and Achaia, also of his visit to Crete and Illyricum. He did not spend time on his own sufferings and persecutions, but emphasised the transforming power of God in the lives of those who believed in Jesus Christ.

He ended by saying, "I want to introduce these brothers who have accompanied me. They bring with them a collection for you, their brothers in Judaea, as an outpouring of their grateful thanks to God and sign of their deep affection for you because of the extraordinary grace God has shown them."⁶²⁷

He turned to the men with him, "This is Tychicus and Trophimus from Ephesus, dear brothers and faithful workers in the Lord's work."

The two men bowed to the assembly before them and brought their offering. Tychicus said, as he handed over to an elder who stepped forward to receive it, "God chose us to be his own people in union with Christ, let us then, whose hope is in Christ Jesus, praise God's glory."⁶²⁸

The assembly said, "Amen."

Paul then said, "Here is our dear doctor, Luke of Philippi, the Lord has laid it on his heart to write a full and orderly account of the life of our Lord Jesus." There was a stir of surprise from the assembly.

Luke stepped forward, he was never a public speaker, but his clear mind and sweet nature often reached the hearts of people and built up the faith of those around him. In a quiet voice he said, "Through the preaching of brother Paul, we have indeed received a full measure of God's grace, a generous

⁶²⁶ Twenty-three men: this was the usual number for the small Sanhedrin. It seems very likely that the Jewish followers of Jesus would duplicate Jewish structures for organisation and discipline.

⁶²⁷ 2 Corinthians 9:12 and 14

⁶²⁸ Ephesians 1:11, 12

helping, poured into our hands,⁶²⁹ in return the church of Philippi wishes to express its love and gratitude to you, our elders in the faith,” he handed over the offering he had brought.

“This is Aristarchus and Secundus of Thessalonica. Brother Aristarchus was a prisoner with me for our Lord in Ephesus. The church in Thessalonica suffered much for their faith, but they received the message of salvation with the joy that comes through the Holy Spirit and have become an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.”⁶³⁰

Aristarchus looking a little uncertain said, “We greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ who has taught us how we should love one another.” Secundus, who was holding the money bag handed it over to the elder.

There was a marked thawing amongst the men around James. They represented a complete cross-section of the Jerusalem community and had obviously viewed the delegation with Paul with disfavour, but their attitude was changing.

“Here is Sopater, son of Pyrrhus from Berea,” Paul said. “Their church is small, but full of faith.”

Sopater was the youngest of the delegates, “My fathers, I bring you greetings from the church in Berea in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,” he handed over a small bag.

Nicodemus, who was now old and grey-bearded, but still a tall and upright figure, stood and spoke on behalf of the elders, “My brothers in Christ, you, together with the brothers that joined us from Corinth over Passover, have truly shown that you have been born of the Spirit and together with us, will see the Kingdom of God. We rejoice that your gifts to us are an expression of your love and we ask you to take back to your brethren our love and blessings. You know that the brothers from Corinth arrived here in time for Passover and we welcomed them and their generous offering to us.”

A robust man with a thick black beard and a no nonsense attitude spoke out, “That is all very well, but we have heard many reports of how brother Paul is undermining the Jewish Law and dividing the synagogues with his teaching.” He turned to face Paul, “There have been reports of how you have actually been punished for your teachings in many of the synagogues of the dispersion,” his voice indicated his shock and revulsion.

Paul rose quietly and said, “I count it a privilege that when I suffer for preaching the Gospel I have a share in Christ’s many sufferings,⁶³¹ and I

⁶²⁹ Luke 6:38

⁶³⁰ 1 Thessalonians 1:6,7

⁶³¹ 2 Corinthians 1:5

consider that what we suffer at this present time cannot be compared at all with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.”⁶³²

One of those present said, “Didn’t our Lord himself say, ‘Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the world? No, not peace, but division.’ Don’t you remember my brothers how he warned that even families would be divided against one another?”⁶³³

Nicodemus turned to Paul, “Brother Paul, you can see how many thousands of Jews have become believers, and how devoted they all are to the Law. They have been told that you have been teaching all the Jews who live in Gentile countries to abandon the Law of Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or follow the Jewish customs. They are sure to hear that you have arrived. What should be done then?”

Nicodemus looked round the room, the elders were watching him, “This is what I suggest you should do. There are four men here who have taken a vow. Go along with them and join them in the ceremony of purification and pay their expenses; then they will be able to shave their heads. In this way everyone will know that there is no truth in any of the things that they have been told about you, but you yourself live in accordance with the Law of Moses.”

There was a murmur of agreement from the other elders, but the man who had spoke earlier asked, “And what about the Gentiles? If we obey the Law of Moses, what must they do?”

Paul, remembering how the Holy Spirit moved amongst the elders at the previous council when this matter was dealt with, remained still. He was far from happy with Nicodemus’s suggestion, but he waited to hear what the others would say.

James said, “As to the Gentiles who have become believers, we have already sent them a letter telling them we decided that they must not eat any food that has been offered to idols, or any blood, or any animal that has been strangled, and that they must keep themselves from sexual immorality. Let us send a copy of this letter home with all these brothers.”

The elders were not totally in agreement with this, they knew there were many who still felt Gentiles must be circumcised and come under the Law, it would not satisfy these people just to have Paul complete the Nazirite vows with four of the brethren. And yet the Gentiles with Paul seemed sincere, devout men.

As the meeting broke up many came over to talk with the delegates. Luke found himself talking to a man who introduced himself as Simon of Bethany.

⁶³² *Romans 8:18*

⁶³³ *Luke 12:51*

He was delighted to discover that Simon had actually been healed of leprosy by Jesus. The result of his questions prompted Simon to invite him home. Paul himself was talking to Nicodemus about the four men under the Nazirite vow.

Luke came up and said, "Will you excuse me if I go with brother Simon to visit with him in Bethany?"

Paul smiled, "Have you started already, brother?"

Simon said, "I'll see he gets back to you for Pentecost, but he can spend the Sabbath with us first. He will want to meet with Mary and Martha."⁶³⁴

Paul nodded and turned back to Nicodemus, "I will meet with you at morning sacrifice."

Early the next morning they met outside the Beautiful Gate. Nicodemus introduced the four men to Paul, "This is brother Micah of Alexandria, brothers Shelomith and Ezra from Galilee and brother Isaac from Caesarea. The four men greeted Paul with reserve. Like Paul the men were barefooted and wearing white.

Nicodemus took his leave and Paul together with the four men entered in the Court of Women. They turned left and entered the Nazirite chamber, where a priest was waiting for them to perform the purification ritual. He questioned them concerning possible contact with a corpse during the period of their vows. This would have rendered the whole period of their vow invalid and required them to shave, then offer special purification sacrifices and start again. Satisfied on this, the priest watched them remove their outer garments and enter the mikvah, where they completely submerged. Paul, too followed them for ritual purification.

The men then put on their clothes and walked across the now crowded Court of Women to the foot of the steps leading up to the Nicanor Gate. It was time for the morning sacrifice and burning of incense. Many of the men were climbing the steps to enter the Court of Israelites, but Paul and the men with him waited at the foot. At the conclusion of the sacrifice of the lamb, together with the meal-offering and the cake-offering, two priests blew a prolonged blast on trumpets, followed by a staccato blast and then a prolonged blast. This told the worshippers in the Court of Women that the priest was about to pour the libation of wine on the altar and the morning sacrifice was nearly completed. Shortly after this another priest became

⁶³⁴ *Dating Paul's Life*; by Robert Jewett. Published by SCM Press 1979. In the year AD 57 15th Nisan (Passover) fell on April 8th. The date of Paul's departure from Philippi on the last Jerusalem trip (Acts 20:6ff) has been reckoned by Ramsay and Plooi to be on Friday the 15th April, 57. (Page 48 and 49) Using this information, Pentecost would have fallen on Sunday 29th May, seven weeks later.

visible to worshippers in the lower courtyard. He was waving a scarf, which was a signal for the Levites to begin to sing.⁶³⁵

The Levites, standing at the top of the steps were accompanied for the singing of the psalms with nine lyres, two harps and one cymbal. At the end of the psalm two priests blew a further trumpet blast.⁶³⁶ Paul then left the four men and joined the long queue of people waiting to climb the stairs through the Nicanor Gate into the Court of Israel. Many people were waiting to make the sacrifices and offerings prescribed by law. When Paul finally entered the court he joined another queue to report that he would be bringing four Nazirite men in seven days to complete their vows, shave their heads and offer the sacrifices.

The priest took the details given to him and without looking up said, "Be here early."

The following evening after the close of the Sabbath, Paul and his companions were sitting with Mnason on the roof in the cool of the evening. The stars made a sparkling canopy above them. They were sitting relaxed discussing the synagogue service they had attended that day and asking questions.

Tychicus asked, "What is the significance of the counting of the Omer?"

Mnason answered, "For seven days after Passover we celebrate the Festival of Unleavened bread as Moses laid down. Then the day after the Sabbath when the first sheaf of wheat is cut, this is offered to the Lord together with wheat flour mixed with olive oil. Until this offering of the first cutting is made, no one may eat any of the new harvest."⁶³⁷ From the date of this offering we count the Omer every day until the forty-ninth day, making seven weeks of the Omer."

"Yes, but what do you mean by 'Omer'?" asked Trophimus.

"Oh, it is a dry measurement, specifying the quantity we must offer to God."

Mnason added, "When we have finished the seven weeks of Omer, we celebrate the end of the wheat harvest. Each household will bring to the Temple two loaves, made of a set quantity of wheat flour with leaven. Then we take two lambs to present them to God. They are slaughtered and made ready for the evening meal for the priests. Other sacrifices offered will be three bullocks for a burnt offering, two rams and fourteen lambs. Then two goat kids are offered for sins."⁶³⁸

⁶³⁵ *The Jewish People in the First Century. Vol 1. Edited by S.Safrai and M.Stern. Published van Gorcum and Comp B.V Assen 1974 Page 889*

⁶³⁶ *Ibid Page 885 and 886*

⁶³⁷ *Leviticus 23:15-20*

⁶³⁸ *Josephus – Complete Works by Whiston (1867) Published Pickering and Inghs 1960*

“Surely the priests cannot eat all the lambs brought for sacrifice on the one day? It is not permitted to keep the lambs until later?”

The Jews present looked scandalised, “The Law forbids any of these offerings to be left over until the following day,” Mnason explained, “But you must remember there are over seven hundred priests assisting with the sacrifices and they and their families are entitled to share in the meat.”

“Also for the offerings from the people, it is permitted for them to bring them during the following six days,” Paul added.

There were sounds of arrival and in a short while an ecstatic Luke joined them on the roof.

“How did it go, brother?” Asked Aristarchus.

Luke grinned, “I am returning there as soon as possible so I may spend some time with Mary and Martha. Simon tells me Jesus stayed with them when he came to Jerusalem.”

They could see that Luke was bubbling over with excitement. “Simon told me he had been a very self-righteous man, even after the Lord had healed him of leprosy. He still felt he was one of the elect of Israel. That is until Jesus told him a story.” Luke’s eyes twinkled.

“Well, come on, tell us. It must be a new one,” Timothy urged.

“Simon said that Jesus made him see that no one can be sure of their own goodness, and no one must despise anyone else. The story goes like this, ‘Once there were two men who went up to the Temple to pray: one was a Pharisee, the other a tax collector.’”

Like children, the men settled down to listen. “The Pharisee stood apart by himself and prayed, ‘I thank you, God, that I am not greedy, dishonest, or an adulterer, like everybody else. I thank you that I am not like that tax collector over there. I fast two days a week, and I give you a tenth of all my income.’”

Paul said quietly, “That could have been me.”

“But the tax collector stood at a distance and would not even raise his face to heaven, but beat on his breast and said, ‘God, have pity on me, a sinner!’ ‘I tell you,’ said Jesus, ‘the tax collector, and not the Pharisee, was in the right with God when he went home. For everyone who makes himself great will be humbled, and everyone who humbles himself will be made great.’”⁶³⁹

When Luke had finished the story, no one spoke, many had tears in their eyes. Somehow hearing a new teaching of the Lord Jesus, spoken in Jerusalem itself brought them nearer to the man himself. He had really walked

⁶³⁹ Luke 18:9-14

around these same streets, visited with these same people and using simple stories, taught profound truths about God.

The day of Pentecost came and went, the Greeks in Paul's party could, of course only see the festival from the Court of Gentiles. Nevertheless they walked round the precincts in amazement, not only at the size and beauty of what they saw, but the incredible, to them, absence of any statues depicting God in any of his forms. Tychicus in particular began to understand the great gift God had given humanity through the Jews; of a God supreme above his creation; beyond the comprehension of any man; and yet through Christ both Jews and Gentile are able to come in the one Spirit into the presence of the Father.⁶⁴⁰ He drifted off to be alone under the porticos of Solomon's porch. His eyes fell on the pens of animals waiting to be sacrificed. The noisy haggling going on round the tables of the money-changers, and he felt that all this was totally irrelevant to his own relationship to God, through Christ.

Paul visited Hannah and found her plump and contented. Abiel was looking old. His manner to Paul was cool, but for Hannah's sake he welcomed him to the evening meal. Jonathon had grown into a tall, handsome young man. He remembered his uncle with affection and told him how his own studies were progressing although he had now taken over much of his father's business and had less time to spend on them. Merab had married and was living with her husband's family. She had two children as Hannah happily told him. The evening passed quietly. Paul left feeling thankful all was well with them.

They continued visiting the local Christian groups in the city and attending the daily services in the Greek-speaking synagogues. Paul had spoken to many of the strictest groups of Jewish Christians, people who still called themselves Nazarenes, and had to some extent reassured them concerning the nature of his teaching to the Gentiles. They had an opportunity also of meeting some of Paul's companions, and were, in spite of themselves impressed with their respectful behaviour.

Their visit was coming to an end and the week in which the four Nazirites would complete their vows with Paul's help was due to end the next day. Things seemed to have settled down amongst the Jewish followers of the Way. In fact the elders were pleased at the reconciliation which had taken place, so it was quite without warning that disaster struck.

Paul had been walking with Trophimus and Luke across the bridge in the upper town to enter the Temple.^{641:642} Walking behind them was Alexander the Coppersmith from Ephesus with a party of fellow Jews.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ephesians 2:22*

⁶⁴¹ *Paul: Arrested in Temple CE 57 – Acts 21:27*

⁶⁴² *Trophimus: With Paul in Jerusalem CE 57 – Acts 21:29*

One of the men with him said, "Look who's there," pointing to Paul.

Another said, "I know one of the men with him he is a Gentile from Ephesus."

"Let's watch where they go." They saw Paul, Trophimus and Luke enter the Court of Gentiles and walked toward the steps leading to the Beautiful Gate and the Court of Women. However in the crush of people, they failed to see Trophimus and Luke continue round the outside of the Temple whilst Paul entered the Court of Women. Shortly afterward Alexander and his party saw him there.

Immediately they began to shout, "Men of Israel! Help! This is the man who goes everywhere teaching everyone against the people of Israel, the Law of Moses, and this Temple."

The shouts attracted the Levite guard who came to see what was happening.

Alexander shouted even louder, "He has even brought some Gentiles into the Temple and defiled this holy place."

Cries of outrage came from those in the Court, the word spread rapidly through the crowd and those outside hearing them pressed in to find out the cause of the rumpus. Soon everyone was shouting that the Temple had been desecrated by Gentiles.

Always nervous during the pilgrim feasts of the Jews, the Roman guards in the Court of Gentiles sent a message to their commander that the Jews had started a riot. Luke and Trophimus saw two soldiers rush past them into the Antonia fort and shortly re-emerge with an officer and a troop of additional soldiers. The whole group marched rapidly round the Temple to the balustrade outside the Court of Women. Luke and Trophimus followed to see what was happening. As they approached the gate they could hear shouting and sounds of growing disturbance coming from within. To their horror they saw Paul being dragged out. Men were hitting him as they rushed him down the steps. The crowd was screaming "Kill him, stone him," behind them, the Levites guards struggled to close the huge bronze gates.

Claudius Lysias,⁶⁴³ the captain of the Roman guard pushed his way through the crowd, which gave a menacing growl when they saw the soldiers, but they stopped beating Paul and Claudius quickly assessing the cause of the trouble, arrested Paul and had chains put on both arms.⁶⁴⁴

Then he turned to the crowd and asked, "Who is this man, and what has he done?"

⁶⁴³ *Claudius Lysias: Roman Commander in Jerusalem – Acts 21:26*

⁶⁴⁴ *Paul: Arrested in Jerusalem CE 57 – Acts 21:23*

The crowd screamed first one thing and then another. Claudius could make neither head nor tail of their accusations, so he ordered his men to take Paul back to the Antonia. The crowd had meanwhile grown and surged round the soldiers threatening to tear Paul from them, screaming 'Kill him, kill him.' The soldiers formed a solid phalanx round their prisoner and lifted him up to rush him to safety.

When they were about to enter into the fort, Paul spoke to Claudius, "May I say something to you?"

Surprised Claudius turned, "You speak Greek, do you? Then you are not that Egyptian fellow who tried to start a revolution and led four thousand terrorists out into the desert?"

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

The soldiers were holding back the crowd with difficulty, but something about Paul's manner convinced Claudius that this little man was no rabble-rouser and he nodded to his men to let Paul speak from the top of the steps.

Paul stood and lifted his hand to quieten the crowd. Since most of them had no idea why they were demanding the death of the man in front of them and intrigued as to what he would say they gradually quietened down.

Paul began to address them: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me as I make my defence before you!"

When they heard him speaking in Hebrew the crowd became even quieter. Paul continued: "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up here in Jerusalem as a student of Gamaliel. I received strict instruction in the Law of our ancestors and was just as dedicated to God as are all of you who are here today. I persecuted to the death the people who followed this Way. I arrested men and women and threw them into prison. The High Priest and the whole Council can prove that I am telling the truth. I received from them letters written to fellow-Jews in Damascus, so I went there to arrest these people and bring them back in chains to Jerusalem to be punished."

The crowd was now completely quiet, Luke and Trophimus edged a little nearer. They saw other Christians listening as well.

Paul continued, "As I was travelling and coming near Damascus, about midday a bright light from the sky flashed suddenly round me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' I asked. 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you persecute,' he said to me. The men near me saw the light, but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. I asked, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Get up and go into Damascus, and there you will be told everything that God has determined for you to do.' I was blind because

of the bright light, and so my companions took me by the hand and led me into Damascus.”

Paul’s story entranced his listeners. Claudius, not understanding what he was saying, could see the crowd was at least temporarily pacified.

“In that city,” Paul went on, “was a man named Ananias, a religious man who obeyed our Law and was highly respected by all the Jews living there. He came to me, stood by me, and said, ‘Brother Saul, see again!’ At that very moment I saw again and looked at him. He said, ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see his righteous Servant, and to hear him speaking with his own voice. For you will be a witness for him to tell everyone what you have seen and heard. And now, why wait any longer? Get up and be baptized and have your sins washed away by praying to him.

“I went back to Jerusalem, and while I was praying in the Temple, I had a vision, in which I saw the Lord, as he said to me, ‘Hurry and leave Jerusalem quickly, because the people here will not accept your witness about me.’ ‘Lord’ I answered, ‘they know very well that I went to the synagogues and arrested and beat those who believe in you. And when your witness Stephen was put to death, I myself was there, approving of his murder and taking care of the cloaks of his murderers.’ ‘Go,’ the Lord said to me, ‘for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

The crowd had been growing restive, but at this point they began screaming, “Away with him! Kill him! He’s not fit to live!” They surged toward the steps waving their clothes and throwing dust into the air. There was no doubt in Claudius’s mind they would tear his prisoner apart, so he ordered his men back into the fort.

“Beat this fellow,” he instructed, when the gates closed behind them. “Find out why the Jews were screaming like this against him.”

Paul was dragged to the whipping post in the yard and Paul said to the officer standing there, “Is it lawful for you to whip a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been tried for any crime?”

Alarmed, the officer told his men to wait and he went to Claudius, “What are you doing? That man is a Roman citizen!”

Claudius came to Paul, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?”

“Yes,” answered Paul.

“I became one by paying a large amount of money,” said Claudius.

“But I am one by birth,” Paul answered.

Frightened by the implications of having chained Paul and ordered his beating. He took off the chains and held him in a cell.

The Great Sanhedrin met on the fourth day of the week, so Claudius sent a message that he was bringing a prisoner before them to determine what accusation was made against him.

The Great Sanhedrin had changed its venue since Stephen's trial from the chamber of Hewn Stone within the Court of Israelites and for the past twenty-six or so years was meeting in the Royal Porticoe, which was situated on the southern side of the Court of Gentiles.⁶⁴⁵

The High Priest, Ananias was presiding. He was an overbearing man of great self-importance. His servants were notorious for their rapacity on their master's behalf.⁶⁴⁶ Paul stood in the centre of the semi-circle, surrounded by Temple guards.⁶⁴⁷ Claudius and his men were watching from the public gallery, where many of the brethren had also assembled. Trophimus, who had been recognized, stayed away but Luke, Timothy and Tychicus persuaded their Jewish brothers to allow them to attend the hearing.

The events of the previous day had been duly noted by the authorities, but the evidence against Paul was nonexistent. Alexander and his friends had failed to produce Trophimus as evidence that Paul had taken a Gentile beyond the balustrade. They had quietly melted away. However there were many who remembered Paul's apostasy and were glad to have him on trial no matter on what charge.

Ananias⁶⁴⁸ nodded and Paul taking it as leave to speak began, "My fellow-Israelites! My conscience is perfectly clear about the way in which I have lived before God to this very day."

The High Priest whispered to his servant to tell one of the temple guards near Paul to strike him on the mouth. Shocked by the unexpected blow Paul turned to the man, "God will certainly strike you – you white-washed wall!" Then turning to the Council he said angrily, "You sit there to judge me according to the Law, yet you break the Law by ordering them to strike me!"

The Levite guards next to Paul said, "You are insulting God's High Priest!"

Paul realised they had tried to trick him into a situation where they would all be witnesses to his disloyalty to the Law and suddenly calm again, he answered, "My fellow-Israelites, I did not know that he was the High Priest. The scripture says, 'You must not speak evil of the ruler of your people.'"

Paul, who knew they had nothing tangible against him, but also knowing how evidence could be manufactured decided to divide the Sadducee and

⁶⁴⁵ There is some confusion as to exactly to where the Sanhedrin had been moved. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* Volume 2 Page 1029 gives the Royal Porticoe as the most likely venue at this period.

⁶⁴⁶ *Antiquities of the Jews*. Josephus Book 20, Ch 9 Para; 2

⁶⁴⁷ Paul: *Before Great Sanhedrin* CE 57 – Acts 22:30

⁶⁴⁸ Ananias: *High Priest* CE 57 – Acts 23:2

Pharisee factions on the Council and declared, "Fellow-Israelites! I am a Pharisee, the son of Pharisees. I am on trial here because of the hope I have that the dead will rise to life!"

Grimly smiling to himself he watched the effect of this statement on his judges. The Sadducees denied that people will rise from death and denied the existence of angels and spirits; but the Pharisees believed in all three. Before long the arguments were raging between his judges, finally a group of pharisees stood and said, "We cannot find anything wrong with this man! Perhaps a spirit or an angel really did speak to him."

That really infuriated the High Priest and his fellow Sadducees, and a group of men advanced threateningly on Paul. Claudius could see that his prisoner was in danger of being seriously assaulted, so he ordered his soldiers to go down and get Paul away from them. They returned to the Antonia.

Nothing had been resolved. Claudius was in a dilemma, he still had no charges against his prisoner, but he held Paul for his own protection, thinking to release him as soon as it was safe. None of Paul's friends could get near him to speak with him.

Jerusalem was in an uproar. Many of the Nazarenes were vehemently opposed to Paul and sided with the Jews in wanting to have him silenced. The elders deemed it unsafe for Paul's companions to be seen on the streets and kept them hidden.

Elements from many factions joined together to discuss how to silence Paul permanently. No one knew who suggested his murder would be the answer, but the idea quickly caught hold. A plot was devised that if the Sanhedrin should order him to appear for further questioning, they would kill him when Claudius Lysias brought him out of the Antonia to the Royal Porticoe.

"You can't kill him in the Temple precincts." One of the plotters was horrified.

"We wouldn't have to, if there are enough of us we can surround the Roman guard, grab Saul and we could have him out of the Garden or Susa gate into the Kidron Valley before anyone was the wiser."

"Then we'd need about twenty or more men to overcome the soldiers."

At this point these particular plotters decided to contact the sicarii, who were always looking for opportunities to kill Roman soldiers and often used the crowds at the festivals to sneak up to some unsuspecting guard and run a dagger between his ribs.

In the end a group of forty men pledged themselves to fast until they had succeeded in killing Paul.⁶⁴⁹ When they were satisfied with their plan, they

⁶⁴⁹ Paul: Jerusalem Plot to kill him – Acts 23:12

approached the chief priests and elders and laid their plot before them. The conspirators were well-pleased with the support they received from this quarter and details of when Paul would be ordered to appear were finalised.

They left the council chamber, still quietly discussing their deployment, no one noticed a young pharisee standing near a pillar, nor that he moved closer to overhear what they were saying. Jonathon spent his mornings studying in the Temple and he had been on his way home when he heard Saul's name mentioned.⁶⁵⁰ As he listened, he became aware that these men were going to kill his uncle. When he realised that they planned to murder him the next day, he wasted no time but walked quickly across the Court of Gentiles to the Antonia. He climbed the steps and asked the guard if he could see his uncle.

He explained he was nephew to the prisoner and the guard let him visit Paul in his cell. When Paul heard Jonathon's news he immediately called the centurion, "Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him."

The centurion took Jonathon to Claudius's office and said, "The prisoner Paul called me and asked me to bring this young man to you, because he has something to say to you."

Claudius looked at Jonathon and saw he was frightened. He rose and took his hand and led him into an alcove, "What have you got to tell me?"

Jonathon swallowed, he hoped the man could not see his knees were shaking. "The Jewish authorities have agreed to ask you to take Paul down to the Sanhedrin tomorrow, pretending that the Council wants to get more accurate information about him. But don't listen to them. There are more than forty men who will wait in hiding. They have taken a vow not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are now ready to do it and are waiting for your decision."

Claudius Lysias was a robust man. He held the most difficult post in the whole empire – keeping law and order in Jerusalem. The activities of his superiors had not made his job any easier in recent years. There was ever-growing hatred of the Roman occupation. He had done his best to maintain his position without provoking unnecessarily, the susceptibilities of the citizens. However the situation arising from the plot against his prisoner, was greatly complicated by the fact Paul was also a Roman citizen. Furthermore he found himself admiring the courageous little man, who had fearlessly addressed the hostile crowd and calmed it down. Claudius had noticed it had been a small group which had stirred up the crowd again.

⁶⁵⁰ *Paul's Nephew: Warns Romans of murder plan – Acts 23:16*

After digesting the information given to him by Jonathon he said, "I will send your uncle to Caesarea under escort. Go home and for your own safety don't tell anyone that you have reported this to me."

He called two centurions and said, "Get two hundred soldiers ready to go to Caesarea, together with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen, and be ready to leave at the third hour tonight.⁶⁵¹ Provide horses for Paul to ride and get him safely through to the governor Felix."⁶⁵²

Claudius had no respect for the licentious, incompetent Felix, an ex-slave, he owed his appointment to his immensely rich brother Pallas, who virtually ruled Rome. However Claudius knew that once under Felix's jurisdiction in the provincial capital at Caesarea, Paul would be out of reach of his fanatical opponents here in Jerusalem.

While the troops were getting ready, Claudius summoned his secretary and dictated a letter to the governor. "Claudius Lysias to His Excellency, the governor Felix: Greetings. The Jews seized this man and were about to kill him. I learnt that he was a Roman citizen, so I went with my soldiers and rescued him." That might be stretching the truth a little, but it would ensure Paul was not returned to be tried by the Sanhedrin which might not have power to inflict the death penalty, but was not adverse from letting the crowd do it for them.

He continued, "I wanted to know what they were accusing him of, so I took him down to their Sanhedrin. I found out that he had not done anything for which he deserved to die or be put in prison; the accusation against him had to do with the questions about their own law. And when I was informed that there was a plot against him, at once I decided to send him to you. I have told his accusers to make their charges against him before you." (He stretched the truth a little here too. He would tell them tomorrow after Paul was safely out of Jerusalem.)

Paul arrived in Caesarea late the following day. The High Priest and certain members of the Sanhedrin were furious when they learnt Paul had escaped. It particularly galled Ananias that he would personally have to do the overnight trip to Caesarea to make formal charges against Paul. It put him to a great deal of inconvenience and he lost the initiative in the constant power game played out between the Sanhedrin and the provincial Roman authorities.

⁶⁵¹ 9.00 p.m.

⁶⁵² *Claudius Lysias: Sends Paul from Jerusalem – Acts 23:23*

CHAPTER 31: PAUL'S IMPRISONMENT IN CAESAREA

CE 57 June to 59 September

Acts Chs 24-27

The news of Paul's secret departure from Jerusalem raced round the city.⁶⁵³ The rage of the High Priest reverberated through the Temple. The forty men who vowed to fast until they had killed Paul had a long and agonised debate and finally decided to make the necessary sin sacrifices to be freed from their vow. Nicodemus brought the news to the elders of the church, and prayers were offered for Paul's safety and quick release. His companions from Macedonia and Asia were shocked with the news and sought the advice of the church elders. Timothy insisted on going to Caesarea to look after Paul and Luke wanted to go with him. In the end it was decided the whole party would depart together and those who wanted to, could embark for home.

Before he left Luke told James, "I shall stay as long as brother Paul remains in prison. There are still many people who knew the Lord with whom I want to speak."

Tychicus, who had formed a close friendship with the Apostle John said, "Come, my brother, visit with us in Ephesus," they embraced. And so it was with many of the others who had found friendship amongst the brethren in Jerusalem.

Some of the Jerusalem community decided to accompany the party to Caesarea, firstly to see they came to no harm and secondly to find out what the charges were against Paul. It was a large party that left Jerusalem later that day. On their arrival in Caesarea, Timothy applied to act as Paul's servant and was given access to him, but the rest of the brethren were not permitted to see him. It surprised no one when Aristarchus decided to stay behind.⁶⁵⁴ He had a deep and abiding love for Paul, and he had also formed a close friendship with Luke and offered to act as amanuensis for his account of the life of Jesus. The others, finding a ship ready to sail to Cyprus and on to Asia left a few days later.

Five days after Paul's arrival in Caesarea, the High Priest arrived with some of the Sanhedrin and a lawyer they had engaged, called Tertullus.⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁵³ Paul: *Escape from Jerusalem CE 57 – Acts 23:31*

⁶⁵⁴ See Acts 27:2

⁶⁵⁵ Ananias, High Priest: *To Caesarea to accuse Paul – Acts 24:1*

Felix,⁶⁵⁶ on hearing of the arrival of Paul's accusers, constituted the court. He was the first freedman to be made procurator of a province. He had been governor over Judaea for some five years. Such appointments were the prerogative of Romans of equestrian rank. Until Claudius's time, procurators had responsibility for the public finances in the provinces. However Claudius had added the power of jurisdiction over disputes.

Felix, in his scarlet cloak and his purple-edged toga, attended by his lictors and followed by the commanders of the local cohorts in their parade armour, mounted the bema to a flourish of trumpets. He sat, flanked by his officials looking disdainfully at the High Priest's delegation. He then sent for the prisoner, who was lodged in the cells at the palace. Paul arrived chained to a soldier.

Luke, Philip, Timothy, Aristarchus and a few others stood in the public section of the court.

Felix nodded at Paul's accusers and Tertullus stepped forward, "Your Excellency!" He began, "Your wise leadership has brought us a long period of peace, and many necessary reforms are being made for the good of our country."⁶⁵⁷

Philip whispered to Luke, "Felix plotted with the sicarii to murder the High Priest Jonathon and allows them to rob and pillage!"⁶⁵⁸

"We welcome this everywhere and at all times, and we are deeply grateful to you." Felix smirked, but motioned to Tertullus to get on with it.

"I do not want to take up too much of your time, however, so I beg you to be kind and listen to our brief account. We found this man to be a dangerous nuisance; he starts riots among the Jews all over the world and is a leader of the party of the Nazarenes."

Obviously none of this was making much impact on Felix, who showed signs of impatience.

"He also tried to defile the Temple, and we arrested him. We planned to judge him according to our own Law, but Lysias, the commander, came and with great violence took him from us. Then Lysias gave orders that his accusers should come before you."

Tertullus waved his hand towards Paul and added, "If you question this man, you yourself will be able to learn from him all the things that we are accusing him of."

The High Priest and elders said, "We can testify that all this is true, your honour."

⁶⁵⁶ Felix: *Roman Governor in CE 57 – Acts 24:1*

⁶⁵⁷ Paul: *Trial before Felix CE 57 – Acts 24:1*

⁶⁵⁸ *Josephus; Antiquities of the Jews Book 20 Chapter 8 para 5*

Felix motioned to Paul to answer the accusation and Paul began, "I know that you have been a judge over this nation for many years, and so I am happy to defend myself before you. As you can find out for yourself, it was no more than twelve days ago that I went up to Jerusalem to worship. The Jews did not find me arguing with anyone in the Temple, nor did they find me stirring up the people, either in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. Nor can they give you proof of the accusations they now bring against me."

Paul knew the case against him was a non-starter, "I do admit this to you: I worship the God of our ancestors by following the Way which they say is false. But I also believe in everything written in the Law of Moses and the books of prophets. I have the same hope in God that these themselves have, namely, that all people, both the good and the bad, will rise from death. And so I do my best always to have a clear conscience before God and man.

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

Paul smiled to himself, that should take the salt from their bread! They were all Sadducees and they could hardly contest before the Roman governor a matter which was known to divide the Jews themselves but was certainly not a matter of detention and trial in a Roman court, or even before the Sanhedrin.

Felix had not lived in Judaea for five years without knowing something of the tortuous arguments beloved by his subjects. So he said, "When Lysias the commander arrives, I will decide your case."

The High Priest conferred with Tertullus, he was furious that the matter was to be postponed and he would have to hang around Caesarea like any common person. Tertullus, knowing his client's uncertain and arrogant temper persuaded him to leave and hold further consultations in private.

Felix had not missed the by-play between them and was satisfied that he had given Ananias a set-down. He turned to the centurion in charge of Paul and said, "Take the prisoner, keep him under guard, but allow his friends to provide for his needs."

Felix thought Paul might yet be a useful tool in the devious power games played by the different factions in Judaea. Besides which he could expect Paul, or his friends to pay a handsome bribe for his release.

Felix was married to the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. The moment he had set eyes on her he had wanted her for himself. Never mind he had been married twice and his current wife had been a granddaughter of Anthony and Cleopatra. Never mind the girl, who was only in her mid teens and sister to the young King Agrippa, was already married to Azizus, King of Emesa. She was young, she was outstandingly beautiful and he wanted her and finally he had her. She was now nineteen years old.⁶⁵⁹

Felix decided to interview Paul for himself and young Drusilla was present. Paul was no longer chained, and appeared before them in clean robes. He had had plenty of time to hear the story of Felix's courtship and marriage to Drusilla and when Felix asked, "Tell me, what is the real issue between you and the Jewish authorities?"

Paul wasted no time, "They oppose me because they refuse to acknowledge that the one they condemned to death under the procuratorship of Pontius Pilate, Jesus, is the Christ that God promised to our forefathers."

"Yes, yes," Felix interrupted, "I've heard about this matter, why do you people go on about him. He died twenty-seven years ago. Not even the Emperor is remembered so long after his death, let alone a nobody from some obscure province."

Paul seized the opportunity, "God sent his only Son, Jesus, to bring salvation to all people. The time is near when the Day of Judgement will come upon us, and it is only those who have been delivered from their sins who will receive Eternal Life."

"Oh, so that's what you meant about 'believing the dead will rise to life,' but what do you mean by sin?"

Paul took a deep breath. Here were two souls corrupted by power, lust and greed. "Through Jesus Christ, we can receive the very nature of God himself, his spirit within us takes us away from a life of selfish and evil deeds and instead prepares us for a life of goodness and self-control."

Drusilla whispered, "Must we listen to this little man?"

Felix for whom concepts of goodness were totally foreign said, "You may leave now. I will call you again when I get the chance."

There was something about Paul and of what he spoke that disturbed him more than he liked to admit. And during the ensuing months, as the High Priest's case waited for the relevant witnesses to return from Asia, Felix would call Paul in from time to time to talk and argue with him. He had

⁶⁵⁹ *Antiquities of the Jews – Josephus Book 20, Chapter 7. In the Steps of St Paul – H.V.Morton Page 364*

decided that if Paul offered him a big enough bribe, he would dismiss the case and free him.⁶⁶⁰

Luke in the meantime was travelling all over Judaea interviewing those who had known the Lord. With Aristarchus's help, he had started writing an account of the Life of Jesus. He began by setting the historical time when Jesus began his ministry. A careful and accurate researcher, he opened his account with, "It was the fifteenth year of the rule of the Emperor Tiberius; Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea, Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip was ruler of the territory of Iturea and Trachonitis; Lysanias was ruler of Abilene, and Annas and Caiaphas were high priests."⁶⁶¹

He then gave an account of John the Baptist's ministry, which he got from his discussions with John and Andrew. He wanted to include the sayings of Jesus, which had been circulating in various editions throughout the different communities. He found the task a joy and a challenge. There were times when he felt he had the story straight, and then he would meet someone, and find he had left out some incident. People could remember much of Jesus's teaching verbatim, but could not remember on which occasions he had said what. He kept copious notes of all his interviews, and he entertained Paul during the long months of his imprisonment with his progress and the difficulties of putting the material together.

It was during one of his visits to Jerusalem that he went to see Mary, Jesus's mother, now a serene old lady. She received Luke warmly, although at first she was reluctant to talk about herself. "My son, the days when Our Lord will return are nearly completed. You can see for yourself the disorders that are taking place in our land, why do you need to hear of the past?"

"My mother, the Good News has come to many who know nothing of the Jews. They long to hear more about the way the Lord Jesus spoke and taught. All they know is from those who preach the gospel to them and men like brother Paul, were not even followers of the Lord while he was alive. Those who knew the Lord are getting old and there are still many more who need to know the Truth about the Way. God has laid it upon me to write an orderly account of the life of your son. I want to include how you were chosen to be the mother of our Lord."

He manner and voice were gentle. Mary's eyes filled with tears. So few had asked this question, and she had treasured the wonder and fear of how she had felt as a young girl betrothed to Joseph the Carpenter when the angel had spoken to her all those years ago. Suddenly she felt a great need to share the beginning of it all. And so slowly over a period of days she told Luke the

⁶⁶⁰ See Acts 24:26

⁶⁶¹ Luke Chapter 3

story, starting with the miracle of her elderly cousin, Elizabeth's first pregnancy and the birth of John the Baptist.

Luke was fascinated. He had had no idea that Jesus and John were first cousins. Mary told him all, and he wrote down everything she could remember. Then he asked, "And as a boy, what was he like?"

Mary thought for a long time before saying, "In many ways like other boys of his age, except he was different." She stopped, remembering those early years.

Luke prompted gently, "How was he different?"

Again Mary thought and then said, "Let me tell you of a time when he was twelve years old. We went every year to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. We always went as a party from our village, and of course during the week following Passover the children were everywhere, seeing the sights, visiting relatives and so on. When the festival was over we all collected together and started for home. We were a large group that year, and it wasn't until evening, when we expected him to join us for our evening meal, he did not appear. Then we started searching. We asked all our family and friends. We'd assumed he had been travelling with some of his cousins. No one had seen him. It was too late to start back for Jerusalem that night, but first thing in the morning, his father and I returned to look for him. We were filled with fear. Strong boys get kidnapped, as you know, and sold into slavery. Finally on the third day we found him in the Temple!"

"What was he doing there?"

"He was sitting with the rabbis. I went to him and said, 'My son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been terribly worried trying to find you.'"

She paused, "He said such a strange thing, 'Why did you have to look for me? Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?' We had no idea what he meant," again Mary paused, "Before we left, the rabbis asked us who had been teaching him, when we told him he just attended the village school, they were amazed, because they said he asked such perceptive questions and gave such intelligent answers to their questions."

"And after that?" Luke prompted, "What happened when you returned home?"

"He grew like any boy, but he was always obedient and full of wisdom. People loved him."⁶⁶²

The news of Paul's arrest had spread throughout the churches and true to form, it was the church in Philippi that sent him help. One day in late summer Epaphroditus arrived and guessing that Paul would be held at the Roman

⁶⁶² Luke Chapter 2

garrison, soon discovered him and was permitted to visit him immediately.⁶⁶³ Paul, who had been playing backgammon with his guard, rose with tears of joy when he saw who his visitor was.

"My dear brother," he embraced Epaphroditus, "What brings you here to Caesarea? How did you find me?"⁶⁶⁴

Epaphroditus laughed, and hugged him back, "The brethren in Philippi send you their love and greetings, they made a collection for you and I was commissioned to bring it. "He handed Paul a small purse containing money then looked round the room, "I see you are being treated better here than you were in Philippi!"

Paul's eyes filled with tears, "My dear children in Philippi, you always help me when I need it most."

At this moment Timothy arrived and added his welcome to Paul's. "Wait till Luke hears you have come."

"Is Luke still with you?" Epaphroditus was delighted.

"Yes," answered Paul, "At least he is travelling round Galilee collecting stories about Jesus's ministry."

While they continued catching up on all the news, Timothy produced Paul's meal, who insisted he shared it with Epaphroditus. When they had finished, Paul told Timothy to take Epaphroditus to meet the local brethren and find somewhere to stay, "I'm not going anywhere and you can come and see me any time, dear brother, so first get settled in."

Epaphroditus' coming touched and encouraged the local brethren, some of whom were feeling the strain of having one of their number jailed. Besides the money which Paul gave to Timothy to use for all their needs, many of the members of the church had sent him gifts. Lydia had sent him a new robe and Syntyche, not to be outdone had sent him a russet-coloured cloak with a handsome clasp.

The gifts were almost overwhelming, but when Epaphroditus said rather sourly, "Sister Lydia and Syntyche were determined to outdo each other. Neither can let the other do anything, without trying to make a bigger and better showing. It gets very tiresome, sometimes. You can't approach the one without upsetting the other."

"I thought they had become reconciled when I was last in Philippi," Paul's eyes grew sad and he sighed. Why do people have to bring grief and pain, when the Lord wants peace and harmony?

"I'm afraid that didn't last long."

⁶⁶³ *Epaphroditus: Brings gifts from Philippi – Phil 2:25*

⁶⁶⁴ *Philippians 2:25-30*

While Epaphroditus waited for Luke to return from Galilee, the local brethren took him round to meet the Christians in the surrounding villages. His coming all the way from Philippi just to bring gifts to support Paul made a deep impression on them, especially when he told them how they had been doing this ever since Paul first brought them the Good News of salvation. Some of those who claimed that it was self-evident that all Gentiles should be circumcised, began to have doubts. They had already met Luke and now this stranger. They saw how Paul was held in the deepest respect and how these Gentiles were as committed to their faith as any Jew. Perhaps those who opposed Paul were wrong? It was all rather disturbing.

Before Luke returned, Epaphroditus caught a fever. Philip and his daughters came to pray for him, but the fever became worse and he grew weaker. Paul began to fear for his life and finally asked Timothy to see if someone could go fetch Luke. Plans were just being made for this when much to everyone's relief Luke and Aristarchus returned.

Luke's pleasure at hearing of Epaphroditus's visit, turned to deep concern when he saw how sick he was. He ordered his limbs to be washed with tepid water every few hours and sent out to buy some willow bark. He mixed other draughts to try to reduce the fever. Epaphroditus started a painful cough and he had difficulty in breathing. Luke ordered water to which a variety of herbs had been added to be kept boiling over a charcoal fire. For days Epaphroditus hovered between life and death. The coming of the first winter rains, with cold and damp weather did not help. Finally one night, when Luke was sure he would not live to see the morning, and the brethren gathered to pray for his soul, a great sweat began to pour from him. He began to cough out great quantities of thick mucus, and by morning after many days of being comatose, Epaphroditus's eyes opened to recognize the wise face of Luke bending over him replacing hot cloths on his chest to assist the release of the congestion.

"Brother Luke!" Epaphroditus gasped.

"Lie still and do not attempt speech, you have been near to death, my brother, but now, thanks be to God, he has given you back to us," Luke spoke quietly.

Epaphroditus's recovery was slow but by spring he was feeling well enough to accompany the brethren up to Jerusalem for Passover. Everyone had told him he could not have come so far and not see this greatest of Jewish festivals and the one at which the Lord gave them the fellowship meal.

Epaphroditus, who had heard how the Jews hated Gentiles asked nervously, "Won't I be in trouble visiting your holy city? Surely that's why brother Paul was arrested in the first place?"

“Bless you,” answered Zacharius, a cheerful red-faced seller of fruit, “The Jews welcome the Gentiles coming to the festival, you are just not allowed into the inner Temple.” Then he winked, “Visitors bring money, you know!”

While the brethren took Epaphroditus off to Jerusalem, Paul decided to start a letter to Philippi.⁶⁶⁵ He loved the brethren in Philippi, they had never let him down and he wanted to encourage them and thank them for all they had done for him.

Timothy got out his writing materials once again and after the opening greeting and initial outpouring of his affection and gratitude for their love, Paul said sadly, “Those dear brothers seem to reveal far more good qualities of Jesus Christ than many of those here who knew him in the flesh.”

Timothy nodded and Paul dictated, “I want you to know, my brothers, that the things that have happened to me have really helped the progress of the gospel.” Timothy gave a quick glance of surprise at Paul, who caught the look and smiled, continuing, “As a result, the whole palace guard and all the others here know that I am in prison because I am a servant of Christ. And my being in prison has given most of the brothers more confidence in the Lord, so that they grow bolder all the time to preach the message fearlessly.”

Again Timothy gave him a surprised look to which Paul said, “You must admit that with the governor’s interest in talking with me, and refusing to hand me over to Ananias, has given them confidence they won’t be harassed by the Romans.

“What about the Nazarenes?” asked Timothy, “They are delighted you are in jail and hope the Romans will execute you and thus end your disruptive influence.”

Paul said, “Well, you can write ‘Of course some of them preach Christ because they are jealous and quarrelsome, but others, from genuine goodwill. These do so from love, because they know that God has given me the work of defending the gospel. The others do not proclaim Christ sincerely, but from a spirit of selfish ambition; they think that they will make more trouble for me while I am in prison.’”

““It doesn’t matter! I am happy about it – so long as Christ is preached in every way possible...””

They were interrupted. Procurator Felix wanted to see him. The next day, those brethren who were left in Caesarea prepared to celebrate the Passover. While Paul was not let out, the guards allowed a few of his friends to join Paul in his cell to celebrate together.

⁶⁶⁵ Furthermore in Acts 20:4 Timothy was with the men who went with Paul to Jerusalem. In Acts 27:2 The only people with Paul were Luke and Aristarchus. To the question, ‘Where was Timothy?’ The answer lies in Philippians 2:19. ‘I hope that I will be able to send Timothy to you soon.’

Epaphroditus returned from a happy visit to Jerusalem. The vast numbers of pilgrims who came from every corner of the world, impressed him deeply. "People were so friendly and welcoming," he commented.

"Well, yes," replied Paul, "It is the duty of all those who live in Jerusalem to make the pilgrims feel welcome and special."

"But there were so many!" Then his face dropped, "I actually met some Jews from Philippi and somehow news of my illness had reached home. It must have been when you thought I was dying, because they were surprised to see me walking about."

Paul decided to finish the letter so Epaphroditus could return to reassure his family all was well with him.

Epaphroditus protested, "But they particularly wanted me to bring them news of the outcome of your case."

"As things are going at present, this could be a long time," remarked Paul. He looked at Timothy, "You know, my son, when we know the outcome of this business, it might be a good idea if you visited all the churches to tell them the result."

Timothy thought a moment and then nodded, "You are wanting to go to Rome next, aren't you?"

"Yes, and then you could join me there. In the meanwhile we can only wait to see what the procurator's decision will be."

Luke, who had come in to see him said, "I don't think you will get a decision out of him unless you bribe him."

"Nothing would persuade me to undermine all I have told him about goodness and self-control just to pander to the greed and the vanity of the man." Paul was adamant.

Luke was goaded into observing, "You don't seem to have made much headway."

"That's not the point, my brother, if he chooses to reject what I have taught him, I cannot compromise the gospel by offering him a bribe."

Luke shrugged, "Then you can expect to stay until the new procurator arrives in July. We better pray he is an improvement on the present one."

Luke was right. Paul stayed in the palace cells in Caesarea for over eighteen months.⁶⁶⁶ The only thing which reconciled him to some extent to his confinement was Luke's research into the life of Jesus. They would arrive

⁶⁶⁶ "After Two years" Acts 24:27. Time sequences in the New Testament: The custom was to count parts of time as a whole. Typical is Jesus was crucified and died at about 3p.m on Friday, he rose from the dead early on Sunday morning, making a period of about one and half days, yet the Gospels record this as 'After three days.' This needs to be remembered in all periods mentioned again e.g. Galatians 1:18 'It was three years later...' Can easily mean around 18 months to two years.

back after these visits, with Nicias carrying an ever heavier bag of scrolls. The quantity of the material he was gathering began to worry Luke.

“How am I to put it all together?” He asked Paul on one occasion.

“Perhaps you could put all the teachings together.”

Luke grunted, “That is an idea. People often tell me the same story but differ in the details.”

Paul's leisurely talks with Felix came to an abrupt end. The local Syrians were demanding citizenship rights in Caesarea. They pointed out that Strato's Tower was existing evidence that Herod the Great actually built Caesarea on the site of one of their cities. The wealthy Jews ignored the claims of the poorer Syrians.

Feelings ran high and soon there were incidents of stone-throwing and violence. The situation deteriorated to such an extent that it became a kind of war between them. Finally, Felix sent his troops to quell the violence, demanding that the Jews should desist in provoking the Syrians. When they refused, the armed soldiers fell on the Jews and killed many of them. Then Felix allowed his men to plunder their homes. This terrified the more moderate Jewish community, who sent a delegation begging him to stop his soldiers from looting. A settlement was finally reached, but Felix's actions had totally alienated him from the rich and powerful in the Jewish community.

News also came to the brethren of corruption and oppression in Jerusalem. Ananias, the High priest had been replaced by Jonathan, and then King Agrippa gave the high priesthood to Ismael. Ananias had been high-handed but Ismael and his men abused their position without shame. The high priest's party sent their servants to the threshing floors to take the tithes entirely for the high priest and his party. They thus deprived the poorer priests of their share, to such an extent they became completely impoverished and some even died of starvation.⁶⁶⁷

The news came that Felix was to be replaced as governor by Porcius Festus.⁶⁶⁸ Paul hoped that Felix would release him, since none of his accusers had returned, but Felix knew that with the end of his procuratorship, he could be indicted on charges of corruption and mismanagement. He hoped by leaving Paul in jail he would placate some of his more powerful enemies. The hope was fruitless as many of the leading Jews of Caesarea went to Rome to lay charges against him.⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶⁷ *Antiquities of the Jews; Josephus Book XX Chapter VIII*

⁶⁶⁸ *Festus: Procurator of Judaea CE 59 – Acts 25:1*

⁶⁶⁹ *Felix's still powerful brother Pallas came to his rescue and was able to persuade Nero to dismiss his accusers.*

Felix had left Festus a legacy of near anarchy in the land. The sicarii whom Felix had used for his own purposes on a number of occasions would plunder and loot villages throughout the countryside. This, added to the alienation of the leading citizens of Caesarea, together with the rapacity of the high priest's party in Jerusalem, provided the prudent and honourable Festus with an almost insurmountable challenge.

Three days after his arrival in Caesarea, Festus left for Jerusalem.⁶⁷⁰ Paul's enemies saw their opportunity to use the inexperienced governor and approached him with a petition to move Paul's trial to Jerusalem. Festus was no one's fool. He realised there was more behind their request than met the eye and answered that since he would soon be returning to Caesarea, Paul's accusers should return with him to lay their charges. Altogether he spent about a fortnight in Jerusalem before returning to Caesarea.

The day after his return he sat in the judgement seat to hear the case against Paul. The men who had accompanied Festus from Jerusalem waited while Paul was brought into court.⁶⁷¹ Immediately they began to make serious allegations against him. Festus turned to Paul to answer them.

Paul said, "I have done nothing wrong against the Law of the Jews or against the Temple or against the Roman Emperor."

Festus turned to the accusers, "Where are your witnesses to these accusations you have made?"

One of the men said, "Your honour, there are many in Jerusalem who can testify to the subversive and blasphemous activities of this man."

Festus was agreeable in trying to accommodate the Jews and turned to Paul, "Would you be willing to go to Jerusalem and be tried on these charges before me there?"

Paul knew that once in Jerusalem his enemies would find the means to kill him long before Festus arrived back to try him. He knew there was no charge that even the Sanhedrin would consider adequate. The men from Ephesus, who had stirred up the trouble two years before had never returned, and were unlikely to be persuaded to make the long journey at their own expense. The only reason they would want to remove the trial to Jerusalem would be so they could arrange his murder.

"I am standing before the Emperor's own court of judgement, where I should be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you yourself well know." Paul declared. "If I have broken the law and done something for which I deserve the death penalty, I do not ask to escape it. But if there is no truth in the charges they bring against me, no one can hand me over to them."

⁶⁷⁰ Festus: *Leaves for Jerusalem* – Acts 25:

⁶⁷¹ Paul: *Brought before Festus* – Acts 25:6

I appeal to the Emperor.”⁶⁷² Paul, born and bred in the most orthodox traditions of his people, had finally used his right as a Roman citizen to escape from his Jewish enemies.

Festus was shocked at the outcome. He conferred with his advisers, but there was nothing he could do and he turned to Paul, “You have appealed to the Emperor, so to the Emperor you will go.”

The Jews were furious, but Festus dismissed them and they had to return empty-handed to Jerusalem.

Festus was kept extremely busy, but at the back of his mind he wondered what he could write to the Emperor as to the charge against Paul. The whole affair was irritating and embarrassing. He mulled over it for some time. Then King Agrippa arrived with his sister Bernice, an outstandingly beautiful woman, elder sister to the Drusilla who had enraptured Felix. The stories circulating about Bernice's relationship with her brother were scurrilous but true. Bernice had attempted to defuse them by arranging for herself a marriage to Polemo, king of Cilicia, but since she soon left him to return to Agrippa, the subterfuge was hardly worth the effort.⁶⁷³

During the visit of the King, Festus put the problem of Paul's appeal to him. Agrippa had been brought up under the Emperor Claudius's patronage and understood the Roman scene as well as the complexities of the Jewish situation. After listening to Festus's story, Agrippa said, “I would like to hear this man myself.”

Greatly relieved at his willingness to assist, Festus replied, “You will hear him tomorrow.”

The audience chamber was arranged for a state occasion, Festus attended by his two lictors and the commanders of the five cohorts entered to the sound of trumpets. The leading citizens of Caesarea and the surrounding area were invited to meet the king. There was a festival atmosphere with King Agrippa and Bernice the centre of the stage. Into this scene of opulence Paul was brought, as usual chained by the wrist to a soldier. This was no trial, but rather a show piece to entertain the guests.

Festus, after formally welcoming his guests, explained the background to the problem, “You see this man against whom all the Jewish people, both here and in Jerusalem, have brought complaints to me. They scream that he should not live any longer. But I could not find that he had done anything for which he deserved the death sentence. And since he himself made an appeal to the Emperor, I have decided to send him.”

⁶⁷² Paul: *Appeals to Caesar* – Acts 25:11

⁶⁷³ *Ibid.* Book 20 Chapter 7

Festus came to the nub of the matter, “But I have nothing definite about him to write to the Emperor. So I have brought him here before you, King Agrippa! – so that, after investigating his case, I may have something to write. For it seems unreasonable to me to send a prisoner without clearly indicating the charges against him.”

Agrippa's accession to his father's kingdom had been delayed because he was only a youth of seventeen at the time of his death. He was now about thirty years old.

Agrippa, used to power, nodded imperiously to Paul and said, “You have permission to speak on your own behalf.”⁶⁷⁴

Paul had been standing with a sense of wonder at how Ananias's prophecy all those years ago was coming increasingly true. Here he was standing before both a king and a Roman procurator! “King Agrippa! I consider myself fortunate that today I am to defend myself before you from all the things the Jews accuse me of, particularly since you know so well all the Jewish customs and disputes. I ask you, then, to listen to me with patience.”

“All the Jews know how I have lived ever since I was young. They know how I have spent my whole life, at first in my own country and then in Jerusalem. They have always known, if they are willing to testify, that from the very first I have lived as a member of the strictest party of our religion, the Pharisees. And now I stand here to be tried because of the hope I have in the promise that God made to our ancestors – the very thing that the twelve tribes of our people hope to receive, as they worship God day and night. And it is because of this hope, Your Majesty, that I am being accused by the Jews! Why do you who are here find it impossible to believe that God raises the dead?

“I myself thought that I should do everything I could against the cause of Jesus of Nazareth. That is what I did in Jerusalem. I received authority from the chief priests and put many of God's people in prison; and when they were sentenced to death, I also voted against them. Many times I had them punished in the synagogues and tried to make them deny their faith, I was so furious with them that I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.”

Festus could not make much of this, although he had heard of a queer sect of the Jews who claimed their crucified leader was still alive. The subtleties of the tensions between the pharisees and the priests, and the significant remark of Paul's that he, a strict pharisee, had collaborated with the priests to hunt down the followers of the Nazarene eluded him. However Agrippa saw how Paul had managed to get across both the Sadducee and the Pharisee

⁶⁷⁴ *Agrippa II: Hears Paul's case – Acts 25:13*

parties, which would explain the expression of combined fury against this little man. Agrippa listened with renewed interest.

“It was for this purpose that I went to Damascus with authority and orders from the chief priests. It was on the road at midday, Your Majesty, that I saw a light much brighter than the sun, coming from the sky and shining round me and the men travelling with me. All of us fell to the ground, and I heard a voice say to me in Hebrew, ‘Saul, Saul! Why are you persecuting me? You are hurting yourself by hitting back, like an ox kicking against its owner’s stick.’ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked. And the Lord answered, ‘I am Jesus, whom you persecute. But get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as my servant. You are to tell others what you have seen of me today and what I will show you in the future. I will rescue you from the people of Israel and from the Gentiles to whom I will send you. You are to open their eyes and turn them from the darkness to the light and from the power of Satan to God, so that through their faith in me they will have their sins forgiven and receive their place amongst God’s chosen people.’”

Paul could see he had the attention of Agrippa, but many of the others were getting restive. “And so, King Agrippa, I did not disobey the vision I had from heaven. First in Damascus and in Jerusalem and then in all Judaea and among the Gentiles, I preached that they must repent of their sins and turn to God and do the things that would show they had repented. It was for this reason that the Jews seized me while I was in the Temple, and they tried to kill me. But to this very day I have been helped by God, and so I stand here giving my witness to all, to small and great alike. What I say is the very same thing which the prophets and Moses said was going to happen: that the Messiah must suffer and be the first one to rise from death, to announce the light of salvation to the Jews and to the Gentiles.”

Festus finally grew tired of all this and shouted “You are mad, Paul! Your great learning is driving you mad!”

Paul, whose attention had been focused on Agrippa, now turned to Festus, “I am not mad, Your Excellency! I am speaking the sober truth.”

He turned back to Agrippa, “King Agrippa! I can speak to you with all boldness, because you know about these things. I am sure that you have taken notice of every one of them, for this thing has not happened hidden away in a corner.” How Paul longed for the soul of this man sitting before him, “King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do!”

Agrippa smiled, “In this short time do you think you will make me a Christian?”

“Whether a short time or a long time,” Paul answered, “my prayer to God is that you and all the rest of you who are listening to me today might become

what I am.” There was a titter from the people, Paul looked down and added, “Except, of course, for these chains!”

His listeners had heard enough and they all got up and left the audience chamber and, as they passed, Paul heard someone say, “This man has not done anything for which he should die or be put in prison.” Then he heard Agrippa say to Festus, “This man could have been released if he had not appealed to the Emperor.”

Later, back in his cell, Timothy and Luke came to listen what had happened at the audience before King Agrippa. They told him the brethren had been praying for him. It was some days before they heard Festus’ decision that Paul should be sent on the next ship, together with some other prisoners due for trial. Apparently, with Agrippa’s help, he had finally composed some sort of a charge sheet against Paul. The disciples were dismayed at the news but Paul rejoiced that at long last he would be visiting the imperial city.

It was then that Paul said to Timothy, “My son, now we are leaving, you must visit the churches in Asia and Macedonia and tell them the outcome of this affair. Ask them to pray for me that I answer without fear before the emperor to the hope I have in Jesus Christ, our Lord.”

Timothy was very reluctant to let Paul go without him.⁶⁷⁵ It was only when Luke assured him that he would not be alone, but that he and Aristarchus would accompany him, that he unwillingly agreed to Paul’s request.⁶⁷⁶ For Paul the long wait had ended and he looked forward with anticipation to his departure for Rome.⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷⁵ Paul: Rome – with Luke and Aristarchus – Acts 27:2

⁶⁷⁶ Luke: Luke and Aristarchus sail to Rome with Paul – Acts 27:2

⁶⁷⁷ Luke continues the story with the account of their journey to Rome and concludes that Paul stayed in Rome for 2 years in a place he rented for himself, “and there he welcomed all who came to see him. He preached about the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ, speaking with all boldness and freedom.”

EPILOGUE – AT THE END

CE 63-64

AND THEN WHAT HAPPENED?

Luke and Aristarchus accompanied Paul to Rome (see Acts Chapters 27 and 28.) Presumably Timothy was sent off to Ephesus and Macedonia to inform them he was on his way to Rome.

Luke's conclusion to the book of Acts, "For two years Paul lived in a place he rented for himself, and there he welcomed all who came to see him. He preached about the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ," leaves many unanswered questions. The 'two years' probably ended in CE.62. Tradition has it that he was executed along the Appian Way, probably after the fire of Rome, which took place in July 64. There is one document which indicates Paul might have been released to do one more visit, and that is his second letter to Timothy. Using this letter one can speculate a possible scenario.

The months went by and still Paul's case was not heard. His accusers had to appear in person and without them the head of the Praetorian Guard could not try Paul.⁶⁷⁸ However just before March of the end of Paul's second year in Rome his period of office came to an end. Before he left all awaiting trial prisoners, whose cases had been untried, were simply released, presenting the new princeps with no backlog of cases.⁶⁷⁹ Thus at the end of two years of house arrest, it is possible that in the absence of his accusers, he was simply released.

We know that Paul longed to take the Gospel to Spain, but there is no evidence he ever went there, however it is entirely possible that on his release he planned to go there. He had just completed about four years in prison (two in Caesarea and two in Rome) his funds would not be enough to do an extended missionary journey to Spain and besides he most probably longed to see the churches he had established in Achaia, Macedonia and even Ephesus.

⁶⁷⁸ *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* by Sherwin-White Oxford University Press 1963. The author discusses under whose jurisdiction Paul's case would fall and suggests it was the officer known from Trajan's time onwards as 'princeps castrorum' or head administrator, suggesting that since the Legions had such an official since Claudius's day, the Praetorian Guard most likely did too.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.* The author discusses various precedents for such action. He suggests it extremely unlikely from the general consideration of Roman criminal procedure but the procurator of Palestine, Lucius Albinus had simply emptied the prisons of untried and unexecuted prisoners at the end of his term of office. The proconsuls of Bithynia were given to cancelling their predecessor's sentences of relegation – a practice Trajan wanted to end.

Looking at the list of people mentioned in his second letter to Timothy, one can see he had had seven men with him of whom four came from Ephesus:

Phygelus	Ephesus	‘Everyone in...Asia, including P and H has deserted me.’	2 Timothy 1:15
Hermogenes	Ephesus		
Demas	Thessalonica	‘Going off to Thessalonica’	2 Timothy 4:10
Crescens	Galatia	‘went to Galatia’	2 Timothy 4:10
Titus	Antioch/Crete	‘to Dalmatia’	2 Timothy 4:10
Tychicus	Ephesus	‘I sent (him) to Ephesus’	2 Timothy 4:12
Erastus	Ephesus	‘stayed in Corinth’	2 Timothy 4:20

Demas, Titus, Tychicus and Erastus (most likely the one who accompanied Timothy to Macedonia in Acts 19:22 and not the treasurer of Corinth) All these people had either accompanied Paul on his travels or had been mentioned in one or more of his letters. It could be suggested that these people were recruited by Paul as part of a team to accompany him to Spain.

He might have been collecting money from the churches along the way, besides visiting and encouraging them. The main indication that he had been travelling round once more is that he asks Timothy to pick up his coat, books and parchments which he had left with Carpus in Troas (2 Timothy 4:13). It would be difficult to imagine that he had left them there for four or five years and had not found someone to fetch them.

Another indication that Paul did actually travel back to Ephesus and Macedonia is his first letter to Timothy 1:3 where he says, ‘I want you to stay in Ephesus, just as I urged you when I was on my way to Macedonia.’ Careful analysis of Paul’s earlier travels reveals that after his first visit to Ephesus (Acts 18:19) he left to go to Jerusalem. After his second and final visit to Ephesus (Acts 19:1-41) he left to go to Macedonia, however Timothy must have gone with him, since he wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia where he met up with Titus (1 Corinthians 7:5 & 6). Timothy’s name is included in the opening greetings. There are no other records in Acts or Paul’s other correspondence that he visited Ephesus and left there for Macedonia.

If Paul completed his journey round the established churches and returned to Rome, why he was arrested? On what charges? Before or after the fire? In the light of his letter to 2 Timothy and the people he had with him, he could not have realised his danger in returning to Rome.

If, as seems likely, he had been discharged from house arrest in 61/62, what happened after this that made his re-arrest likely? For this it is necessary

to look at the political situation in Rome and the deteriorating relationships between the Jews and Christians.

The high priest had had Jesus's brother, James, put to death in 62 A.D.. This must have broken the church in Jerusalem. John and possibly a very old Mary, mother of Jesus were living in Ephesus – where they reputedly lie buried. Peter was in Rome. The other Apostles were also scattered. The Jews were determined to oust the Christians from amongst their ranks. Politically the Jewish faith was a licensed religion throughout the Empire and had special privileges as a result, (notably exemption from serving in the Legions.) As far as Rome was concerned the Christians were just one more sect of the Jews and had been treated as such.

The Jews seem to have been successful in getting the authorities to accept that there was a difference because when Nero arrested the Christians and killed them, the Jews of Rome were not touched. One explanation for this is to be found in Nero's new wife, Poppaea. She was a convert to Judaism and had been living with Nero since 58 CE. In 59 she had persuaded Nero to get rid of his mother, Agrippina. Nero arranged the murder of his mother in that year. Poppaea dominated Nero as his mistress, but she wanted to be his wife. Nero had been married to his half-sister Octavia. She was now only nineteen years and had been exiled from Rome. Poppaea wasn't satisfied and Nero ordered Octavia's death. Octavia was popular with the Romans and Nero did not get rid of her without public protest. Finally she was brutally murdered in CE 62 and Nero was free to marry Poppaea.

It is difficult to imagine why such an ambitious and bloodthirsty woman should have been a convert to Judaism, however she must have used her considerable influence on behalf of the Jews and with her record it is entirely feasible that when Paul's enemies protested at his release from jail in 61/2, Poppaea, whose power had increased in the interim, might well have arranged to have Paul re-arrested when he returned to Rome in early 64.

It is not difficult to imagine the dismay amongst the brethren at Paul's re-arrest. This time it was no easy-going house arrest, but 'I'm even chained like a criminal' (2 Timothy 2:9). His travelling companions left him. Paul makes his first court appearance where 'no one stood by me the first time I defended myself: all deserted me' (2 Timothy 4:16). He feels the end is near, 'The hour has come for me to be sacrificed; the time is here for me to leave this life' (2 Timothy 4:6). Only Luke is with him (2 Timothy 4:11) and he begs Timothy to come soon and bring Mark (2 Timothy 4:9,11). At the end of the letter he repeats, 'Do your best to come before winter.' (2 Timothy 4:21). One hopes that Timothy and Mark managed to get to Rome before his execution.

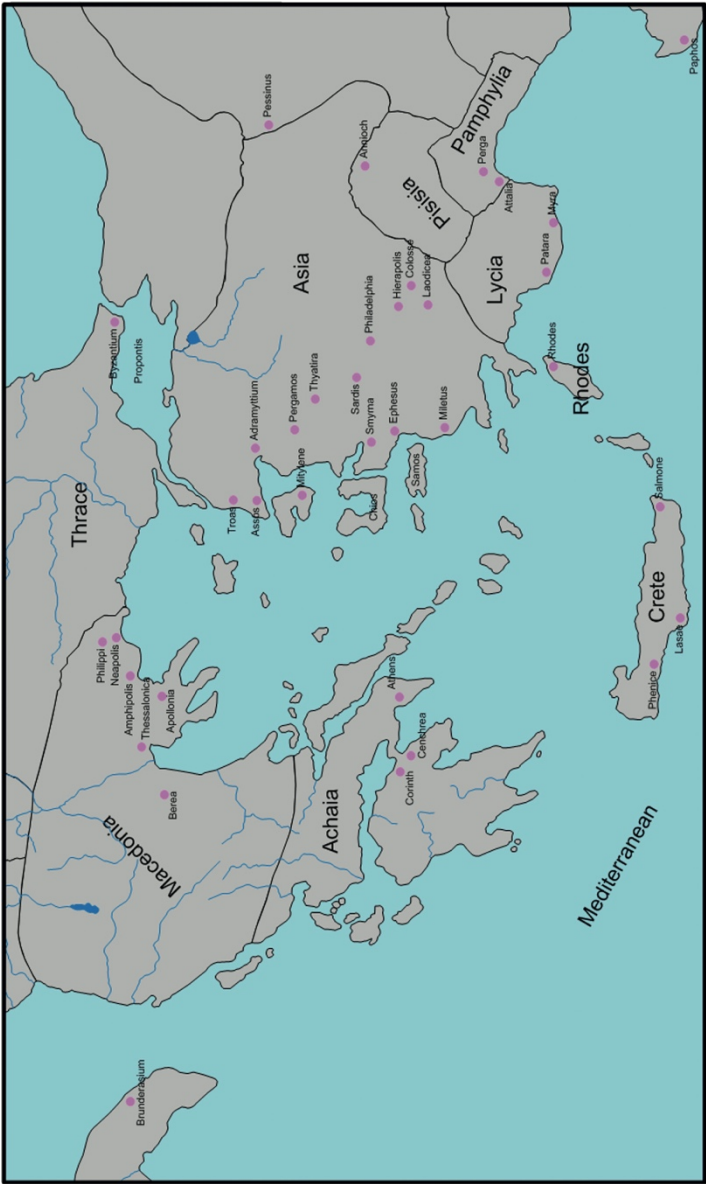
Paul's faith never faltered. He writes "I have done my best in the race, I have run the full distance, and I have kept the faith. And now there is waiting

for me the prize of victory awarded for a righteous life, the prize which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that Day – and not only to me, but to all those who wait with love for him to appear” (2 Timothy 4:7-8).⁶⁸⁰

AUTHOR: Rosemary M. Elliott

⁶⁸⁰ *It is wonderful to contemplate that many of the cities Paul visited are known today only because Paul wrote to the churches he had established in them. His words containing Eternal Truths proved stronger and more enduring than these mighty cities which have crumbled into ruins.*

MAP OF PAUL'S MISSION FIELD



LET YOUR LIFE SPEAK — A TESTIMONY

— *A Testimony to Rosemary Monica Elliott (1931–2018)*



Rosemary in 1954



In later years

Born in Bermuda in 1931, Rosemary was the youngest of the three children of Alice and Peter Gibson. The family moved to England where Rosemary grew up, became a Quaker, and qualified as a social worker at Bedford College, London.

Rosemary was baptised and confirmed an Anglican, but found that she was hungry for more than the Communion Service was providing. Before going to Bedford College, she attended an International Weekend at the Friends Ambulance Unit where the quiet, unemotional testimony of Rev. Michael Scott about his ministry in South Africa ‘told’ her she should ‘live in South Africa’. Having qualified as a social worker, and using her Quaker contacts, she applied for a post at Port Elizabeth Child Welfare and began work in 1954.

*... I saw that outside criticism of the country was not helping to solve its problems. ... if they were to be solved at all, it was necessary for me (and others like me) to live there, absorbing the conflicts of the situation into ourselves and then, with the Grace of God, find the right solutions and the power to apply them. [from: *The Workings of Jesus Christ in the Life of R.M.E*]*

By the end of 1954, she had met Talbot Elliott and they were married at a Quaker Meeting in Port Elizabeth the following year. They moved to the Elliott citrus farm Hermiston, in Addo in the Sundays River Valley, where their three children, Sarah, Philip and Stephen were born and raised.

Rosemary was challenged by the inequalities of South Africa. The impetus that drove her to South Africa, continued to impel her actions. The Archbishop of Durban's call to fight racism after Sharpeville (1960) was a call to action, but Rosemary recognised that it was not enough for church leaders to issue statements; ordinary people needed to be involved, too. She invited local people of every colour to come and meet to *seek ways in which we could express our Christian faith more effectively in our lives*. In spite of many setbacks – many of them resistance from the white community – she felt the Holy Spirit urged her on to break down the racial barriers in the conservative farming community of Sundays River Valley, with its inequalities and inherited prejudices.

I have begun to see how tremendously entrenched is the status quo: how power and financial wealth go hand in hand ... We do not see the often devastating effects which big business has had on the lives of communities and nations ... we have no idea how these financial power blocks operate, we have no idea of the incredible profits they make. We do not know who accumulates this wealth nor how it is used to manipulate politicians and governments. [from: The Workings of Jesus Christ in the Life of R.M.E]

Her battles with bureaucracy were long and arduous. Whereas white and coloured widows and orphans obtained Maintenance Grants from the government, black women did not. Many years of frustrating and time-consuming work eventually (1976) resulted in a Quaker delegation to Pretoria to submit Memoranda to the Department of Bantu Affairs, and the red tape was cleared. She spent much time during 1977 catching up with the backlog of families eligible for assistance. Rather than finding it fulfilling, she felt that she was dealing with the end result of a sick and maladjusted society. It was necessary work, but did not make for a better community with more fulfilled people. A growing, evolving society requires growing, evolving people who are fully equipped to find their full potential. To open up opportunities for improving the lives of people and supplementing their income, she experimented with using available raw materials to make things that would be immediately useful to the maker, and if to her, then possibly to her neighbours, and finally to the wider public. After a period of ups and downs, a group of women was established who made sisal sandals, sleeping mats, table-mats, handbags, and anything else people could think up. Two of

the mats were still in use in 2008 – one in the local library, the other at the Anglican church. With help from the Village Management Board a wooden prefab building was erected where the women could meet and work. In 1984, when the ANC decided to make the country ungovernable, the local schools and the handcraft centre were burnt down. When Rosemary drove down to what was now a heap of ashes, the women very bravely ran out to meet her. They stood holding hands and weeping; said a prayer and promised to meet the next week and continue working. By the end of 1984, they were able to rebuild the handcraft centre, with the help of the very youths who had burnt it down! They called it *iThemba lethu* (Our Hope).

It was at this craft centre in Zwelitsha where she was, on one occasion, approached by a group of tsotsis who demanded the keys to her car. She calmly handed them over and continued her work, in spite of the loud distress of the women in the craft centre. Rosemary responded that all was well, and she would get her car back. An hour later, her car was indeed returned to her. The community had rallied round to find the offenders and persuade them to return the vehicle – a tangible sign of her status in the community!

Rosemary was not simply a ‘teacher’ and guide. She also learned from the people she worked with. The rising cost of food led her to drive a cooperative effort to grow vegetables on the farm. The initial attempt of engaging the men to do so failed, so she took to heart the advice of the woman who worked in her kitchen: “Don’t worry if the men won’t do anything. Tell them you want to speak to their wives – the men don’t know what we women want to cook.” The cooperative started in September 1974, all the women working together, weeding, hoeing, planting. When the time came to divide up the crop, more problems arose. In spite of having agreed to share the produce according to the number in the family, there was ill-feeling when the produce was divided up. “I work as hard everyone else, and if I don’t get the same, it will make me lazy,” said a woman who had no children at home. Despondently, feeling that the woman had missed the whole point of sharing, Rosemary re-divided the crop of onions. As the woman picked up her now considerably larger bunch, she immediately re-divided it and gave half of it to the two mothers with the biggest families. In Rosemary’s words: *What a marvellous object lesson she had taught us all. She had grasped the essentials better than I had.*

Much of the opposition she encountered was not only from within the white farming community, but also from the established church communities where, she suspected, many of the clergy felt threatened by her attempts to bring people together in Christ. Hers was often a lone voice in the attempt to establish an ongoing fellowship; she was the only one who provided continuity in this attempt.

All Rosemary's actions were driven by her deep-seated belief in the Quaker values of equality, simplicity, peace and truth, founded on the rock of her trust in Christ, and in searching to be the hands and life that carry out his work in the world:

He NEEDS us in the dark places of the world. He needs our total personality – heart, mind and body. This is a slow process, involving us in discipline, self-sacrifice and the need for constant re-commitment to the Way of Love. [from: The Workings of Jesus Christ in the Life of R.M.E]

Rosemary loved painting, singing, acting, dancing and she wrote prolifically. She contributed stimulating articles and book reviews to SAQN, wrote a play (*Prometheus Bound*), and completed a biography on Paul, titled *Paul, Apostle by Special Appointment*.

Her influence is lovingly recalled in the words of three Eastern Cape Quakers:

Rod Woollgar:

Rosemary once told me that having grown up in the Anglican faith, she felt called to be more involved in her beliefs and went searching. It was while looking for a spiritual home she attended a number of Christian churches and meetings, among them a Quaker Meeting. After attending all of these, she felt driven to re-attend the Quakers and found her home.

She read all she could of Fox's life and all else concerning the Quakers, and tried to live by the precepts she found. When, during the student uprising, the SAP in the Eastern Cape were rounding up and imprisoning children without trial, she felt called, despite her trepidations, to approach the police and demand to know where the children were as the families were understandably anxious to know their whereabouts. Through her persistence she eventually found them at St Albans prison near Port Elizabeth. She explained to me that she did so because as Fox had said when you feel called, remember, 'He has no one else but thee'.

Her excellent book on the life of St Paul deserved to be published but the publishers felt that it was too long and asked her to shorten it. However, Rosemary decided that if she did so it would lose a lot of its content and meaning. It is a well written and informative book and should be read by all those who profess Christianity or try to live by its principles; it should also be required reading for all who intend joining the ministry.

Her relationship with her husband Talbot, who was congenitally deaf, was quite remarkable: a simple stamp of her foot would get his attention as he would feel the vibration and then they could sign to each other. Insofar as

I could gather the only things they virulently disliked were the mousebirds which damaged so much of their annual citrus crop.

She was a wonderful guide and counsellor and a fountain of knowledge about Quaker Faith and Practice. We often teased that, had we been a Roman Catholic order, she would have been the Mother Superior; or if Jewish, Mother Shapiro.

John Blair:

When I think of Rosemary it is inevitable that I think of Hermiston, the citrus farm that she and Talbot created in the Sundays River Valley. But it is not the oranges that we would leave with when Quarterly Meeting was held there that I remember most, or the roses that Rosemary managed to cultivate and market in an unhelpful climate, but the peace and tranquility that I felt there at the farm during times when the world around us often felt neither peaceful or tranquil, and somehow that peace seemed to be generated by Rosemary herself.

Not that Rosemary was a person you would describe as quiet. In the 1970s she was a prime mover in the setting up of Valley Welfare, an ecumenical NGO that aimed and succeeded through a mixture of help and self-help in uplifting the lives of people in the Valley, particularly the least privileged – the women who lived in the township at Addo. Rosemary organized the building of a welfare and handicraft centre there and every month brought their products to Port Elizabeth to sell and raise funds.

She also found the inner courage and conviction to speak truth to power on behalf of others less able to do so, be it to the police in the case of missing student protesters, or to state officialdom in an ongoing quest for pensions.

Perhaps what many Friends in the Eastern Cape will remember most about Rosemary, however, was her ministry during Meeting for Worship. Rosemary was not able to attend meeting for a number of years and we were all the poorer for it. She had an amazing ability during vocal ministry to relate the everyday happenings to individual people in the Valley, be they rich or poor, in work or out of work, to gospel values and to that of God in each of us.

Adrienne Whisson:

When I joined Cape Eastern Regional Meeting in the mid-80s, Rosemary Elliott was clearly the light of the meeting. Her face, her words and her activism all seemed to shine. She lived Quakerism, exemplifying faith and practice. I could not have had a better introduction or teacher. I was made Clerk fairly soon after joining, as I recall. There was an arduous side to it,

taking minutes, typing them up, photocopying them and posting out. Rosemary held my hand at all stages. She also encouraged me to do as much reading as possible. I experienced an apprenticeship of living the Clerking. I am grateful to her for that because I don't think it happens much anymore.

Later, when I felt freer, I would come up with what I thought was a good project for our Meeting. She would always say, "Adrienne, don't forget if you come up with an idea, you also have to run with it".

She was concerned that members should feel they belonged to Cape Eastern. She was protective of fragile members and attenders. She chided me once for what she felt was rather a harsh attitude on my part.

Apart from her many community activities, she also spent time writing, especially working on her book, *Paul, Apostle by Special Appointment*. I felt the best way I could support her was to offer accommodation at the research stage when she needed it. She visited at least four times to use the Grahamstown libraries which were an essential source of material. She was a most appreciative guest, and her visits were much enjoyed. Eventually, her son, Philip, organised the printing of between 10 and 12 copies in 2009. It received very positive reviews from Michael Whisson and the Rev. Nancy Charton, the first woman to be ordained in the Church of the Province of South Africa, (See SAQN issue no. 230, no. 1, 2011), and a woman very similar to Rosemary: brave, clever, energetic, compassionate and funny. Recently Prof. Peter Rose reviewed the book as "a superb piece of work, hugely creative ... [it would be] most attractive to people choosing religious experience above high scholarship". I hope it eventually reaches the "tens of thousands or people" that he felt it should and could.

She also wrote at least two plays intended to be acted at C&SAYM. Guy Butler felt that her play, *Prometheus Bound* (1986) was good enough to be staged at Rhodes University Theatre. Unfortunately, that never happened, for he had retired. Friends in Grahamstown plan to hold an evening in her memory when we will read the play.

A lasting memory of her was of her sitting next to Talbot, signing whatever talk was taking place. She was always most assiduous of his welfare, of his being part of whatever was happening.

One of Rosemary's own poems sums up her 'way':

*I choose Peace as a way of life –
Just as my life was a gift – so I give it back in service to others.
Just as I have been nourished by the creativity of others –
so I offer my own creativity for the enrichment of others.
When I see my brother or sister sick, hungry or suffering;
I will see myself in their place and seek to help them.*

*May the Spirit of Christ in me reach out to cherish the Christ in others.
I affirm that I am part of a life chain of love, trust and service
which is mutually supporting and enriching,
and I will use the resources of the world reverently,
as gifts to be shared.
I choose Life in all its abundance for myself and all others.
And in dying I pray my death will also be a gift which opens doors for
myself and others.*

Rosemary's ministry went far beyond words; she truly lived the Quaker injunction to 'Let your life speak'.