

FROM JERUSALEM TO ROME



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PAUL was a faithful servant of God, and a true disciple of Jesus. He traveled from place to place telling the people about the wonderful things God was planning to do for them when Jesus is King. After a while God made it known to Paul that he should visit Jerusalem. He always did what God wanted him to do, so he started to travel in the direction of Jerusalem.

They didn't have airplanes or railroad trains or automobiles at that time, so it was much more difficult for Paul to travel than it is for us. Sometimes he walked. Sometimes he traveled in a sailboat.

On his way to Jerusalem he visited the disciples of Jesus in many places, and when it was possible he preached to them. In a place called Troas the disciples of Jesus met together, and Paul preached to them all night. One young man, who was sitting on a window sill, went to sleep while Paul was preaching, and fell out of the window, and when they picked him up he was dead. But Paul used the power of God to make this young man alive again.

As Paul went from place to place on his way to Jerusalem, some of his friends advised him not to continue his journey to Jerusalem. They said that when he arrived he would be put in prison. But Paul didn't take their advice. He knew that God wanted him to visit Jerusalem so he was determined to go. He said:

“I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

When Paul and his companions reached Jerusalem they went to the home of James. There they met a number of Jesus’ disciples, and Paul told them about the many wonderful experiences he had enjoyed when telling the people about Jesus. Then he visited the temple, and while he was there some of the Israelites, who had been acquainted with him and knew that he now was a disciple of Jesus, arrested him.

These were the same kind of people who caused Jesus and Stephen to be killed; and now they wanted to kill Paul. We mustn’t think badly of them, though, because they thought Paul was one of God’s enemies. Paul himself at one time thought that Jesus and Stephen were enemies of God, but now he understood better. Now he knew that Jesus was the “Lamb” of God who had died in order that all the people might be made alive again.

The Israelites—as I have told you before—were not the real rulers of Jerusalem. The city was under the rule of the Romans, and when the Roman chief of police heard that the Israelites had seized Paul and were beating him and intended to kill him, he sent soldiers to rescue him.

This Roman officer was called the “chief captain of the band.” He supposed that Paul had committed some great crime, so he told his soldiers to put two chains on him and take him into the castle where he could be questioned.

The people were greatly excited!

The Roman soldiers had to carry Paul to keep him from the mob. As they were carrying him up the stairs into the castle, Paul asked permission to speak to the people who were crying out against him. He was given this permission. He waved to them with his hand, and they stopped their shouting long enough to hear what he had to say. Then Paul told them that at one time he was just like them, that he, too, thought all who believed in Jesus were God’s enemies, and that they should be put to death.

Paul then told the people who were trying to kill him about the wonderful experience he had when Jesus spoke to him while he was on his way to Damascus to arrest the disciples of Jesus who lived there. It was then that he learned how wrong he was. He found out that Jesus was the Son of God, who had come to the world to die for the people.

Yes, Paul told his enemies a wonderful story, and it was a true story, too. But still they wanted to kill him. Finally the people wouldn't listen any more, and they cried out saying:

“Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live.”

Then the chief of police gave orders that Paul be taken into the castle and that he should be beaten to make him tell the truth about the great crime which it was supposed he had committed. Of course Paul had done no wrong, but the chief of police didn't know this. He didn't realize that the people could be so angry with Paul just because he was a disciple of Jesus.

It is really wrong to be angry with people just because they don't think as we do.

When the Roman soldiers had securely bound and were about ready to beat Paul, he spoke to a guard who was standing nearby, and asked him if it was lawful to beat a Roman who had not been tried and condemned. The guard was very much surprised that Paul was a Roman, and he quickly reported it to his chief. When it was discovered that Paul was a Roman they arranged to hold a trial for him, and let the people tell what great wrong he had done.

Yes, Paul was a Roman, but he was also an Israelite. It was something like one who is an Englishman becoming a United States citizen. Even though one's parents are English, if he is born in the United States he is a citizen of the United States. One who is not born in the United States can become a citizen by taking out citizenship papers.

So there were these two ways of becoming a Roman citizen. Paul, although his parents were Jewish, was born a Roman citizen. It was

a very good thing for him to be a Roman citizen, for because of this the Roman soldiers had to protect him.

The next day the chief of police arranged for Paul to appear before a council of Israelites to defend himself. Some of the men in this council were called Pharisees, and some were Sadducees. The Pharisees believed that God would make dead people alive again, it the “resurrection of the dead.” The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. Paul knew this, so he told the council that the thing he was being accused of was his belief in the resurrection.

Well, that started an argument among the Pharisees and Sadducees who were in the council. Besides, the Pharisees believed in angels, and they thought perhaps an angel had spoken to Paul. If so, they were afraid to do anything to harm him. But the Sadducees didn’t believe in angels, so this was something else over which they argued.

They not only argued, but started to fight one another. The chief of police saw what was occurring, and he was afraid Paul would be seriously hurt, so he ordered his soldiers to take him back into the castle where he would be safe.

That night a very wonderful thing occurred. The Bible tells us that the Lord stood by Paul and said to him:

“Be of good cheer, Paul; for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.”

Now Paul knew what to expect. He was sure that he would be delivered from the Israelites in Jerusalem, and that he was to go to the city of Rome, in Italy, to tell the people about Jesus, and about the resurrection. But the way in which Paul traveled to Rome was very strange indeed.

The next day after the Lord spoke to Paul, a group of more than forty Israelites banded together and agreed that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. They told the chief priests and elders about it, and suggested to them that they ask the chief of police to bring Paul before them again for further questioning. They explained that this would give them an opportunity to seize Paul and kill him.

But this plan didn't work. Paul had a young nephew who lived in Jerusalem, and he overheard the plans that were made by these wicked men to kill his Uncle Paul, so he hurried to the castle, where he was able to see the chief of police and warn him of the plot. Then the chief of police, whose name was Claudius Lysias, decided to send Paul out of the city to a Roman governor in Caesarea by the name of Felix. So he arranged that night for two hundred soldiers, seventy cavalrymen, and two hundred spearmen to take Paul out of the city to Caesarea.

Claudius sent a letter to Felix, explaining what he knew about Paul and the charges against him, and that he was sending him to Felix to be tried because he was a Roman citizen. Five days later a committee of Israelites came from Jerusalem to accuse Paul before Felix.

Felix was a clever man, and he could see that Paul had done no wrong, so he sent these men back to Jerusalem, telling them that he would examine the case further at a later time. Then he instructed the guard to give Paul as much liberty as possible, and to allow his friends to visit him. And there Paul remained for more than two years.

Then another Roman officer named Festus took the place of Felix in Caesarea, and it was arranged that Paul should be tried again before him. Festus, who was then visiting Jerusalem, insisted that his accusers go with him to Caesarea. At this trial Paul, knowing that God wanted him to go to Rome, appealed to Caesar. Caesar was the emperor of the Roman Empire, of which Rome was the capital. As Paul was a Roman citizen, his appeal was honored, and now he was to be taken as a prisoner to Rome.

But before Paul started on the journey toward Rome, arrangements were made by Festus for him to present his case to a Roman king named Agrippa. King Agrippa was very much interested in what Paul told him, and said that he was almost convinced that he should be a disciple of Jesus. Paul certainly did preach a wonderful sermon to King Agrippa, telling him about Jesus, and that he had

been made alive again, and that all who have died are also to be made alive again.

King Agrippa said that Paul could have been set free if he had not appealed his case to Caesar. But God had told him he was to go to Rome and tell the people there about Jesus. So, determined that he would do what God wanted him to do, it made little or no difference to him whether he were free or not.

After awhile arrangements were complete for Paul to leave by ship, together with other prisoners, on the long journey to Rome. All these prisoners were put in charge of an officer named Julius. There were no vessels which went directly to Rome, so they sailed from place to place, changing from one ship to another several times until they reached Alexandria in Egypt.

There they arranged to sail in a ship that was going to Italy. But this ship never reached Italy, because it was wrecked in a severe storm off the island of Melita.

Before this happened and before they set sail again, they were stopping for a while in a place called "The Fair Havens." It was by now very late in the fall of the year, and Paul advised the captain of the ship to remain in The Fair Havens for the winter. There were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship. Many of them were anxious to get to their destinations so it was decided to set sail and not take Paul's advice.

But it turned out that Paul was right. A heavy winter storm arose, and it seemed certain that the ship would be wrecked. The people on the ship were very much frightened, so Paul delivered a wonderful message to them, saying:

"Now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship."

Then Paul explained to the people on the sinking ship why he was so sure that they would all be saved. He said that one of God's angels had spoken to him, saying:

"Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar; and lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee."

They steered the ship as best they could toward the land, and it went aground some little distance off shore. Those who could swim ashore did so. Some used boards, and others used broken pieces of the ship to keep themselves afloat, and finally they all managed to get to the dry land and to safety. The people who lived on this island of Melita were very kind to the shipwrecked travelers. It was rainy and cold so they built a fire for them.

Paul helped to build the fire, and as he was putting wood on it a poisonous snake called a “viper” bit him on the hand. The Bible says that the viper came out of the heat. It was cold weather, and probably the serpent had hidden itself away in the wood for the winter, and the fire drove it out.

The people of the island, as well as the passengers, knew that anyone bitten by a viper was almost certain to die. But Paul was not harmed. God was taking care of him because he wanted him to tell the people in Rome about Jesus. When Paul didn’t die from the viper bite, the people of the island were kinder to him than ever.

The ruler of the island was named Publius. His father was very sick, and Paul healed him. Paul also healed other sick people on the island. They remained on Melita for three months. By that time the worst of the winter was over. Another ship from Alexandria, which had not been wrecked, but had remained at Melita for the winter, was sailing, so Paul was taken on this ship to complete his journey to Italy. After two more stops on the way, Paul finally arrived in Italy by ship, at a seaport which was quite a journey from Rome.

The Roman officers knew that Paul had not committed any crime, so when they brought him to Rome they did not put him in prison as they did other prisoners, but allowed him to hire a house for himself. He was not free, though, because he was kept chained to a soldier all the time, day and night. It was arranged that different soldiers would take turns in thus guarding Paul.

For two years Paul lived this way. And what do you suppose he did all this time?

Well, first of all, he sent for the important Jews of Rome to come and see him. He told them about Jesus and the resurrection. Some of them believed what he told them, and some did not.

After that various Gentiles visited him.

So all day long, day after day, for two whole years, Paul continued to tell the people who came to see him about Jesus, and about all the good things God will do for the people when Jesus becomes King of all the earth.

The Bible doesn't tell us very much about what Paul did after this. It is believed, though, that he was set free, but later arrested by the Romans again and brought to Rome, where he was put to death. Like Jesus, however, Paul was not put to death because he had done wrong. He was put to death because the rulers didn't want him to tell the people about King Jesus. Won't it be grand when everybody will love Jesus, and will be glad that he is their King?

QUESTIONS

- What happened to Paul when he visited the temple in Jerusalem?
- Name the Roman rulers to whom Paul explained why his enemies hated him?
- What happened to Paul on his way to Rome, and why did he spend the winter in Melita?
- How was Paul treated after he arrived in Rome?