

Companions of Them So Used

“Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; ... and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.”
—*Hebrews 10:32,33*

IN CONNECTION WITH THE ministry of the Apostle Paul we hear much about such able and zealous fellow servants as Barnabas, Silas, Timothy and Luke, the beloved physician. Important and helpful as these brethren undoubtedly were to the apostle, there were others who also greatly assisted him in his ministry of whom we do not hear very much.

In his extensive journeys to establish and serve the churches, or when he remained for a time at one place, Paul evidently had in his presence a small group of faithful brethren, never seeking or gaining prominence, but choosing rather to serve humbly in the background. They would write his letters, for his eyesight was poor; and after writing them, they would deliver them. They ministered to his personal needs; they shared his trials, his dangers, and, some perhaps, even his imprisonment.

In Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth he writes, "Aquila and Priscilla salute you. ... All the brethren greet you." (I Cor. 16:19,20) Toward the end of his letter to the Romans, we read, "Timotheus my workfellow, and Lucius, and Jason, and Sosipater, my kinsmen, salute you. I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord. Gaius mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you." (Rom. 16:21-23) At the end of the letter to the Colossians we find the statement, "Written from Rome to the Colossians by Tychicus and Onesimus." In his letter to the Colossians Paul says, "Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you."—Col. 4:14

Because of his poor eyesight, no doubt, various brethren often wrote his letters from his dictation. He added his signature in his own handwriting, however, as a gracious token of his love, as indicated in his letter to the Thessalonian brethren, where he writes, "I Paul add the greeting with my own hand, which is the credential in every letter of mine. This is my handwriting." Then follows that sweet benediction with which he closed so many of his epistles, "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all."—II Thess. 3:17,18, *Weymouth New Testament*

We do not know very much about most of these brethren who so constantly waited on and assisted Paul. However, we do know that their service was indispensable to him, and from what he sometimes wrote of these brethren we know he loved and depended on them and appreciated their sacrifices.

ARISTARCHUS FROM MACEDONIA

One of these was a man named Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, a trusted friend and traveling companion to Paul. We first hear of him in connection with the riot that occurred in Ephesus toward the end of Paul's long stay in that city during his third missionary journey. Apparently, some of Paul's ministry in Ephesus had been directed against the worship of false gods, and this preaching had begun to have an impact. In recording the incident, Luke writes, "A certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; Whom he called together, ... and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands."—Acts 19:24-26

Seeing their livelihood thus threatened, the silversmiths stirred up the whole city, and "Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia," and Paul's companions in travel, were taken into custody. When the uproar eventually subsided, Paul called his disciples to him, and embraced them, and departed for Macedonia. (Acts 19:29-41; 20:1) This was the initial record of Aristarchus' companionship with Paul and of sharing his experiences and persecutions.

When Paul returned from Macedonia, he and a few of his little band of followers, including Aristarchus, went to Troas, where they remained for seven days. On the last day of his stay there, and not knowing when he would again see these brethren, he continued preaching until midnight. One of his audience,

a young man named Eutychus, sitting in a window, was lulled into a deep sleep, and fell from the window, and was taken up dead. Paul restored the young man to life and resumed his preaching “even till break of day.” We can imagine that the apostle would surely have used this unique occasion to preach the wonderful doctrine of the resurrection. Then, the record states, “he departed,” continuing on his journey with his faithful companions.—Acts 20:1-11

Aristarchus was with Paul in Troas, and now went along with him, eventually arriving in Caesarea, and then Jerusalem. Evidently he kept in close touch with the apostle, for about two years later, when Paul boarded a ship at Caesarea to be taken as a prisoner to Rome, Aristarchus accompanied him. (Acts 27:1,2) It was no doubt on that long, perilous voyage, during which Aristarchus saw further evidences of Paul’s great courage and trust in the Lord, and he most surely continued to serve the apostle well as they journeyed.

It seems certain that Aristarchus faithfully accompanied Paul all the way to Rome and remained with the apostle during his confinement. In a letter Paul wrote from Rome to Philemon, he says, “Greetings to you ... from Epaphras my fellow prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus; and from Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.” (Philem. 1:23,24, *Weymouth*) Paul here makes a distinction between Epaphras, whom he describes as his “fellow prisoner,” and the others, including Aristarchus, whom he calls his “fellow workers.”

However, in a letter to the Colossians, also written from Rome, Paul states, “Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner saluteth you.” (Col. 4:10) Indeed, Aristarchus

had long been Paul's companion, helper and fellow worker in Christ, but now, apparently, he was also with him as a prisoner. We hear no more about this faithful, loyal saint, but tradition says he died a martyr. If so, just as he was Paul's companion in travel, so was he his faithful companion in sacrifice, and in death.

TYCHICUS OF ASIA

Another of these humble companions of the Apostle Paul who quietly served in the background was Tychicus, of Asia, and possibly from the city of Ephesus. He also knew Aristarchus, and no doubt these two were very good friends. We can imagine that in addition to being faithful helpers of Paul, they also supported each other, and shared many times of close fellowship together.

Tychicus was probably involved with Paul and Aristarchus in that trouble in Ephesus, as previously noted. When Paul left Ephesus and went to Macedonia, and then returned to Asia, we read that Aristarchus, "and of Asia, Tychicus," accompanied him, and they both later went with Paul to Troas. (Acts 20:4,5) As was the case with Aristarchus, Tychicus most likely was also part of "Paul's company" who eventually came to Caesarea and, finally, Jerusalem.—Acts 21:8

Some years later, when Paul was confined in Rome, Tychicus, like Aristarchus, was there with him. It was to Tychicus that Paul dictated the letter to the Ephesian church. As Paul would speak, Tychicus would write concerning many vital truths, for example: "That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his

promise in Christ by the gospel: ... to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, ... According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”—Eph. 3:6-11

Though not specifically recorded, we can surmise that Tychicus might have paused in his writing from time to time and inquire of Paul as to a fuller explanation of “the mystery,” and of the “eternal purpose” of God. Along with all their trials, cares, and the responsibilities of the churches, what marvelous fellowship these brethren in Christ must have had. How close they must all have been! In the very face of Paul’s own approaching judgment by the Roman authorities, what an example of faith and sacrifice he was to his companions as they heard him dictate these words: “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.”—Eph. 4:1

Tychicus not only recorded this epistle for Paul, but he was also to carry it to the Ephesian church. Paul writes in that letter, “That ye also may know my affairs, and how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother, and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things: Whom I have sent unto you, ... that ye might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts.”—Eph. 6:21,22

It was evidently about this same time that Paul also wrote his letter to the Colossians, for again it was Tychicus who likely wrote a portion of this letter, and also bore it to the church at Colosse, for Paul says in it, “All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you.” Then he manifests his love and affection for Tychicus, speaking of him as “a beloved brother, and a faithful

minister and fellowservant in the Lord: Whom I have sent unto you, ... that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts.” (Col. 4:7,8) It would seem that Tychicus possessed that wonderful talent of bringing comfort to the brethren. It was a talent which Paul himself must greatly have appreciated during the years of his confinement in Rome.

Later, we read of Paul’s purpose to send Tychicus to Crete to see Titus. (Tit. 3:12) Thus, we surmise that Tychicus was reunited with Paul after delivering the letters to the Ephesian and Colossian churches. It is not clear whether this reunion of Paul and Tychicus occurred at Rome or at some other location. Some Bible commentators suggest that Paul, following his first imprisonment under “house arrest” in Rome, was released and perhaps traveled again for a season to visit the brethren. If so, it may have been during this time that the apostle met up again with Tychicus.

The last mention of Tychicus is in Paul’s final epistle, his second letter to Timothy, written from Rome during his final imprisonment, and shortly before his death. In the closing verses of this letter, Paul reveals how greatly he longed for the fellowship and comfort of the brethren, for at this time of his great need he was almost alone. He beseeches his beloved Timothy, “Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me.” Continuing, he says that Crescens had departed to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. “Only Luke is with me.” (II Tim. 4:9-11) As for Tychicus, he could not now comfort the apostle, for at this moment that faithful fellow servant in Christ was on another long journey for Paul: “Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus.”—vs. 12

The Scriptures tell us nothing more about Tychicus. One wonders if that “beloved brother, and faithful minister in the Lord” managed to return to Rome in time to once more see the one whom he had so long and faithfully served, and so greatly loved—to comfort his heart. Whether yes or no, the Scriptures clearly indicate that Tychicus was a faithful companion and coworker with Paul all the way to the end of the apostle’s life.

EPAPHRAS—MINISTER TO THE COLOSSIAN CHURCH

Epaphras was from Colosse in Asia Minor, and no doubt a very close friend of Paul. We find him bringing greetings and visiting the apostle at Rome at the time Paul is writing his letter to the Colossian brethren. Quite possibly Epaphras was an elder in the Colossian church and even helped establish it, for there is no record that Paul ever stopped there. In his letter the apostle says that Epaphras “is for you a faithful minister of Christ; Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.”—Col. 1:7,8

Epaphras may have conferred with Paul at Rome for some time, for later in the same letter Paul again mentions him. “Epaphras,” Paul writes, “who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis.”—Col. 4:12,13

Paul greatly appreciated one such as Epaphras, who was fervent in prayer, for he so prayed himself. We recall what he said to the brethren in his letter

to the Romans: “Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.” (Rom. 15:30) Paul understood that fainthearted, halfhearted prayers had no place in the life of the follower of Christ. Rather, he believed and urged that one should pray with his whole heart, fervently, as did Epaphras—and he loved him for it the more.

This visit with Paul at Rome may have continued for some time, for we find that when the apostle later wrote his letter to Philemon, Epaphras is again mentioned as being present with him. In fact, some of the brethren mentioned in the letter to the Colossians are also mentioned in the letter to Philemon. Paul cites Epaphras, Mark, Demas, Luke and Aristarchus, previously considered, as all sending their greetings to Philemon.—Philem. 1:23

In reality, there were not many with Paul at Rome. As he contemplated the approaching termination of his ministry, he must oft times have reflected on his lifelong, loving but perilous service to the brethren. At the end he would say, looking about him thoughtfully, “These only are my fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me.” (Col. 4:10,11) Among those who were a comfort to Paul as he spent himself in the service of the Lord and the brethren was Epaphras, the one who was always laboring fervently for the brethren in prayer.

As with Jesus there were only a few, so also was it with Paul. Yet how tightly these faithful few clung to Paul. They gathered close about him, ministering to him, comforting, praying, laboring, carrying forth the Gospel, the instructions, the encouragement, to

the churches scattered about in Asia, Macedonia and Greece. They went on long, perilous, and weary journeys. Among these loyal saints was Epaphras, Paul's "fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus."

OTHER COMPANIONS

Demas was one of those mentioned by Paul as being among his fellow laborers, in his letters to the Colossian brethren and to Philemon. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul urged him to come to him as quickly as he could. It was at that time also that Paul wrote to Timothy that "only Luke is with me." Why was he alone, except for Luke? Paul tells us that some were on journeys, others he had sent to minister to other churches, but Demas had gone back into the world. Paul must have surely been saddened that one of those he had numbered among his brethren and companions had forsaken the Lord and the Truth. So he wrote to Timothy, "Come shortly unto me: For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica." (II Tim. 4:10,11) How dearly, therefore, Paul loved and appreciated those few who were faithful under those hard conditions to the very end.

Among these faithful brethren who strengthened and ministered to Paul must be numbered another little group of friends. They brought love and comfort to Paul at a time of his special need. We are told about them in the last chapter of the Book of Acts, which describes the end of Paul's long journey by ship from Caesarea to Rome. We read from Luke's narrative: "We came the next day to Puteoli; Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome.

And from thence [that is, from Rome] when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.”—Acts 28:13-15

Who were these brethren who came several days' journey to meet and to greet Paul before his arrival at Rome? We do not know their names, and probably Paul himself did not know them personally. However, they evidently knew of and loved Paul, and they traveled great distances to bring him their love, comfort and companionship. How beautiful is the statement that when Paul saw this, “he thanked God, and took courage.”

There was nothing lacking in Paul's faith and trust in the Lord. He would have made his calling and election sure, we believe, with or without the fellowship and sacrifices of the brethren. Yet, even for one such as Paul who had rock-solid faith and courage, the hard road of sacrifice was no doubt made a little smoother, a little less arduous, by the comfort, prayers and encouragement of the less significant among the brethren. Although Luke does not tell us who these brethren were that journeyed far to bring comfort to Paul as he neared Rome, it seems certain that their names are written in large letters in the “Lamb's book of life.”—Rev. 21:27

We recall what Paul wrote to the Hebrew brethren, partially quoted in our opening text. “Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.

For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.” (Heb. 10:32-35) That evidence of their love and compassion cost the brethren reproaches, afflictions, the spoiling of their goods, their freedom, and sometimes their very lives.

None of us who walk in the steps of the Master can be likened to Paul, Peter, John, or the other apostles. Many do not have five talents, or even two. However, each one, no matter how humble, can provide comfort and support to those who may have greater opportunities or talents for service in the Lord’s vineyard. All of us, in fact, can minister one to another, pray for each other, and reflect to one another that love which emanates from our Heavenly Father. As did Aristarchus, Tychicus, Epaphras, and those unnamed saints who greeted and strengthened the Apostle Paul on the road to Rome, let us be faithful “companions” of all our fellow brethren, even to the end of our earthly pilgrimage. ■