

Paul was destined to go to Rome but in Roman custody and on their terms and schedule. Not really their's, but that God's purposes and timing might be carried out. perhaps the Roman restraint was a bit chaffing for a man as driven and active as he had been for his whole life. Yet he accepted the restraint as from the Lord. Both as a reproof for his adventure to Jerusalem that had resulted in his arrest, and as a restraint from further unauthorized excursions. He followed David's example, who when offered three alternatives for chastening for his sin in numbering the people of Israel, David had wisely chosen to be in the Hands of Jehovah.

*2Samuel 24:14 And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the LORD; for his mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man.*

Paul was content to be in the Lord's tender hands. He referred to himself as the prisoner of the Lord in more than one epistle, Ephesians 4:1; 2Timothy 1:8. Also in Psalm 23:3,4.

Paul was then subjected to an extended series of reviews by various Roman authorities which must have sorely tried the patience of such an active servant of the Lord. But he was given numerous opportunities to witness to these authorities, their aides, his guards and indirectly to any and all spectators at the hearings. Luke reveals some of the insincere questions and examples of unjust handling of his case. He reports the willingness of Felix to hand Paul over to the Jews for a purported hearing in Jerusalem which would have only provided them another opportunity to ambush him. The authorities attempted to extort bribes for his release by prolonging his case, holding repeated audiences, trying his patience and that of his companions. Their intent does not seem to be an honest inquiry regarding his case or of interest in their own soul's destiny. On the other hand we do not read of any of the saints residing in Caesarea or neighboring cities visiting him, encouraging him and providing for his comfort and basic bodily needs not provided by the Romans. Nor do we read of any of the believers from Jerusalem visiting or supporting him, though their continued meddling in the rituals of Judaism had indirectly led to his confinement. Did they fear arrest or didn't they care about him, or...? Some of the prison epistles were written during these times while he was in Roman custody still in Palestine. They speak of a cadre of supporting friends that remained with him and name some of them. Watch for these as you read the epistles. We seem to hear no more in scripture of the saints in Jerusalem beyond this point—except impersonally in the epistle to the Hebrews written to them. They were suffering hardship and mistreatment and persecution, Paul had come there with supplies and funds collected by the various European Assemblies for their relief. Though they only had a few years remaining before the impending sudden destruction forecast by the Lord, Luke 21, they didn't seem to see it coming. This despite deteriorating conditions surrounding

them and increasingly antagonistic attitudes and actions between the Jews and the Romans. And where were the twelve? Tradition tells of the original twelve scattering abroad throughout the world, from the British Isles to China, but scripture is silent regarding them, except for early Acts where they are seen as still in Jerusalem.

In this chapter we have more examples of the uneasy relationship between the Jews and the Roman occupation government. Despite the well deserved reputation of the ruthless Romans, the wily Jewish leadership had learned how to exploit weaknesses in the policies and practices of their occupiers to get in large measure what they desired. Of course, as Acts reveals, in so doing they had severely compromised what little was left of their integrity and professed godliness. A search of the Gospels and the Acts reveals many instances describing this corrupt dance of loathing partners to the devil's music of mutual hatred. A cruel heartless dance that led to the crucifixion of the Lord of Glory, and later of his apostles and servants, beginning with James and Stephen. In the narratives of the first five books of the New Testament the Spirit faithfully exposes the personal unbelief and dishonesty, or the personal faith and integrity, of numerous Roman and Jewish individuals. We feel like we almost know some of them, for good or bad.

Included in Luke's Spirit inspired narrative we find a variety of examples of exaggerated deference, stilted formal language and empty forms of address used both in letters and by various spokesmen. These appeal to man's pride and sense of self importance, but woe to the soul who actually believes this stuff. (Only God, and the Lord Jesus are truly worthy of the praise given them. Let all others beware of the fault of the devil,1Timothy 3:6). After his visit from the Lord (ch. 23) Paul's attitude seems to have changed. He is more like he was before he came to Jerusalem the last time. For the remainder of the book of Acts Paul's conduct is a good example of honest respect, forthright responses to questions and earnest concern for the souls of those he encounters. His epistles reflect that attitude as well. The respect he shows disreputable men and women is not approval of their immoral lives or unrighteous decisions. God has placed those who are now in authority and we are to pray for them, honor and obey them and their representatives, no matter what their personal lives display. Peter and Paul both urge this upon us in their epistles as well as demonstrate it in their lives recorded in scripture, Matthew 22:21; Romans 13:1-8, 1Timothy 2:1-8, Titus 3:1, 1Peter 2:17. We thank the Lord for the measure of peace and safety we enjoy in this nation these days though we sorrow to see a departure from the outward acknowledgment of God's rights and care seen earlier in its history. How like the Jews and even the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem in the days of Paul. What is impending? Are you ready? Praying? Hebrews 10:37.

By Ronald Canner, January 13, 2010.