

**Colossians 4:18** *The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen. (Written from Rome to the Colossians by Tychicus and Onesimus)*

#### Paul's Conversion

- Tarsus was the place of my birth, a principal city of the Roman Empire. The river Cydnus ran through the city into the artificial harbour, one of the engineering masterpieces of the ancient world. It was the same spot where, forty years before my birth, Cleopatra had stepped ashore to meet her lover Mark Antony. It was a busy city, with the bustle of caravans constantly heading out through a crevice in the surrounding mountains called the Cilician Gates, another feat of ancient engineering.
- My father was a master tentmaker, and was independently wealthy. Our family held the coveted title of citizens of Rome, which was seldom granted to anyone – not to mention Jews – except in return for a large fee or services rendered to the Empire. We were justly proud of this distinction. My parents were Pharisees, fervent in Jewish nationalism and strict in obedience to the Law of Moses. Even the privilege of Roman citizenship paled beside the high honor of being Israelites!
- Tarsus had its own university, but the son of a Pharisee would never study pagan philosophy. So as an adolescent I was sent by sea to Palestine where I studied under the famous Jewish Rabbi Gamaliel. It was there I learned both to expound the law and prosecute those who broke it, for a Rabbi was not only part preacher but part lawyer. I excelled above all my contemporaries.
- Before I could become a Rabbi in Israel, it was required that I master a trade. I therefore left Jerusalem in my twenties to return home to Tarsus and work in the family tent-making business. It was roughly ten years later when I returned to Jerusalem. By then, the followers of a new prophet named Jesus of Nazareth were filling the land of Israel with their teaching. There were claims of miracles, and even one report circulating that Jesus had risen from the dead after his crucifixion!
- It was in Jerusalem that I met a young man about my age named Stephen. Age was the only thing we had in common, for while I performed the honorable duties of a Pharisee, Stephen wasted his time doling out food to widows as a deacon among those who followed Jesus. He also preached constantly in the streets that Jesus was our Messiah. I considered his arguments nonsense, but I recognized this sect as dangerous. I was very pleased when Stephen was finally arrested.
- To be honest, he didn't have much of a chance at his trial. His preaching so angered the Sanhedrin that they manhandled him out of the sacred Temple precincts into the streets. It was actually illegal for the Jewish authorities to execute anyone unless their sentence was confirmed by the Roman authorities, but the mob cared nothing for that. They angrily dragged Stephen outside the northern gate to the Rock of Execution where – instead of first throwing him over the precipice to break his neck as the custom was – his accusers immediately began casting stones at him.
- I had raced outside the city with the mob and was hastily chosen to guard their cloaks as they carried out the death sentence. I did not expect to be affected by the gruesome scene that day, but I had never seen anyone like Stephen. As his body was gashed and maimed, he knelt in prayer and clearly said, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." He then lost consciousness, but the howling mob was so enraged that they kept heaving rocks until his mangled flesh became obscene.
- I suppose I never did shake that memory, but duty intervened. For the rest of that year, the Jewish authorities attempted to stamp out the new sect. I was chosen as their chief agent, and basically was successful in forcing most of the Nazarene's disciples to either flee Jerusalem or go into hiding. Rome did not permit us to kill them, but we used the threat of the dreaded public flogging – forty stripes save one – effectively. The courage of a few collapsed and they renounced their faith, but I must confess that most of them prayed even as my soldiers beat them senseless at the stake.
- You can imagine my rage when I found out that the followers of Jesus who had fled Jerusalem were preaching their doctrine wherever they went! I went immediately to the High Priest and asked for official letters authorizing me to arrest them and return them to Jerusalem for punishment. Damascus was to be my first objective, but it was on the way there that my life changed forever.
- On the last day of our journey, when we were almost to Damascus, a great light more brilliant than the sun suddenly flashed from the sky. My companions were affected, but I was completely overcome. A voice said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" I looked up into the center of the light and saw the face of a man. I immediately knew it must be Jesus, but I stalled for time and asked, "Who art thou, Lord?" As I feared, he answered, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."
- I thought I was a dead man, but then I noticed that there was no hate in his eyes – only love!
- I asked, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" and he told me to proceed to Damascus and wait for further guidance. It was only when the great light disappeared that I discovered I was totally blind!
- My men led me to Damascus. I was physically blind, but for the first time I found I could really see!

- When I got to Damascus I stayed three days in the house of a Jewish man named Judas. I refused all food and companionship; all I could think about was my terrible sin. I thought I was serving God, but I all I had done was set up my own standards of goodness. I had rejected Jesus because any man hanged on a tree was cursed in our Law; now I saw that the curse he bore was mine!
- God spoke to a disciple named Ananias to come pray for me (imagine what he must have thought when God told him my name!). My eyes were immediately healed, but greater than that I was baptized in the name of the One I had persecuted and received the baptism of His Spirit!

### **Paul's Hidden Years**

- My reception at the Jewish synagogue was not so friendly. The Jewish elders thought I was in their city to carry out my mission of persecution; when I told them about my experience, they turned on me. I decided to leave the city temporarily, and headed for the wilderness of Arabia to be alone. There in the desert, I was able to receive revelations directly from the risen Jesus Himself. As I learned and prayed, the weeks turned into months and the months into years.
- Three years later, now in my mid-thirties, I returned to Damascus. However, the hostility of the Jews toward followers of Jesus had only grown worse with time. The believers finally helped me escape at night, letting the High Priest's former representative down over the wall in a fish-basket!
- I finally made my way to Jerusalem, where it all began. I guess I should have expected it, but I was completely taken back when the disciples were all still afraid of me. They thought my conversion was just another trick to infiltrate their ranks. If it had not been for a disciple named Barnabas, they might never have accepted me. He took me to the Apostles and convinced them I was a believer.
- I spent the next fifteen days learning from Peter, the leader of the Apostles, all about Jesus' life on earth. I also met James, the Lord's brother, during my time in Jerusalem. And I preached, picking up where Stephen had left off, sharing the same gospel which had infuriated me four years earlier. I was always aware that another Saul the Persecutor might be listening ... and I was right. Once again there was a murder plot, but the brethren helped me escape. I was alone again.
- It was at this time that I literally dropped out of the history of the early church. I spent most of that time back in my hometown of Tarsus. There, I worked again in the family business, although the relationship was very strained due to my conversion. Several times during these years I was scourged by the elders in the local synagogue, and my body became permanently scarred from the beatings. I found out exactly what Jesus meant when He said, "You will be hated for my name's sake." My family finally disowned me, and I literally lost everything I held dear for Christ's cause.
- Again I went alone into the wilderness, and Jesus appeared to me once more in a glorious vision. It was so sacred to me that I never mentioned it again for over fourteen years, and then only in very guarded terms. In the years to come, it was this glimpse of eternity that sustained me through all of the hard times. I was now in my early forties, but my life's adventure was just beginning!

### **Paul's First Missionary Journey**

- My dear friend Barnabas finally found me and brought exciting news; due to a remarkable experience of Peter at the household of a Gentile centurion named Cornelius, the gospel had begun to spread among pagans as well as Jews. He brought me back to his home in Antioch.
- Antioch was the third greatest city in the Roman Empire, a magnificent example of architecture. It was so corrupt that even ancient Rome rated it excessively immoral and promiscuous. However, those who followed Jesus Christ in this city made such an impact with their holy lives that it was here in Antioch the world first called us "Christians."
- After about a year, a prophet from Jerusalem visited us and prophesied of a coming famine. Our church in Antioch determined to store up wheat and send it to Jerusalem, which would be particularly hard-hit. They appointed Barnabas and me to take the grain to the elders in Jerusalem.
- Not long after we returned to Antioch, the leaders in the church there felt directed by the Holy Ghost to appoint Barnabas and myself as missionaries.
- Our first destination was the island of Cyprus, and our method remained the same in each town: we would first preach the gospel in the Jewish synagogues. Surprisingly, we received an invitation to appear before the Proconsul of Cyprus, Sergius Paullus. As we talked to him, however, we were opposed by a sorcerer in his court named Elymas. The Holy Ghost rose up in me and I abruptly commanded him to be struck blind. Needless to say, the Proconsul believed our message!
- In Antioch of Pisidia, the rulers of the synagogue invited me to preach. Some of the Jews received our message, but it was the hunger of the Gentiles that amazed me. They begged us to preach to them also, and by the next Sabbath almost the entire city came together to hear the word of God.

- The Jews should have been happy to have such a great attendance at the synagogue, but instead they were filled with envy. They eventually stirred up enough trouble to expel us from the city, but not before a great number of the Gentiles believed and the whole region heard the gospel.
- Similar persecution occurred repeatedly as these unbelieving Jews followed us from city to city, stirring up the multitudes against us. When they tried to stone us in Iconium, we fled to Lystra.
- Among the crowd in Lystra was a crippled man. As we preached, I discerned that he had faith to be healed. When the Holy Ghost prompted me I said, "Stand upright on thy feet!" He was immediately healed, and began to leap and walk. The crowd went wild.
- What we didn't know about Lystra was that in its legendary past the god Zeus and his messenger Hermes had supposedly disguised themselves as poor travelers to seek shelter. They were refused at every home except that of an old peasant named Baucis, who fed them. The gods then revealed themselves, turned the inhospitable citizens into frogs and the cottage of Baucis into the gold and marble temple which had stood outside the city since long before the Romans. Even small children in Lystra knew the legend, and believed that Zeus and Hermes (or Jupiter and Mercurius in the Greek language) would return, this time to be treated with honor.
- It would have been humorous if it were not so sad – they believed Barnabas to be Zeus and me to be Hermes, because I was the chief speaker. They were planning to make a sacrifice to us!
- The instinctive reaction of a Jew to blasphemy has always been to tear their clothing. This we did automatically as we ran among the people, trying to persuade them that we were only men. We had barely restrained them when some Jews from Antioch and Iconium showed up; they persuaded the people to stone me. All I remember is the pain and the blood, then all was darkness.
- The mob which had been ready to worship me now dragged me out of the city and left me for dead. But as the disciples stood around me in prayer, the Lord raised me up. The next day we left for Derbe, where we were successful in seeing many souls brought into God's kingdom.
- We finally decided to retrace our steps through each city we had visited, to encourage the new disciples and check on their progress. We ordained elders in every church to lead the work after our departure. It required lots of courage to face the possibility of more persecution on the way!
- Finally, we arrived back in Antioch of Syria where we had started this journey. We reported to the church all that God had done, and especially how He had moved among the Gentiles.

#### **The Council at Jerusalem**

- It was about this time that I received disturbing news from the Roman province of Galatia, which contained most of the cities we had recently ministered in. Christian Pharisees – false teachers – had been welcomed by the churches, had undermined my credentials as an Apostle, and had successfully convinced the Gentile Galatians that they needed to keep the Jewish law in order to be complete as Christians. They had been swept into another gospel – one of human works!
- All my emotions exploded in a letter I wrote to be read in the Galatian churches. I told them that if anyone – even an angel from heaven – preached another gospel, then they were accursed by God. I asked them if they thought that, after beginning their life for God in the spirit, they could now be made complete by finishing in the flesh? I even asked them who had cast a spell on them!
- These churches had been doing so well; I could not believe that false teachers had hindered them. I tried to explain that the Law was like a tutor, the slave that looked after a son and took him to school. The child was not expected to remain under his guidance once he became an adult!
- I suspect those swayed by this false teaching had somewhat of an ulterior motive, for the Jewish religion was not persecuted like the Christian faith. Those who kept the law avoided mistreatment.
- I was relieved when the elders in Jerusalem finally decided to address this issue at a church council. Barnabas and I attended so we could give an account of our travels. Peter spoke first, noting that God was pouring out His Spirit on the Gentiles just like on the Jews at the first. We followed him, and told how God had confirmed the Word preached to the Gentiles with miracles.
- Finally, it was time for James to speak. He summarized the conclusions of the council, that the Gentiles should not have to live by the Jewish law. However, he did recommend that they abstain from some practices which were grossly offensive to the Jews for the sake of harmony.
- With this divisive issue conquered, the church was now free to be more than just another sect within Judaism. We were now united in reaching our entire world with the gospel – Gentile or Jew.

#### **Paul's Second Missionary Journey**

- My second missionary journey started with a desire to return once again to the churches we had started, just to see how they were doing. Barnabas and I were going to go together, but he insisted on taking John Mark with us. I didn't think that was a good idea, since he had deserted us early in our first journey. Regrettably, our disagreement was so strong that we decided to part ways.

Barnabas and John Mark headed to Cyprus, while I took Silas with me on my travels. Years later, I would look back and realize I had made a mistake about John Mark; but even so, God somehow worked it out so that His will was ultimately accomplished in all our lives.

- Silas and I visited the churches in Derbe, Lystra and Iconium, and added a young man named Timothy to our team in the process. We would have continued with our own itinerary, but the Holy Ghost directed us not to preach any more at this time in the Roman provinces of Asia or Bithynia.
- We ended up in the city of Troas, where I had a vision in the night of a man from the Roman province of Macedonia saying, "Come over and help us." This was the direction we had sought. Luke, a converted Greek physician, joined us as we continued our journey.
- We immediately embarked on the short sea voyage to Macedonia, and soon found ourselves in the chief city of Philippi. It was an important military center, and was often referred to as "Little Rome."
- Our first convert in Philippi was a woman named Lydia who ran a business selling the rich purple-dyed cloth for which Thyatira was famous. She opened her home for us to lodge with her family.
- One day as we were on our way to the riverside prayer meeting where we had met Lydia, a slave girl followed us chanting, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation." We ignored her for several days, but then I had enough. One day I turned to her and commanded the evil spirit which possessed her to come out.
- The problem was that her masters, who depended on her powers as a medium to make money, immediately turned on us and dragged us to the magistrates, accusing us of making trouble. We were scourged and thrown into prison, where our feet were secured in stocks.
- In acute discomfort and pain, forced to lay in our own excrement, Silas and I could think of nothing else to do but pray; and soon, the praying turned to singing as God encouraged our hearts. Suddenly, the prison shook with an earthquake. All the doors, stocks and chains were opened!
- The jailer came running, ready to kill himself rather than be tortured for his negligence. We assured him that we were all still present. When he asked, "What must I do to be saved?" I knew why we were there. Late into the night, we were still baptizing the members of his household and rejoicing.
- In the morning, the magistrates sent to have us released quietly. I would have none of it! I told the soldiers that I was a Roman citizen, that my rights had been violated, and that I wanted a personal escort out of the prison. In truth, I merely wanted to put a little fear into the magistrates so they would think twice before persecuting any other members of the infant Philippian church.
- Our next major stop was at Thessalonica, where a great multitude became believers. Our work went extremely well until a group of unbelieving Jews became jealous, stirred up the lower classes of the populace, and mobbed the house of Jason where we were staying. Their cry was, "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also!" For our own safety, the brethren sent us on to the city of Berea. Here, the people were more noble and receptive than those in Thessalonica, because they searched the Scriptures daily to investigate what we were preaching.
- The unbelieving Jews soon caught up with us again, and attempted to stir up a riot. The brethren sent me away again, but this time Silas and Timothy remained behind to continue the work. I booked passage on a ship to Athens, and when I arrived sent word for them to join me once again.
- I had a tendency to stir up a revival or a riot – most times both – wherever I preached, but in Athens I met a reaction that puzzled me completely. I had been stirred in my spirit by the city's many idols and was preaching the gospel daily in the market. A group of philosophers invited me to address them before the Court of the Areopagus; I did so, but when I mentioned the resurrection of Christ, they merely laughed and dismissed me. It was a disturbing reaction, and one that I had not yet encountered. But some good came out of when several people in Athens were converted to truth.
- I moved on to the city of Corinth, where I met Aquila and Priscilla. They were tentmakers, and allowed me to stay with them and work in their business. Of course, I also began to preach.
- Ancient Corinth was so wicked it insulted one's morality to call them a "Corinthian." Thousands of prostitutes of both sexes offered their bodies to worshippers in huge pagan temples. Live theatre included sex acts. If the power of God could build a church here, it could do so anywhere!
- When the Jews of Corinth refused our message, we were able to secure the house of Justus for our meetings. It was right beside the synagogue, and our first convert was Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue! Silas and Timothy had now rejoined me; we ministered in Corinth for 18 months.
- The persecution was fierce in Corinth, but the Lord Jesus appeared to me in a vision one night and said, "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city." That gave me the strength to keep going.
- When yet another synagogue leader named Sosthenes got saved, the unbelieving Jews sprang into action once again. They brought me before a newly-appointed Proconsul named Gallio to answer charges. To their surprise, he dismissed all charges and drove them from his courtroom. His decision left the church legally free to preach the gospel – for a short time anyway.

- At this time, Aquila and Priscilla relocated their tent-making business to Ephesus. I sailed there with them, went on to Jerusalem by myself to keep the Passover, and finally returned to Antioch.

### **Paul's Third Missionary Journey**

- My third missionary journey began like my second, with a desire to check on the churches we had started. I went through the Roman provinces of Galatia and Phrygia, working my way back to the city of Ephesus. Upon my return, Aquila and Priscilla informed me that a young and eloquent preacher named Apollos had come to Ephesus from Alexandria. They had instructed him more completely in the truth, and his ministry was having a great effect on the Jews.
- When I arrived in the city, I met a group of John the Baptist's disciples who had never been baptized in Jesus' name or even heard of the Holy Ghost. I soon remedied that! Later that year, I spent three months preaching in the synagogue until the Jews rose up against me. We moved the believers into the nearby school of Tyrannus, and continued teaching the doctrine of Christ. Many believers went out from Ephesus to spread the gospel through the surrounding countryside. As a result, after two years the entire Roman province of Asia had heard the Word of the Lord.
- If Corinth was polluted with immorality, then Ephesus was possessed by sorcery. The occult was everywhere, but in this atmosphere God did special miracles by my hands. The Ephesians had been taught that magic spells written on papyrus worn next to the skin could heal them. So it was not strange that one day when I was working and could not leave to pray with their sick loved one, a new believer asked me for the sweatband or apron that I was wearing while making tents. When they laid it on the afflicted one, the disease was immediately gone. God's power was greater!
- The delivering power of Jesus' name was noised throughout the city so much that seven sons of the Jewish priest Sceva decided to add "Jesus" to their catalog of religious incantations for exorcism. Nothing much happened until they went into the house of a man who was really demon possessed. When they said their little formula he replied, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?" Then he leaped on them, tore their clothes off and beat them as they tried to flee. When these things began to get out, the entire city was affected. Some of the believers still possessed their occultic books, but now they piled them in the public square and burned thousands of dollars worth.
- Every spring devotees of the Mother Goddess Diana (also called Artemis) converged on Ephesus for Artemisia, a great festival which was normally the prime sales season for the guild of the silversmiths. Their replicas of the Diana idol were usually in high demand, but because of the growth of the church sales had fallen off sharply. As a result a silversmith named Demetrius stirred up the emotions of the festival-goers, who seized two of my companions and rushed into the city's theater. I tried to follow but the other disciples prevented me, fearing for my life.
- The town clerk of Ephesus, who was responsible for civic order, was thoroughly alarmed. The Romans would choose swift retribution for any city allowing a riot like this. He calmed the crowd down and warned them of the consequences, then dismissed them. Thankfully that was the end of it, for that situation could have ended much differently for some of us!
- I returned to the province of Macedonia for a time, visiting the churches we had started there, then returned to Troas. It was there that I was preaching in a crowded upper chamber when a young man named Eutychus dropped off to sleep and fell out of the window to the street below. We went down and prayed for him and God immediately raised him up. At Miletus, I got to visit with the elders from Ephesus, but only briefly because I wanted to be back in Jerusalem for Pentecost. It seemed that everywhere I went, someone would prophesy to me that bonds and afflictions awaited me in Jerusalem. One prophet named Agabus even took my belt and bound his hands and feet saying, "So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle." Everyone was quite upset, but I told them it didn't move me, because I felt God's direction to go in spite of persecution.
- I had a wonderful reunion with the elders at Jerusalem, but they pressured me to accompany four men who were completing the Nazarite vow to the Temple, in order to pacify some who said I had turned my back on the Law. I was uncomfortable with it from the beginning. It was an error in my judgment to do it, for it set in motion forces that would lead to a lengthy imprisonment.

### **PAUL'S JOURNEY TO ROME**

- I managed to keep out of sight in the Temple compound for several days, but finally someone saw me and loudly accused me of bringing Gentiles into the Temple. Although the charge was not true, the volatile crowd immediately dragged me out of the courtyard and began to pummel me. I really thought that I would die right there, but the Roman garrison intervened and rescued me.
- The crowd was so boisterous that the soldiers literally had to carry me to the fortress. It was just as well, for I could hardly walk. Just before we entered, I asked the captain in Greek if I could address the crowd. He was surprised to find I was from Tarsus; he thought I might be the illiterate Egyptian who had recently led a tragic uprising, inducing thousands to carry hidden daggers and stab political

opponents, then to camp on the Mount of Olives in expectation of the miraculous collapse of the city walls and the defeat of the Romans. While the military had routed the armed rabble and sentenced hundreds of the Jews to death, the Egyptian had somehow escaped.

- By the hidden authority of the Holy Ghost, the crowd quieted when I raised my hand. I spoke to them in Hebrew, preaching the sermon that I would review so often in the years that followed. I told them my testimony, telling them about the Damascus Road, Ananias and Stephen. All was going fairly well until I repeated God's promise to send me to the Gentiles. The crowd erupted in anger.
- I was taken by the soldiers into the fortress and prepared to receive the dreaded flagellum, a murderous scourge of heavy rawhide thongs loaded with jagged bits of metal and bone. I knew if I went through it – even if I survived – I would never preach again. I used the only thing I had left, my Roman citizenship: "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?"
- Time stood still for me as the chief captain was called in to make his judgment. They decided to forego the flogging and send me to the Sanhedrin for questioning. The hearing was not going well until I perceived that the assembly was split between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Since the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, it was an easy thing to get them fighting each other with one comment: "Of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question."
- The outcry became so great that the chief captain feared for my life and took me back to my prison cell. It was there in my loneliness that I once again saw Jesus. He stood by me and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." It was so reassuring to me that I wasn't going to die at the hands of the Jews.
- I might have worried if I had known that more than forty Jews had made a pact not to eat or drink until they had killed me. But God allowed my sister's son to overhear their plot. When my nephew told me of it, I sent him with a centurion to tell the chief captain. Thus it was that I was transferred to the Praetorium at Caesarea by night, accompanied by 200 soldiers, 200 spearmen and 70 horsemen. The governor Felix ordered a trial, but realized quickly that the Sanhedrin had no case under Jewish law. However, he did not release me, but ordered me to be kept under house arrest.
- Two years later, after a riot in Caesarea, Felix was recalled to Rome in disgrace. He could have easily released me before leaving, but he wished to keep some favor with the Jewish leaders. So it was that I was still in prison when the new Procurator Festus came to power in Caesarea. He reopened my trial, but since Festus did not understand Jewish law, his solution was to have me sent to Jerusalem for a final trial. I knew that a trial in the Jewish Sanhedrin spelled certain death for me, so I used the last privilege accorded to any Roman citizen: "I appeal unto Caesar."
- I had to make a final appearance before Festus and his Jewish religious adviser King Agrippa so that they could formulate a suitable charge to present to the Emperor's court, and then I was delivered to a centurion named Julius for transport to Rome. As the only prisoner of rank on the ship, I was permitted to take two attendants, Aristarchus and Luke.
- It was on this journey that we ran into an incredible storm that blew us completely off course. With all cargo thrown overboard, food severely rationed, and the sun and stars hidden for days, the crew and the prisoners finally despaired of life. But it was at the worst moment of the storm that an angel of the Lord appeared to me, assuring me that we would all survive the imminent shipwreck.
- We washed up on the island of Malta after our ship ran aground. I even got to preach the gospel there, after God kept me from the effects of a poisonous snakebite and used me to heal the father of the island's chief magistrate. After three months, we proceeded on our journey in another ship.
- Rome was the greatest city I had ever seen, with more than a million citizens and about a million slaves living on its seven hills. I was placed again under house arrest, constantly chained to a soldier, but able to receive friends, write letters and even preach. Once again, I tried sharing the truth about Jesus with the Jews first, but when most of them refused me I turned to the Gentiles.
- For two years I had to pay for my own lodging, even though I was confined and waiting for my trial. Luke's book of Acts ends here since it was written as evidence for my upcoming trial before Caesar.

#### **REMEMBER MY CHAINS**

- You might think that my constant imprisonment was a depressing thing for me. I will answer that it could have been. To the human spirit, there is nothing worse than chains. And yet, when we get right down to it, everyone has chains of some kind.
- Chains alter your perception of how powerful, intelligent and good you are; they make you feel helpless, dependent and conscious of your weaknesses.
  - In my first epistle, I introduced myself as "Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;) (Galatians 1:1)

- After some suffering, I became "... the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (1 Corinthians 15:9)
- After more suffering, I felt that I was "... less than the least of all saints ... that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." (Ephesians 3:8)
- After two years in chains in Rome, I finally realized "... that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." (1 Timothy 1:15)
- However, it is a common misconception that chains prevent growth and effective work, that the slightest difficulty in circumstances or drop in privileges is reason enough to simply quit.
- I have proved from my experience that this is simply not true, for while I was imprisoned in Rome I produced some of my best epistles, I preached and prayed, witnessed and worshipped while chained to an unbelieving Roman guard. Talk about opposition!
  - "... for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, *therewith* to be content." (Phil. 4:11)
- I don't remember which of my guards inspired my writing which began, "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil," (Eph. 6:11), or which one first heard the scripture, "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end," (Eph. 3:20-21) but I do remember that they were affected. Many of them became believers, even though the one who witnessed to them was in chains.
- I described myself in one place as "an ambassador in bonds" (Eph. 6:20), but I think that description could apply to most of God's servants. We all have chains of some kind, whether they be bonds of physical affliction, shackles of circumstance, or the fetters of a fiery trial. The question is, will we still continue to work for God even when we don't understand the chains?
- REMEMBER MY CHAINS! I won Onesimus to the Lord while I was bound (Philemon 10); my brethren developed boldness because of my prison term, "waxing confident by my bonds," and spoke the word without fear (Philippians 1:14). These things happened because I remembered that even while I was bound, "the word of God is not bound!" (2 Timothy 2:9).
- Simon Peter and I were put on trial by the Emperor Nero along with many other Christians who were blamed for the Great Fire of Rome in AD 64. After the trial, we were confined to prison together until finally being executed on the same day. Peter was nailed to a cross as a public spectacle at Nero's Circus, head downward at his own request since he did not feel worthy to die like his Lord. As a Roman citizen, I was beheaded in a less public place.
- REMEMBER MY CHAINS! All I could think about as I was being led to my execution was a single Scripture I had written much earlier: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are* not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Romans 8:18)
- REMEMBER MY CHAINS! Any chains we must bear for Christ pale in comparison to the weight of the chains of sin He has delivered us from.
- REMEMBER MY CHAINS! Will you work for God in spite of YOUR chains? PAUL DID!