

Paul's Prayer Request

"Now I beseech you brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; that I may be delivered from them that are disobedient in Judaea, and that my ministration which I have for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, that I may come unto you in joy through the will of God, and together with you find rest" (Rom. 15:30-32).

At what time the Spirit first revealed to Paul that he would fall into the hands of disobedient Jews in Jerusalem is not disclosed -- perhaps even as he wrote this letter to Romans such had been revealed to him. We do know that shortly after he wrote this letter he told the elders of the Ephesian church, *"behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, save that the Holy Spirit testifieth unto me in every place that bonds and afflictions abide me ..."* (Acts 20:22f). When Paul landed on Palestine soil and visited disciples in Tyre, they, through the Spirit said to Paul that he *"should not set foot in Jerusalem"* (Acts 21:7). At Caesarea a prophet named Agabus took Paul's girdle, bound himself with it, and predicted, *"Thus saith the Holy Spirit. so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles"* (Acts 21:11). At this latter point all the brethren begged Paul not to go any further, but still he did.

Jerusalem brethren knew the peril which awaited Paul, even the suspicion some believers held of him. These suggested a solution by which Paul might alleviate the fears of Jewish Christians but during the fulfillment of it, Paul was apprehended in the temple by disobedient Jews, and had not Roman soldiers intervened, he would have been beaten to death. But, while the Spirit declared bonds would come to Paul, He had not indicated death, not at that time at least. Still, amidst the trials of being seized and the riot which followed Paul's defense on the castle steps, things looked dark indeed! To lift Paul's spirit at this low point in his life, a few days later Jesus assured him in a vision, *"Be of good cheer: for as thou has testified concerning me at Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome"* (Acts 23:13). Paul was delivered from the disobedient in Jerusalem, but not delivered from bonds.

Faced with all these warnings of the Holy Spirit, one question naturally arises. Why would Paul deliberately place himself in harm's way when he knew that certain imprisonment awaited him? The answer to that is his second petition in which he requested that Romans pray *"that my ministration which I have for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints."* The apostles at the Jerusalem conference had appealed to Paul *"to remember the poor"* and this

had been 6-7 years earlier (Gal. 2:10). Still, despite that need and the request of the apostles that he fill it; Paul was concerned how Jerusalem brethren would receive these funds. Paul was hated by unbelieving Jews nearly everywhere and even Jews who believed had some reservations about him because some false brethren had spread rumors about him that he taught *"all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs."* (Acts 21:21) So, Paul would place his own life in jeopardy that the needs of his countrymen might be supplied. This trip on his part proved the genuineness of his love for his nation as he had written the Romans: *"For I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake, my kinsmen according to the flesh ..."* *"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God is for Israel that they may be saved ..."* (Romans 9:3; 10:1). Coupled also with this, was his expression that the gift *"not only supplied the needs of the saints"* but abounded unto thanksgiving to God. Hopefully, the gift would serve as a bridge to help mold into one Jewish and Gentile brethren. Finally, Paul asked Romans to pray that he might come to them with joy through the will of God and thus find rest. That petition in part, was granted. Paul did finally arrive in Rome, if not as he had hoped, at least he was there. Many heartaches and trials had followed him on the way. His joy and rest might be somewhat diluted; joy and peace to be in Rome; but with restrictions that were a test of his faith and steadfastness -- a test he did not fail.

Paul and his Roman brethren's prayers were answered, perhaps not in the manner he or they envisioned, but they were answered. God hears and answers the prayers of his people even today. Prayers still works -- we have received rain. We just need to try prayer more often! NEXT: The conclusion of our study of Romans.

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