

HOW TO LOVE THE JEWISH PEOPLE

SERIES: PAUL, AN INSTRUMENT OF THE RISEN CHRIST

By Ron Ritchie

In 1981, Ed and Kathy Woodhall and my wife Anne Marie and I took a group of people from our church to Israel. At the airport in Tel Aviv, we were met by our Jewish tour guide Miriam, who was the daughter of a deceased Supreme Court judge, and our Jewish bus driver Moses. At first we sensed tension with our guides. How in the world were we going to get along for the next ten days, a Christian group visiting the Holy Land, traveling, eating, and living with two Jewish people? I wondered.

Once Miriam began to share with us her knowledge of Christianity and of the places where Jesus ministered, however, a quiet respect, which later grew into love for her, began to settle over our group. At each site we visited, she shared her insight into the person and ministry of Jesus, and then one of our group gave witness of his or her personal relationship with Jesus as our Messiah, Lord and Savior. All the while Moses, our bus driver, was listening. As each day went by he witnessed the love which we were expressing for one another as well as both he and Miriam.

This is the subject I want to discuss with you today: How to love the Jewish people. Our model will continue to be the apostle Paul, as we study his love for his kinsmen living in Rome. The apostle has at last arrived in the city, following his appeal to Caesar. He had been under house arrest for two years in Caesarea, falsely charged with desecrating the temple. Following a series of trials, he at last appealed to Caesar, as was his right as a Roman citizen. We already have looked at his adventures, including a shipwreck and his being bitten by a viper, which God had in store for him on the long journey to Rome. At last, however, he has reached his destination. It is spring of the year 60 A.D.

Four years earlier, writing from Corinth to the church at Rome, Paul had penned these words concerning his fellow-countrymen,

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in and thus all Israel will be saved;... From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers (Rom.11:25, 28).

Even though they are enemies of the cross of Christ, the Jews, says the apostle, are "beloved for the sake of the fathers."

So we pick up the story of the apostle again in Acts 28. He had spent the winter on the island of Malta, where he was washed ashore following the shipwreck in the Mediterranean. Arriving at last in Puteoli, Italy, he found some Christian brethren with whom he spent several days. "And thus we came to Rome," writes our storyteller Luke, in Acts 28:14.

How to love the Jewish people. We must first,

I. Treat them as God's beloved people, Acts 28:16-22

And when we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him. And it happened that after three days he called together those who were with the leading men of the Jews, and when they had come together, he began saying to them,

"Brethren, though I had done nothing against our people, or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. And when they had examined me, they were willing to release me because there was no ground for putting me to death. But when the Jews objected, I was forced to appeal to Caesar; not that I had any accusation against my nation. For this reason therefore, I requested to see you and to speak with you, for I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel." And they said to him, "We have neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren come here and reported or spoken anything bad about you. But we desire to hear from you what your views are; for concerning this sect, it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere."

At last the apostle has arrived in Rome. His heart's desire has been fulfilled. Although he had never met the believers who formed the church there, earlier in his letter to them he had written,

For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine. ..I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome (Rom.1:9, 15).

So Paul, Luke and Aristarchus found living quarters in the city of Rome, which would be their home for the next two years. From other sources we learn that the praetorian guard of the Emperor became his jailers during that time. Every six hours, a praetorian guard chained himself to Paul, and this continued all during his house arrest in the city. Referring to this time, in the book of Philippians Paul writes, "...my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well-known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else" (1:13).

The apostle became very attached to his new room-mates: For every six hours he was chained to a new praetorian guard. The Paul did not realize that he would stay in this condominium for the next two years. But if he were chained to four different guards a day for two years, which is possible, he would have had opportunity to share the gospel with some 2,920 Roman guards! What a ministry!

From his house, Paul called together the leading men of the Jews and addressed them. It seems he thought that word had reached the Jewish community in Rome that he was coming to the city. Knowing of his reputation, Paul supposed that they would do everything they could to stop him from testifying that Jesus was the Messiah. Further, they would probably inform the Roman government that he was the head of a unauthorized religion that had nothing to do with Judaism. By his addressing this group, however, Paul may have been hoping to get a favorable hearing from the Emperor, one that that might win recognition for Christianity as the true fulfillment of Israel's ancestral religion. Thus the apostle desired to trod a peaceful path to both the Jews and the Emperor.

Addressing these men, Paul laid out the reasons for his imprisonment. He had "done nothing against our people, or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans," he began. The Romans had examined him but found that there was no ground for putting him to death. When the Jews objected to this, he was forced to appeal to Caesar, but not to accuse his nation of any wrong. For this reason he was "wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel."

After the Damascus Road conversion experience, the risen Christ had said of Paul, "he is a chosen instrument of Mine to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). So the apostle never lost an opportunity to speak of the Hope of Israel to his Jewish brethren. This was true in the beginning of his ministry in Damascus, in Jerusalem, later during his three missionary journeys, and even now in the Gentile capital. In Romans 1:16 he had written, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to every one who believes, to the Jew first and then to the Greek."

The "Hope of Israel," of course, is Jehovah. In Jeremiah14:8 and 17:13, Jehovah is called the "Hope of Israel," its "Savior in times of distress." Paul told the Jewish leaders in Pisidian Antioch, Turkey, some 13

years earlier, that God had raised up a King after his own heart and that "from the offspring of this man according to the promise God has brought to Israel a Savior Jesus." Then the apostle went on to explain about John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, and how he had alerted the leadership of Israel that the Hope of Israel was about to enter the stage of Jewish history and that they should prepare their hearts to receive him. But the leaders in Jerusalem refused to recognize Jesus or what the prophets had said about him. Finally, they condemned him to the cross by the hand of Pilate. He was executed, and then buried in a borrowed tomb. "But God raised Him from the dead," said Paul.

"...And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'Thou art My Son, today I have begotten thee.'...Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses" (Acts 13:38-39).

As Peter said when he stood before the Jewish Supreme Court to answer for his healing of a lame man, "There is no salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The name which Peter was referring to was Jesus, the Hope of Israel.

Paul's motivation to witness to the Jewish leaders came from a heart of love given to him by his Savior. Quoting from his letter to the Romans again,

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:1-3).

"Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayers to God for them is their salvation" (Rom. 10:1).

The Jewish leadership in Rome responded to what Paul had to say to them, in these words, "We have neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren come here and reported or spoken anything bad about you. But we desire to hear from you what your views are; for concerning this sect, it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere." Politically, it would have been unwise to involve themselves with a Jewish prisoner who had already been declared innocent by both Governor Festus and King Agrippa, a man who was on his way to meet the Emperor Nero. But at the same time these men were open to hear about this sect, the people of "The Way," the "Christians" who seemed to be all over Rome.

Here once again we have an example of Paul's love for his Jewish brethren. We see his sensitivity to the these leaders, and his desire to keep the door open so that he would be invited to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with them. Paul knew that God was calling out a remnant from the nation of Israel for his name's sake. He knew that God had already chosen vessels of mercy to whom he would offer the wonderful gospel, for he had written to the Roman Gentiles with the nation of Israel in mind, "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved: for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." Salvation for both Jew and Gentile was possible only by means of the "Hope of Israel," Jesus the Messiah.

During our visit to Israel, we recognized that as our love and respect for Miriam and Moses grew, they responded with the same love and respect. They began telling us of their families. They listened to us sing Christians songs in the bus and taught us Jewish songs and dances as we drove throughout the countryside. One day Moses arrived with a box of home-made cookies that his wife had made especially for us. He told us that in all his years of driving tour buses in Israel, his wife had done this only once before. He shared that he had fought in all the wars of Israel since 1948, and that his twin daughters were currently serving in the Israeli army. As Miriam shared some of her life, I could not help but notice how warm she was becoming towards our people, and how attentive she was as one of our group taught the scriptures at the different sites. She

seemed very interested in our teaching, and on what was going on when we baptized several of our group in the Jordan river in Galilee.

How to love the Jewish people. First, we must treat them as God's beloved people ; and then,

II. Teach them of God's beloved Christ, Acts 28:23-29

And when they had set a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God, and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from morning until evening. And some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe. And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, saying,

"Go to this people and say,
'You will keep on hearing, but will not understand;
And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive;
For the heart of this people has become dull,
And with their ears they scarcely hear,
And they have closed their eyes;
Lest they should see with their eyes,
And hear with their ears,
And understand with their heart and turn again,
And I should heal them.'"

"Let it be known to you therefore, that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen."

Paul's message was that Yahweh is King over all the world and King of Israel. The Jews looked forward to the time when Yahweh would deliver them from their enemies, and reign in Zion with his everlasting kingdom, ruling over the nations of the world. They frequently associated their hopes with the reign of an anointed King, called the Messiah, who would come from the line of David (Isa..9:6). Thus the Jews were looking for an earthy king and kingdom.

When Jesus arrived on the stage of history, however, he said, "the kingdom of God is in your midst" (Luke 17:21). Jesus was speaking of a spiritual, not an earthy kingdom, the kingdom of the hearts of men. This world is under the rule of Satan (Matt. 4:9), but the action of God through Jesus set in process the work of bringing Satan's kingdom to an end and setting his captives free. If therefore the coming of the kingdom already means the hour of judgment is upon wicked men (Matt. 3:10), it is also the hour of deliverance in which men are set free from the demonic powers (Matt 12:28f).

The mystery of the kingdom of God is that God is now at work in the ministry of Jesus, the risen Lord, Savior and Messiah, for the salvation of men and women before the time comes for judgement and the opportunity for repentance is past. Jews and Gentiles alike must enter the kingdom of God by faith in Jesus as the Christ, for the kingdom of God is at hand.

Ray C. Stedman has written,

Paul spoke of the kingdom of God which had come with the coming of Jesus. This Kingdom was opposed to the rule of Satan, the powers of darkness which reigned in human hearts. Human history is the checkered account of man's struggles to be free from that from which he cannot free himself. It is this rule of darkness, this authority of the kingdom of Satan, which the kingdom of God in Christ challenges.

From morning until evening, Paul continued to try and persuade the Jews concerning Jesus, both from both the Law of Moses and from the prophets. Utilizing the Jewish scriptures, the Law (the sacrificial system) and the prophets, Paul tried to show the Jewish leaders in a solemn manner that Jesus was the promised Prophet, Priest and King. This could be demonstrated by our Lord's of miracles (signs) during his earthly ministry, but even more dramatically by his death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and the sending of the Holy Spirit--all incidents that were recorded beforehand in the Law and the prophets. However, Satan has blinded men and women to the spiritual realities that offer them hope and salvation in Jesus Christ.

Following the resurrection of Jesus, the gospels record the wonderful story of the two discouraged and disappointed disciples of the Lord were on the way down from Jerusalem to Emmaus (the first site at which Miriam and Moses taught us). There they were met by a stranger who asked them why they were so downcast. They explained how they were followers of Jesus but he was crucified a few days earlier. "We were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel," they told the stranger, "but he is still dead even though it is the third day, the day when he promised he would rise from the dead." Finally, the stranger, who was the risen Lord, said,

"O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and enter into His glory? And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24: 25-27).

The reaction of the leading Jewish men in Rome was the same two-fold response which Christians get today when they share the gospel among either Jews or Gentiles. Here is how Paul describes this response in his letter to the Corinthians,

For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life (2 Cor. 2:15-16).

The response in Rome was no different: some were persuaded by Paul's words, but others would not believe.

To those Jews who rejected his gospel message, Paul quoted the words of Isaiah, written 700 years earlier, in which the prophet issued a warning to the Jews of his day. The effect of his ministry, divinely ordained though it was, would be but to make the deaf still more deaf, the blind more blind, the dull heart duller. It is interesting that Jesus himself is quoted in all four gospels as having used this passage during his ministry.

On our last evening in Tel Aviv, we invited Moses and his wife and daughters, together with Miriam, to a farewell dinner. For many of us it was a very moving time. We were sure we would not see Moses again, but at the same time were were excited because several in our group committed to fly Miriam to the United States and be our quest for a few weeks in California. The Millers and several single adults opened their hearts, homes and pocket books and gave of their love and time to Miriam. Through word and deed they witnessed to this lovely Jewish person, seeking to show her how God had already sent his Messiah and that his name is Jesus. The good news was rejected, but not our love and friendship. Many have kept in touch with her over the intervening years, but to this day Miriam, and, I'm sure, Moses, have so far rejected their Messiah.

But the rejection of Jesus by the Jews became good news for the Gentiles. Paul says, "Let it be known to you therefore, that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, they will also listen," as had some of the Jews to whom Paul spoke.

During his ministry, Jesus quoted Isaiah 42 and said,

Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen;
My Beloved in Whom My soul is well pleased;

I will put My Spirit upon Him,
And He shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles.
He will not quarrel, nor cry out;
Nor will any one hear His voice in the streets.
A battered reed He will not break off,
And a smoldering wick He will not put out,
Until He leads justice to victory.
And in His name the Gentiles will have hope.

Quoting Isaiah 65 in his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote,

I was found by those who sought me not, I became manifest to those who did not ask for me." But as for Israel, he says, "All the day long I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people (Rom. 10:20-21).

Then, referring to the Jews, Paul wrote,

I say then they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles to make them jealous. Now if their transgression be riches for the world and their failure be riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fulfillment be! (Rom. 11:11- 12).

Just last week, we saw dramatic fulfillment of this good news for the Gentiles. Our College pastor Doug Goins shared with us that three Gentile students in his college group had accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

How to love the Jewish people. We must treat them as God's beloved people, and teach them of God's beloved Christ.

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