

Paul's Activity After Release (AD 63-64)

By Ed Stevens -- Then and Now Podcast -- Jan. 20, 2013

INTRODUCTION:

A. Our studies here on Covenant Key are moving closer and closer to the "eve of destruction." We are looking at events which occurred in AD 63-64, just months before the Neronic persecution broke out, in which so many dear saints were brutally tortured and killed. That darkest of all nights for Christians may have seemed like the End for Christianity, but the Gates of Hades did not prevail. Jesus cut short that great tribulation and rescued his elect ones out of harm's way. The Church rose up out of the ashes of that great persecution to become the mightiest cultural, religious and spiritual force on the planet. The Neronic persecution was merely the "eve of destruction" for the Jews. Their ruthless butchery of Christians only provoked the King of Kings to pour out His Full Cup of Wrath upon the Jewish nation. In coming weeks we will be looking at the Neronic persecution. That was the great tribulation predicted by Jesus and mentioned in the book of Revelation.

B. Let's ask God for His guidance in our study here --

Infinite, Immortal, Invisible God of the Universe, Who alone is Holy and Worthy of our trust and worship. We adore and glorify Your Son for rescuing our souls from the eternal doom that Satan had planned for us. And we again ask for your guiding hand upon this nation who has forsaken You. Wake us up and move us toward repentance and faithfulness. Use these historical studies to teach us the mistakes of the past, so we can avoid them in the future. And I pray your richest blessings upon all those who support this ministry. It is in the Name of our precious Savior, and Your Glorious Son, that we pray. Amen.

C. If you have benefited from these studies, we would encourage you to become partners with us in this teaching and publishing ministry, in order to share in all the good fruit that comes from it. Those who contribute to International Preterist Association will receive some of our latest and greatest resources as our gift to you. Simply go to our website and click on the left sidebar button entitled "Make a Donation to IPA" where you can make a one-time donation or contribute monthly. Our website address is <www.preterist.org> You can also make a donation through PayPal. Our PayPal address is: <preterist1@preterist.org>

D. In our study last time, we looked at the biblical data and some of the historical traditions about Apostle John, trying to nail down the dates for all five of his books (the gospel of John, the book of Revelation, and his three short epistles). There was one more thing I had hoped to cover last time, for which we did not have time, and that was the issue of the authorship of the fourth gospel -- the gospel of John. Some of you may not be aware of it, but there are some Christians who believe the fourth gospel was not written by the Apostle John. They think it was written by

Lazarus. However, by comparing all four gospels and their historical narratives about the Last Supper, the trial and crucifixion, the burial, and the resurrection, it is easy to see that the author could not have been Lazarus. I have written a four-page PDF which provides the evidence to prove that John was the author of the fourth gospel. If you would like to have that PDF, simply email me and request it. The title of it is "Lazarus NOT the Author." Those of you who are already on my PDF list will automatically receive it.

E. Starting this session, we will begin looking at the activities of Apostle Paul after he was released from his first imprisonment in Rome in the Spring of AD 63.

Paul's Activity After His Release (AD 63-64)

Introduction: The five year period that we have been looking at (AD 60-64) was extremely critical to the formation of our NT canon. By my count, 18 of our 27 NT books were written in those five short years: Luke, Acts, Jas, Rev, Eph, Col, Phlm, Phlp, Heb, Tit, 1Tim, 1Pet, 1Jn, 2Jn, 3Jn, 2Tim, 2Pet, Jude (in order of writing). What an explosion of literary activity in such a short time right before all heck broke loose in the Neronic persecution! During those five short years the apostles were scrambling desperately to prepare the church for the Great Tribulation and the Great Apostasy which they knew was about to be unleashed upon them. The combined forces of Nero and the Jewish establishment vented all its fury against the Church in its attempt to utterly wipe it off the face of the earth. The Neronic persecution appears to have been the battle of Armageddon that the book of Revelation is talking about. But the unbelieving Jews, who played the harlot with Rome and arranged the Neronic persecution, ended up being hung on their own gallows that they had prepared for the Church.

Apr - 63 – Paul's final travels before *second imprisonment* and martyrdom. It is not likely that Paul went back to visit the Hebrew communities in Judea as some have suggested, based on the statements in Heb. 13:18-23 (see below). He knew there were at least forty Jews in Jerusalem who had taken a vow to kill him. He would have been immediately killed if he went back to Jerusalem. However, it does seem that he did visit some of the churches in his own network in Italy, Greece, Macedonia, and Turkey.

Furthermore, Paul was not one to change his plans. He had been accused of fickleness before (see 2 Cor. 1:17), and was very defensive about it. In his other prison epistles (Eph. Col. Phlm. Phlp.) that were written just before Hebrews, Paul does not mention any plans to visit Judea, but instead states that he intended to visit Philippi on his way to Colossae where he planned to stay for a while, probably in preparation for a missionary trip to Spain (see Rom. 15:24, 28, written in AD 58 just before his arrest and imprisonment). Thus, his travel plans after release from Roman imprisonment were restricted to Greece, Macedonia, and Asia Minor. There are no hints of a trip to Judea. Colossae seems to be as far away from Rome as he planned to go, before he began his missionary journey to Spain. So it seems more likely that Paul kept to his original plan of going to Colossae to stay with Philemon for a while

after his release from imprisonment.

This immediately raises the question: If Paul had no intentions of visiting the Jewish saints in Judea, then how do we explain the language in Hebrews 13:18-23 which states that he planned to visit them:

[13:18-19] Pray for us... so **that I may be restored to you the sooner**. ...[13:23] Take notice that our brother **Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you**. [Heb. 13:18-23 NAS95 boldface added]

The only way I can conceive of Paul going back to Judea would be if he: (1) totally abandoned his plans to go to Spain contrary to his originally stated intentions, and (2) kept his plans to go to Judea totally secret so that his enemies would not know about it in advance. He surely would not have given them advance notice, as he does here in Hebrews, so that his enemies would be waiting for him. It would be especially dangerous to mention any plans to travel to Judea in this Hebrews letter, which he knew would ultimately end up in the hands of Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, some of whom could easily leak his travel plans to his enemies.

Therefore, it is more likely that these statements here in Heb. 13:18-23 were only directed toward the same Diaspora Jewish Christians to whom his prison epistles had just been addressed (Greece, Macedonia, and Asia Minor). He was indeed planning to visit them soon, as we know from his other prison epistles. The courier (Mark) would have made that clear when he delivered Hebrews to the various Christian communities through which he traveled on his way from Rome to Jerusalem.

The bulk of the epistle applied to all Jewish Christians inside and outside Judea, while these closing statements in verses 18-25 (which were added to the otherwise finished book just before it was sent by courier) applied only to the saints in Greece, Macedonia, and Asia Minor whom Paul was planning to visit after his release. When the courier (Mark) delivered the epistle of Hebrews to the other churches beyond Asia Minor (such as Syria and Palestine), he could easily have left out that closing section (verses 18-25), or simply explained that it applied only to the churches in Greece, Macedonia, and Asia Minor.

We know from the Philippians epistle that Paul intended to travel with Timothy to visit the church in Philippi after his release (Phil. 2:19-24). That was the same trip during which he planned to go to Colossae.

We must also remember that the bulk of the message in the book of Hebrews is directed toward all Jewish Christians both inside Palestine, and in the Diaspora especially, who were being tempted by the Judaizers and Zealots to forsake Christ and return to Judaism to support the Jewish cause against Rome. The persecution was beginning to heat up and Jewish Christians were under a lot of pressure.

However, if the courier for the Hebrews epistle was **Mark**, as we suggested before, then it would make total sense for the book of Hebrews to be directed toward all Hebrew Christians (both inside Palestine and outside in the Diaspora). Paul would have written it with Mark in mind as the courier, knowing that Mark would take it to all the churches in Greece, Macedonia, Turkey, Syria, and Palestine. The epistle to the **Hebrews** was a general encyclical that would make the rounds of all the churches,

especially on the eastern side of the Roman world. This would explain why the book of Hebrews appears to address the churches in Judea, and how they would get a copy of it without Paul having to go there to deliver it.

We know that Paul planned to spend some significant time with Philemon in Colossae after his release (Phlm. 1:22). Then after staying there for several months and raising funds for his trip to Spain, he planned to travel to Nicopolis for the winter (where he would be able to catch the first boat for Spain in the Spring).

Paul said in **Philemon** that his plan after release was to go to Colossae and stay with Philemon ("At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you." Phlm 1:22). While we do not know for sure the exact route he planned to take, nor how long he would spend at each of those cities, we do know that Philippi was one of the stops along the way, since he says in **Philippians** that he hoped to visit them with Timothy after they were released. And we know that Paul hoped to go to Spain, and that he intended to get help from the various churches in Asia, Macedonia, and Greece to make that journey. It seems from his letter to **Titus** that he also planned to spend the winter in Nicopolis before going to Spain (Tit. 3:12). However, it does not seem that he was ever able to make that journey. It appears that he was arrested before he reached Nicopolis. We will discuss more about this when we deal with the book of Second Timothy.

The last chapter of the book of Hebrews intimates that Paul planned to visit the Hebrew Christian communities in Greece and Turkey as soon as he was released. Colossae (where Philemon was preparing his lodging) was a good example of a church which had many Diaspora Jewish Christians. This seems to be the very same Diaspora Hebrew Christians to whom the books of Hebrews, James and 1 and 2 Peter were written. This was Paul's last missionary journey to stabilize the Hebrew Christians during that time of intense persecution (AD 62-66) when many of them were falling away and going back into Judaism. His visit to these Jewish Christians in Greece and Turkey was also for the purpose of raising funds for his trip to Spain.

Spring - 63 – Titus was in Crete when Paul wrote to him. It could have been written in the Spring or Summer of AD 63, not long after Paul had been released from his first imprisonment and before his second arrest and final imprisonment and martyrdom. It seems to have been written before or about the same time as the 1 Timothy letter. Paul was NOT in prison at the time of writing. Paul planned to send Artemas or Tychicus to Crete, so that Titus could come to Paul in Nicopolis. It is possible that one of these two couriers (Artemas or Tychicus) carried the letter to Titus, or as we suggested earlier that Apollos and Zenas may have carried it to Titus. In 2 Timothy Paul says that Tychicus was sent to Ephesus, so that means that Artemas was probably sent to Crete. Paul was planning to spend the winter in Nicopolis, so it sounds like this letter was written in the summer or early Fall when he would have begun making plans for the winter. It is not clear whether this was his first winter after Roman imprisonment (late 63 and early 64), or whether it is speaking of the second winter (late 64 and early 65). It is possible that Paul stayed in Nicopolis the first winter (AD 63) after his release, and then went on to Turkey with the intention of coming back to Nicopolis the following winter (before going to Spain). This would explain a lot of the events which don't seem to fit otherwise. We know that the

second winter in Nicopolis (winter AD 65) never materialized, since he was arrested before he got there. Zenas (the lawyer) and Apollos were coming to Crete (perhaps delivering this letter), and Paul asks Titus to help them on their way to wherever they were headed (as we noted before about their possible involvement in the release of John from exile on Patmos). We don't know if they were with Paul at the time he wrote to Titus, or whether they had already left. Most likely they were getting ready to leave and carry this letter to Titus in Crete. Paul does not say where he was when he wrote this (probably for security reasons, in case the letter was intercepted by Jewish persecutors). But there was still a lot of freedom to travel, which would not have been the case after the great fire in Rome and Nero's persecution began. Nicopolis would not have been a safe place for a Christian to spend the winter after the Neronic persecution broke out (AD 64-65). So it seems more likely that the epistle of Titus was written in the Spring or Summer of AD 63. More analysis needs to be done on this period of Paul's travels after his release and before his final arrest and martyrdom.

Spring - 63 – Release of John from exile in Patmos (after only one year there, during which time he wrote the book of Revelation). Something I find extremely intriguing is Paul's statement to Titus about *Zenas* (the lawyer) and *Apollos* (the orator) leaving Rome, planning to travel through Crete, and go on their way to some other place. Paul instructs Titus to "*diligently help them on their way so that nothing was lacking for them*" (Tit. 3:13). We can infer that they had been in Rome to help Paul in his defense before Nero, and that their work on his behalf was successful. Now Paul was getting ready to leave Rome, and it seems that Zenas and Apollos were leaving as well, probably carrying this letter to Titus (although Paul does not say so, for security reasons). Evidently Zenas and Apollos were still on a mission of some kind, since Paul tells Titus to "*diligently help them on their way so that nothing is lacking*". What was their mission for which Paul wanted Titus to diligently raise funds? And where were they going after visiting Titus in Crete?

Who else was in prison in the region, who might need the services of Zenas and Apollos? *Apostle John* was in exile on the nearby island of Patmos! It would make perfect sense for Zenas and Apollos, who helped Paul get released from his imprisonment, and now armed with Paul's release documents to use as a precedent, to go to Patmos to secure John's release. They were definitely on a mission, for which they needed significant funding, and the small island of Patmos was only a short boat ride away from the island of Crete. If this is the case, it would explain how John could have been released from Patmos after being there for only about a year, during which time he had written the book of Revelation. When released (Spring or Summer of AD 63), he probably settled in nearby Ephesus, as tradition suggests, and was still residing there a year later when the Neronic persecution broke out, at which time he was "killed by Jews" as Papias in the second century has affirmed (*Apostolic Fathers*, Michael W. Holmes, Baker Books: *Papias* 5:5; 6:6). Origen also agreed with this (*Papias* 6:6).

It is worth noting that John could not have been killed by the Jews after AD 70, since their power to kill anyone had been taken away from them. They themselves were under the ban of Rome. So, if John was "killed by Jews" as Papias affirms, it

must have been before the war broke out, at a time when the Jews would have had the permission of Rome to kill Christians (i.e., during the Neronic persecution, AD 64-66). Papias claims that the death of John at the hands of the Jews was in fulfillment of the prediction of Jesus recorded in the gospel accounts of both Matthew (20) and Mark (10).

It is also possible that John could have already been released from his exile on Patmos after Ananus II was deposed from the High Priesthood in the summer of 62. However, since Ananus II had not died, John would not have been allowed to return to Judea. So, the tradition about him going to nearby Ephesus after his release may have some substance, and could have occurred at this very point in late 62 right after John had written the book of Revelation there on the island of Patmos. This would have given John almost two full years to live in Ephesus before the Neronic persecution broke out in late 64. It might also explain the traditions which suggest that John's three short epistles (1, 2, 3 John) were written from Ephesus right after he had been released from Patmos (AD 62-64).

Summer - 63 – 1 Timothy was probably written in the Fall of AD 63 after Paul had been released from his first imprisonment and before Paul's second arrest and final imprisonment and martyrdom. It seems to have been written about the same time as the letter to Titus. Paul wrote to Timothy (1 Timothy) who was in Ephesus. Paul left Timothy in Ephesus while Paul traveled onward to Macedonia. Paul was not in prison at this time, but he does not say where he was when he wrote it (probably for security reasons). The tribulation was already underway and heating up (AD 63-64), so it is not surprising to see Paul give so few details about his location and travel plans.

Jul 63 – Jesus b. Gamaliel was appointed High Priest in place of Jesus (son of Damnaeus) by Agrippa II. He ruled for less than two years (AD 63-64). He was the next to last High Priest before the war. He was High Priest at the time the Neronic persecution broke out. He was removed from the High Priesthood right after the construction of Herod's temple was completed (early 65), and the white stone paving project began [Josephus *Antiq.* 20.223 (20.9.7)]. It was this Jesus (son of Gamaliel) who was closely **allied with Annas II** later in the war (AD 68) when the Idumeans came to crush the moderates who were under the leadership of both Annas II and Jesus (son of Gamaliel). Both of these former high priests were rounded up and killed by the Idumeans and Zealots [Josephus *Wars* 4.316 (4.5.2)]. We will say more about him when we get to that part of the history in AD 68. In his autobiography (the *Life* 41.204), Josephus states that this Jesus (son of Gamaliel) was a close friend of both himself and his father, Matthias. This fact raises some suspicion that Josephus may have shared the hard-line antichristian views of Ananus II, and may have used his trip to Rome to realize some of their shared antichristian goals (such as helping arrange the Neronic persecution). According to Talmudic sources, Jesus b. Gamaliel married **Martha**, a daughter of a priest from the wealthy family of **Boethus**. It was this high priest supposedly who reformed the educational system in Israel at this time, so that every district had its own school and their sons were enrolled at the age of six or seven to begin their education. [VanderKam 483-486]

Summer - 63 – Saints began leaving Jerusalem and Judea. Somewhere in here must be the time when the Church began leaving Judea to dwell in Pella and other cities outside Palestine. Eusebius said:

But the people of the church in Jerusalem had been commanded by a revelation, vouchsafed to approved men there **before the war**, to leave the city and to dwell in a certain town of Perea called Pella. And when those that believed in Christ had come thither from Jerusalem, then, as if **the royal city of the Jews and the whole land of Judea were entirely destitute of holy men**, the judgment of God at length overtook those who had committed such outrages against Christ and his apostles, and totally destroyed that generation of impious men. (Eusebius *Eccl. Hist.* 3.5:3)

There is a good chance that the “revelation” mentioned by Eusebius was the book of Revelation, especially Rev. 18:4 which says, “*Come out of her my people.*” This was written in mid-62 before John was killed in the Neronic persecution in late AD 64. Hebrews 13:13-14 (“go out to him outside the camp”) is very similar (written in late 62 or early 63). Both of these statements were written in AD 62-63 before the outbreak of the Neronic persecution (summer of 64). The saints in Jerusalem must have had copies of both Revelation and Hebrews a year or more before the Neronic persecution broke out (August 64) and could have left the city before they were rounded up and killed by the Romans and their Jewish informants in the Neronic persecution.

Another possible time when some Christians might have left Judea was when the star and the comet (see Apr 65 below) were seen over Jerusalem for a whole year from Passover AD 65 until Passover of AD 66. This could easily have been seen as a warning to get out of the city. Also the signs that they saw at the Passover in AD 66 would have been understood as a warning of coming doom, and almost their last chance to get out easily and safely. However, these things occurred after the Neronic persecution had already killed most of the Christians in Judea and the Diaspora. There probably weren't very many (if any) Christians left in Judea by the time the star and comet were seen (AD 65-66).

Eusebius says that they received a revelation and left the city **before the war began**. Josephus says the war began in the summer of AD 66. So their departure would have occurred long before July 66. Furthermore, the biggest factor in all this (but almost totally overlooked by everyone) is the Neronic persecution. If the Christians had heeded the warnings in Revelation and Hebrews (AD 62-63) and left Judea immediately (summer of 63), they would not have been in Judea when the Neronic persecution broke out (summer AD 64). Eusebius does not seem to indicate that they remained in Judea until the war broke out. The implication is that they left soon after they received the revelation which commanded them to leave the city (AD 63-64). If any of them waited to leave until the Neronic persecution started, it would have been difficult to escape safely (summer of 64 until summer of 66). After the war broke out in the summer of 66, the Zealots occupied the temple and the Roman armies started approaching Jerusalem. There were not any Christians left in Judea at that time. They had either been killed in the Neronic persecution (summer and fall of AD 64), or were raptured at Pentecost in AD 66. That is why Josephus does not

mention any Christians participating in the revolt, even though he does mention Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes and Zealots. Not even Judaizing Christians were mentioned. Evidently they had been rounded up and executed in the Neronian persecution, or had fled to Pella and other Gentile cities before the war broke out.

Well, that will do it for this session. Next time we will continue looking at the activities of Apostle Paul after his release from his first Roman imprisonment. As we have seen already in this session, there are some real ambiguities and obscurities surrounding Paul's travels after his release, which we will try to sort out in the coming weeks.

Thank you so much for listening. May all of you have a blessed week of service to our Lord Jesus.

If any of this material has raised any questions for you,
or if you need more information, do not hesitate to email me at:
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There are a lot of great supplementary articles posted on our website,
plus books and audio/video media for purchase. Go there and browse all you want.
Here is the link: <http://preterist.org>

If you would like a couple of great books which detail all of these events, I would recommend **ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS** by F. F. Bruce, which is available for order at our website (www.preterist.org), and **JEWISH BACKGROUNDS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT** by J. Julius Scott, which is available from Amazon.com. Be sure to get a copy of my book, **First Century Events**, which deals with the Roman, Jewish, and Christian events of the first century. We will be using it as a study guide here in our studies of the first century. You can purchase it from our website: www.preterist.org

Some further recommended reading:

Josephus *Antiquities* and *Wars* (sections which deal with the Herodian rulers)