



# Never Been to Spain

The Journals & Journeys of Paul

## "Chained Reaction"

It's an obvious illustration but we sometimes refer to a seemingly stifling situation as though we are "chained" to something. For example, someone might radically change careers and say, "I didn't want to be chained to a desk anymore."

MSNBC recently filmed a documentary series titled, *Chained to My Ex*. It's about divorced couples who, for one reason or another, must still live together. One of the taglines says, "being married and living together can be unbearable, but being divorced and living together? That can be true hell."

What if you were literally chained to someone? That's the situation Paul found himself in for two years in Rome.

When we last saw Paul he was under arrest, on his way to Rome to appeal his case to Caesar Nero. The ship he was on was wrecked. Everyone on board survived and made it to land, to the island of Melita. While gathering sticks to make a fire Paul was bitten by a deadly snake. He shook it off and showed no signs of illness let alone death. More than that, God used him to heal many of the sick on Melita.

We're rushing through arguably one of the most exciting episodes of Paul's life. That's because we already know it so well. It's like a favorite scene from a favorite movie. We want to find out some new things about Paul; or at least things that are a little more obscure.

We pick up the story, then, with Paul arriving in Rome.

Acts 28:16 Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.

"Dwell by himself" means Paul was not in a prison; not in a cell. He was in a house he rented under what we would call house arrest.

Paul wrote several letters during that first Roman house arrest - Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon.

In Philippians he made this fascinating statement:

Philippians 1:12 But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel,

Philippians 1:13 so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ;

The "palace guard" was the Praetorian Guard, the Imperial Guard of Rome. This guard was an elite corps of soldiers, established to guard the Emperor of the Roman Empire.

The body was instituted by Augustus and was called by him *praetoriae cohortes*, praetorian cohorts, in imitation of the select troop which attended the person of the praetor or Roman general. Augustus originally stationed only three thousand of them, three cohorts, at Rome, and dispersed the remainder in the adjacent Italian towns. Under Tiberius they were all assembled at Rome in a fortified camp. They were distinguished by double pay and special privileges. Their term of service was originally twelve years, afterward increased to sixteen. On completing his term, each soldier received a little over eight hundred dollars. They all seem to have had the same rank as centurions in the regular legions. (Marvin Vincent, *Word Studies In The New Testament*, Vol. III, p. 420).

Paul had been delivered to the Praetorian Guard to await trial before the Emperor. Paul said of himself that he was "bound in chains," where the Greek word *halusis* is used (see also Acts 28:20 and Ephesians 6:20). The *halusis* was a short length of chain by which the wrist of a prisoner was bound to the wrist of a soldier who was guarding him so that escape was impossible.

Was Paul really chained 24 hours a day to a Praetorian Guard? Probably not. It would make sleeping weird if not difficult! He wasn't really much of an escape risk, either. I'm sure he was chained a lot - sometimes to a Praetorian Guard, other times to his bedpost. His overall situation was that of being chained and he was literally chained a great deal.

Think of it. In the course of two years one by one Praetorian Guards would be on duty with Paul. These guards were therefore under the constant influence of Paul and the Gospel.

For one thing, Paul had a lot of visitors in Rome. The guards could not help overhearing what Paul taught others.

I wonder who was guarding him the day Paul wrote Ephesians chapter six about taking up the whole armor of God? Do you suppose he questioned his guard to get the uniform exactly right?

Then there was the whole matter of Onesimus, the runaway slave. Paul had led his master, Philemon, to faith in Jesus. Whether Onesimus came to Paul for help, or Paul saw him in Rome, Onesimus, too, was saved by Paul's sharing. After serving Paul for a time, the apostle sent Onesimus back to Philemon to ask forgiveness. It must have blown the minds of the Praetorian Guards.

Paul's imprisonment had opened the way for preaching the Gospel to the finest regiment in the Roman army. All the Praetorian Guard knew why Paul was in prison - and many of them were touched by the Gospel. No wonder Paul declared that his imprisonment had actually been for the furtherance of the Gospel.

The news spread from guard to guard, to the families of the guards, and then to Caesar's household. Paul ended the Philippian letter by saying, "All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household" (4:22). "Caesar's household" means his servants and attendants - all those surrounding him in the running of his life and the government.

We might ask, Was Paul chained to a Praetorian Guard, or was a guard chained to him?

Paul's perspective was that God had arranged it so that they could be chained to him for the furtherance of the Gospel.

Our problem is we find it hard to make the comparison between Paul's *halusis* and our own. It seems almost glorious to be chained to a Praetorian Guard and to thereby evangelize Caesar's household. We always seem chained to someone or something much less dramatic or important.

I don't know who or what you are chained to but unless you are out of the will of God, you need to adopt Paul's perspective and realize it is chained to you for the furtherance of the Gospel.

Speaking of the furtherance of the Gospel, what happened to Paul with regard to his appeal to Caesar?

Reading what he wrote in the letters he penned during the two year house arrest and comparing them to his later letters, written just before his execution, gives us some help with the disposition of his case before Nero.

In his letter to the church in Philippi Paul indicated that he was prepared for whatever happened and had come to terms with the possibility that he could be put to death.

Philippians 1:19 For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

Philippians 1:20 according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.

Philippians 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:22 But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.

Philippians 1:23 For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

Philippians 1:24 Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.

At the same time he was optimistic that he would be released. In Philippians 1:25-26, he wrote, "I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me." In Philippians 2:24 he added, "And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon."

In his letter to Philemon Paul was confident that he would be able to return to Asia Minor to see Philemon.

Philemon 1:22 But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.

We can contrast Paul's optimism in Philippians and Philemon with his certainty of being near death in his second epistle to Timothy. In Second Timothy 4:6, he wrote "For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure." These words were probably written during a second Roman imprisonment.

One indication of this is given in Second Timothy 4:16-17,

2Timothy 4:16 At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them.

2Timothy 4:17 But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

One way to interpret these verses is to see the "first defense" as Paul's 62AD trial before Nero and his deliverance from the "lion's mouth" as his release after that trial.

Scholars today believe it is more likely that the "first defense" was a preliminary hearing before a later second trial. Under either interpretation, Paul was acquitted at his first trial.

Some later Christian sources support the case that Paul was acquitted and then took the Gospel to the furthest reaches of the Roman Empire. Clement of Rome, in his epistle to the Corinthians written in the 90's AD, made the following statement about Paul in the fifth chapter:

After preaching both in the east and west, he gained the illustrious reputation due to his faith, having taught righteousness to the whole world, and come to the extreme limit of the west, and suffered martyrdom under the prefects.

For a first century Roman "the extreme limit of the west" was Spain. Paul expressed a desire to travel to Spain in Romans 15:24 but he does not seem to have had the opportunity to do so before 62AD. Clement's statement supports a scenario in which Paul was released after a first trial in Rome and then made a trip to Spain before his second imprisonment.

This scenario was favored by Eusebius of Caesarea, the fourth century bishop and historian whose Ecclesiastical History is an invaluable compilation of early Christian history. In Book 2, chapter 22 of this work, Eusebius wrote:

Festus was sent by Nero to be Felix's successor. Under him Paul, having made his defense, was sent bound to Rome. Aristarchus was with him, whom he also somewhere in his epistles quite naturally calls his fellow-prisoner. And Luke, who wrote the Acts of the Apostles, brought his history to a close at this point, after stating that Paul spent two whole years at Rome as a prisoner at large, and preached the word of God without restraint. Thus after he had made his defense it is said that the apostle was sent again upon the ministry of preaching, and that upon coming to the same city a second time he suffered martyrdom.

In support of his conclusions Eusebius cites some of the same evidence we have been considering, including Second Timothy 4:16-17 and the fact that Paul's trial occurred before the time when Nero became a persecutor of Christians. On this second point, Eusebius commented,

It is probable indeed that as Nero was more disposed to mildness in the beginning, Paul's defense of his doctrine was more easily received; but that when he had advanced to the commission of lawless deeds of daring, he made the apostles as well as others the subjects of his attacks.

Cyril of Jerusalem wrote,



[Paul] carried the earnestness of his preaching as far as Spain, undergoing conflicts innumerable, and performing Signs and wonders.

Chrysostom also wrote about Paul stating, "for after he had been in Rome, he returned to Spain..."

There is also an interesting fragment of a papyrus manuscript discovered in the Ambrosia Library (Italy) in 1700 by Domingo M. Muratori. The document, written in Latin, seems to date around the year 140AD, judging from its content. Among the important references to the four gospels, Paul's letter to the Romans, and other documents, there appear five lines which end with the words "when he (Paul) went to preach the Gospel in Spain."

Whether chained or free, Paul remained the prisoner of The Lord and went about his daily business furthering the cause of the Gospel.