

LESSON 33

IMPRISONMENT AND END

References : *Phill. Chapter :1*
 : *2Timo. Chapter : 4*

Memory verse : *2Timo. 4 : 6-9*

Objective: To be convinced that it is far better to be with Christ absent in the body.

Introduction: How did Paul reach Rome? Why? Recollect the previous lesson. On reaching Rome, Paul was imprisoned. At first, he was granted some liberty. He evangelised the visitors and soldiers there. As the result, the gospel was spread even in the palace of Caesar. Some of the soldiers of the cruel Nero were also converted. He worked in the Roman prison on behalf of Christ. Since the Jews were unable to prove their charges on him, he was released and could work with freedom for some more time.

The Book of Acts ends with Paul's imprisonment in Rome. He stood on trial only after two years. The delay was caused because of the Jew who had to come up for levelling charges against Paul. We have already seen what the Jew held against him (Acts 24.5-6). In the later part, his imprisonment took of rigorous dimensions with strict confinement. Yet, he shared the gospel with anyone who visited him. Though he was in bonds, his gospel was not bound. He led many of his visitors to Christ. One simos the slave of the rich Philemon of Colosse was led to Christ at this time (Phil. 10). Besides, he utilised time for giving practical instructions and admonitions to various Churches after hearing about the activities of the respective fields from visitors coming to him. When in prison, he used receive material helps from Churches, like Philippi.

(Ph. 4: 10) The epistles known as Prison Epistles were written during this period (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon - AD 61- 63).

Paul's Prison life was beneficial to the Lords ministry in many ways. When Paul was in prison, the word of God entered into Caesar's palace - the center of Roman government. The Ceasar of Rome at that time was the fifth emperor Nero. He was a cruel ruler (A.D 54-68) who persecuted the Christians in the most horrible way. He killed his own brother and mother, Nero had the city of Rome set on fire in A.D. 64. He had planned to build a new city in the place of the former. This led to the persecution of Christians in a large scale and in the cruelest way. Innumerable innocent Christians were killed. Nero committed suicide in A. D, 68.

Nero's soldiers had stood on guard over Paul. In those days according to the Roman law of prisoner's guard, the hand of a prisoner was chained to a soldiers hand. Soldiers on duty kept changing on shifts of night and day. Paul shared the gospel with each of them. As the result, the whole palace guards knew that Paul was in prison because he was a servant of Christ. (Phil 1:13). Moreover, some belonging to Caesars Palace also accepted Christ. For Paul was accompanied by them while saluting the Church at Philippi (Phil. 4:22). In spite of imprisonment, Paul never felt depressed or sorrowful about himself. Instead, he was always ready to testify about his Lord. Being ready in and out of season, he performed the work of an evangelist. He got an opportunity to take the gospel even to the royal court of Caesar. Paul was thoroughly convinced that he was the eambassador of Christ in that Roman metropolis where the ambassadors of many nations were present. But one difference! Those worlds ambassadors moved about with all freedom, whereas he served as the ambassador in bonds" for heaven (Eph.6:19, 20 c.f. 2 Cori. 5 : 20).

RELEASE FROM THE FIRST IMPRISONMENT IN ROME:

Paul had expected that he would be released from prison temporarily and would be able to visit some places including Philippi (Phil. 2:23, 24, 1:19, 25, 26, Phil. 22). The historians generally agree with the fact that Paul was released from prison after A. D. 63. His desire to visit Spain also was fulfilled after the release (Rom. 15:24).

Freed in A.D. 63, he had probably worked with freedom until A. D.67. It was during this time that he left Titus in Crete. There is no mention in the former accounts that Paul evangelised Crete. But towards

the close of his ministry he could begin work in Crete, the completion of which was entrusted to Titus (Titus. 1:5) We get some hints about this period from the second epistle to Timothy. "The cloak that I left in Troas" Points to this period (Tim. 4:13). Also in the epistle to Titus, Paul tells him to do his best to come to him at Nicopolis (Titus. 3 : 12) which also signifies the same period.

During the period A. D. 63 to 67 Paul travelled to Macedonia, Greece, Asia Minor, Spain etc. and worked for the Lord. He wrote the first epistle to Timothy and the one to Titus at Macedonia.

SECOND IMPRISONMENT IN ROME:

The Roman government imposed anti - Christian laws in the whole empire. Then Paul was arrested and brought to Rome in chains. This time his imprisonment was rigorous. Formerly his friends had freedom to visit and help him. But now that freedom was denied . When the believers learned that if they identified with Paul, it would be harmful to their well being, they began to withdraw from Paul. The second epistle to Timothy was written at that time. This was the final epistle and the words that came from Paul were very touching. Everyone in the province of Asia whom he loved deeply had deserted him (2 Tim. 1:14) Even his closest and nearest people felt ashamed of his sufferings and chains (2 Tim. 1:8, 17). Demas a fellow worker with him had also deserted him. Many of his intimate friends were not with him now. He instructed Timothy to bring Mark to him soon (2 Tim. 4 : 9 - 18). Also he wrote to Timothy to bring his cloak and scrolls that he left at Troas before winter.

Even then notice his courage and hope expressed in his last words! His words don't sound at all like those of a defeatist or desperate person (2 Tim. 1:8 -14, 2:3, 10:13, 2:12, 4:6 -8) He knew for sure that the due time for him the brave soldier of Jesus Christ to pour out his life as a drink offering at the feet of his beloved Master had arrived. Infront of his sufferings that were for a moment, the eternal weight of glory became all the brighter. 'That day ' which would prove what he laboured and ran for, was not in vain became more glittering before him.

Paul the greatest apostle stood before the cruel Emperor Nero. Trial was over. The death sentence was declared to Paul. He was led from the dark cell outside the city of Rome. Only some mean and utter scoundrels followed him to the place of execution. As they reached the place of execution, Paul slowly stooped down and kept his neck close

to the wooden piece on which he was to be beheaded. Immediately the executioner's fell on his sacred neck. Paul "departed to be with Christ". Paul who said in his life time that it was far better to be with Christ, now experienced it. Now he is resting in paradise with Christ, until he shall stand before his beloved Lord to receive his crowns. That day we shall see Paul along with thousands and thousands of souls who were his direct converts as well as those who have come to Christ by his writings, through the centuries. Do you have that blessed hope personally and commitment to serve the Lord at costs?

EXERCISE - 33

Answer the following questions.

1. After how many years of imprisonment, did Paul stand for trial? What was the cause of the delay?
2. How did Paul utilise his time in prison?
3. Name the slave who was led to Christ by Paul during his imprisonment?
4. Which epistles were written during the time of his first imprisonment in Rome?
5. How was Paul's prison life beneficial to the Lord's ministry?
6. Who was the Caesar of Rome at that time?
7. What was his attitude towards the Christians?
8. How did the palace guards get an opportunity to listen the gospel?
9. Who began the work in Crete and who completed the work there?
10. Which places did Paul visit after he was released from the prison?
11. Which epistles did Paul write from Macedonia?
12. Which was Paul's last epistle and from where was it written?
13. Write in brief about the death of Paul and show that it was suitable to his life, ministry and teaching?

