

Wednesday

December 31

Paul and Colossae

We have no record of Paul ever visiting Colossae, which again tells us something about the effectiveness of his evangelistic strategy. First, it was Epaphras, [E-PA-PHRAS] a resident of Colossae (*Col. 4:12*), who brought the gospel to that city (*Col. 1:7*). But how was he converted? Most likely, it was in the mid-50s, AD when Paul was in nearby Ephesus and “all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus” (*Acts 19:10; compare Acts 20:31*).

The book of Revelation witnesses to how widely the gospel spread throughout this area (*Rev. 1:4*). The most plausible explanation for this success, including its spread to Colossae,

is as a result of the work of Paul's converts, who first heard the message in Ephesus, the most important city in Asia Minor and a major port. Epaphras[E-PA-PHRAS] [LIKELY] heard Paul's preaching in Ephesus and, becoming one of his coworkers, he took the gospel back to his hometown of Colossae.

The city itself, about nine miles (15 kilometers) southeast of Laodicea, is only now being excavated, so we know less about it compared to more prominent cities of the region. We do know it had a sizable Jewish population with "as many as ten thousand Jews living in that area of Phrygia."—Arthur G. Patzia, *New International Biblical Commentary: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 1990), vol. 10, p. 3.

Coins minted at Colossae indicate the people there, as in many Roman cities, worshipped a variety of gods. The pagan

practices and strong cultural influences obviously presented Christians there with tremendous challenges, not only in evangelizing the city but also just remaining faithful to the pure faith of the gospel. Another prominent Christian in Colossae was Philemon, who may have been converted about the same time as Epaphras[E-PA-PHRAS].

Read Philemon 15, 16. See also Colossians 4:9. What course did Paul gently urge Philemon to pursue with Onesimus?

"For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?" Philemon 1:15-16 KJV

FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

Although Roman law required Paul to return Onesimus to Philemon, Paul appeals to Philemon's heart and conscience as a fellow believer and urges him to treat Onesimus, not as a slave, but as a brother (Philem. 16).

However much we detest the idea of slavery in any form, and wish that Paul would have condemned the practice, how do we come to terms with what Paul says here? (How fascinating that, during slavery in America, Ellen G. White specifically told Adventists to defy the law that ordered people to return escaped slaves.)

THE BIBLICAL ALLOWANCE FOR SLAVERY WAS NOTHING LIKE WHAT WAS AND IS STILL PRACTICED IN OUR WORLD. FOR EXAMPLE, ANY PHYSICAL INJURY TO A SLAVE WAS IMMEDIATE REASON FOR THE RELEASE, MEN COULD NOT BE STOLEN AND SOLD INTO SLAVERY, IF SLAVES WERE HARMED THE LAW WAS EXPLICIT, EYE FOR EYE, TOOTH FOR TOOTH, ETC. (EXODUS 21).

EXODUS 21:20, 21

“WHEN A MAN STRIKES HIS SLAVE, MALE OR FEMALE, WITH A ROD AND THE SLAVE DIES UNDER HIS HAND, HE SHALL BE AVENGED. BUT IF THE SLAVE SURVIVES A DAY OR TWO, HE IS NOT TO BE AVENGED, FOR THE SLAVE IS HIS MONEY.

EXODUS 21:26, 27

“WHEN A MAN STRIKES THE EYE OF HIS SLAVE, MALE OR FEMALE, AND DESTROYS IT, HE SHALL LET THE SLAVE GO FREE BECAUSE OF HIS EYE. IF HE KNOCKS OUT THE TOOTH OF HIS SLAVE, MALE OR FEMALE, HE SHALL LET THE SLAVE GO FREE BECAUSE OF HIS TOOTH.

Laws About Slaves

EXODUS 21:1-7

“NOW THESE ARE THE RULES THAT YOU SHALL SET BEFORE THEM. WHEN YOU BUY A HEBREW SLAVE, HE SHALL SERVE SIX YEARS, AND IN THE SEVENTH HE SHALL GO OUT FREE, FOR NOTHING. IF HE COMES IN SINGLE, HE SHALL GO OUT SINGLE; IF HE COMES IN MARRIED, THEN HIS WIFE SHALL GO OUT WITH HIM. IF HIS MASTER GIVES HIM A WIFE AND SHE BEARS HIM SONS OR DAUGHTERS, THE WIFE AND HER CHILDREN SHALL BE HER MASTER’S, AND HE SHALL GO OUT ALONE. BUT IF THE SLAVE PLAINLY SAYS, ‘I LOVE MY MASTER, MY WIFE, AND MY CHILDREN; I WILL NOT GO OUT FREE,’ THEN HIS MASTER SHALL BRING HIM TO GOD, AND HE SHALL BRING HIM TO THE DOOR OR THE DOORPOST. AND HIS MASTER SHALL BORE HIS EAR THROUGH WITH AN AWL, AND HE SHALL BE HIS SLAVE FOREVER.

“WHEN A MAN SELLS HIS DAUGHTER AS A SLAVE, SHE SHALL NOT GO OUT AS THE MALE SLAVES DO. IF SHE DOES NOT PLEASE HER MASTER, WHO HAS DESIGNATED HER FOR HIMSELF, THEN HE SHALL LET HER BE REDEEMED. HE SHALL HAVE NO RIGHT TO SELL HER TO A FOREIGN PEOPLE, SINCE HE HAS BROKEN FAITH WITH HER. IF HE DESIGNATES HER FOR HIS SON, HE SHALL DEAL WITH HER AS WITH A DAUGHTER. IF HE TAKES ANOTHER WIFE TO HIMSELF, HE SHALL NOT DIMINISH HER FOOD, HER CLOTHING, OR HER MARITAL RIGHTS. AND IF HE DOES NOT DO THESE THREE THINGS FOR HER, SHE SHALL GO OUT FOR NOTHING, WITHOUT PAYMENT OF MONEY.

EXODUS 21:16 - NOW HERE WE READ WHY ELLEN WHITE GAVE THE COUNSEL NOT TO RETURN SLAVES TO THEIR MASTERS IN EARLY AMERICA:

“Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death.

**SLAVERY TODAY AND IN AMERICAN HISTORY IS A
DIRECT VIOLATION OF THE BIBLE TEACHING AND THIS
IS WHY ELLEN WHITE SPECIFICALLY TOLD ADVENTISTS
TO DEFEY THE LAW THE ORDERED PEOPLE TO RETURN
ESCAPED SLAVES.**

1Timothy 1:10- “menstealers”

“But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.”

1 Timothy 1:8-11 KJV

ANOTHER REASON WHY PAUL URGED ONESIMUS TO RETURN TO HIS MASTER IS THAT ONESIMUS HAD GREATLY WRONGED HIS MASTER BY STEALING MONEY FROM HIM AND NEEDED TO MAKE THINGS RIGHT BY ASKING FOR HIS FORGIVENESS AND THEN BE PREPARED TO WORK WITH HIM IN MINISTRY:

AMONG THOSE WHO GAVE THEIR HEARTS TO GOD THROUGH THE LABORS OF PAUL IN ROME WAS ONESIMUS, A PAGAN SLAVE WHO HAD WRONGED HIS MASTER, PHILEMON, A CHRISTIAN BELIEVER IN COLOSSE, AND HAD ESCAPED TO ROME. IN THE KINDNESS OF HIS HEART, PAUL SOUGHT TO RELIEVE THE POVERTY AND DISTRESS OF THE WRETCHED FUGITIVE AND THEN ENDEAVORED TO SHED THE LIGHT OF TRUTH INTO HIS DARKENED MIND. ONESIMUS LISTENED TO THE WORDS OF LIFE, CONFESSED HIS SINS, AND WAS CONVERTED TO THE FAITH OF CHRIST. AA 456.1

ONESIMUS ENDEARED HIMSELF TO PAUL BY HIS PIETY AND SINCERITY, NO LESS THAN BY HIS TENDER CARE FOR THE APOSTLE’S COMFORT, AND HIS ZEAL IN PROMOTING THE WORK OF THE GOSPEL. PAUL SAW IN HIM TRAITS OF CHARACTER THAT WOULD RENDER HIM A USEFUL HELPER IN MISSIONARY LABOR, AND HE COUNSELED HIM TO RETURN WITHOUT DELAY TO PHILEMON, BEG HIS FORGIVENESS, AND PLAN FOR THE FUTURE. THE APOSTLE PROMISED TO HOLD HIMSELF RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SUM OF WHICH PHILEMON HAD BEEN ROBBED. BEING ABOUT TO DISPATCH TYCHICUS WITH LETTERS TO VARIOUS CHURCHES IN ASIA MINOR, HE SENT ONESIMUS WITH HIM. IT WAS A SEVERE TEST FOR THIS SERVANT THUS TO DELIVER HIMSELF UP TO THE MASTER HE HAD WRONGED; BUT HE HAD BEEN TRULY CONVERTED, AND HE DID NOT TURN ASIDE FROM HIS DUTY. AA 456.2 PAUL MADE ONESIMUS THE BEARER OF A LETTER TO PHILEMON, IN WHICH, WITH HIS USUAL TACT AND KINDNESS, THE APOSTLE PLEADED THE CAUSE OF THE REPENTANT SLAVE AND EXPRESSED A DESIRE TO RETAIN HIS SERVICES IN THE FUTURE.

IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THE TOPIC OF BIBLICAL SLAVERY IS MUCH LIKE BIBLICAL HELL — A VERY MISUNDERSTOOD AND MISREPRESENTED TOPIC TO SAY THE LEAST.

YES THERE IS A BIBLICAL SLAVERY, (JUST LIKE THERE IS A BIBLICAL HELL) AS NOTED BY THE WORD “SERVANT.” AND WE ARE ALL SERVANTS OR SLAVES TO CHRIST THROUGH HIS

CONSTRAINING LOVE. WE HAVE BEEN BOUGHT WITH A PRICE TO BE SET FREE TO SERVE GOD FOREVER.

PAUL'S APPEAL TO SLAVES PROVIDES A PARALLEL APPEAL TO SLAVE OWNERS -BOTH ARE ENJOINED TO LIVE THE LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN BELIEVER AND CARE NOT FOR THEIR EARTHLY POSITION. SLAVE OWNERS WERE TO TREAT THEIR SERVANTS WITH LOVE, MERCY AND JUSTICE. SLAVES WERE TO SERVE THEIR MASTERS HONESTLY AS SERVING GOD. AND IT IS THIS THAT MAKES SLAVERY A NON-ISSUE FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE. ANYTHING THAT FAILS TO TAKE GOD'S GUIDELINES FOR "MENSERVANTS" INTO CONSIDERATION OR SOMEHOW JUSTIFY IN ANY DEGREE THE CRUEL SLAVERY PRACTICES OF THIS WORLD IS A GROSS MISREPRESENTATION OF GOD'S CHARACTER AND HIS INSPIRED INSTRUCTION REGARDING MEN SERVANTS.