

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Acts: The Continuing Earthly Ministry Of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Part VI: The Ministry Of The Universal Church In Its Spread To The Ends Of The Earth, Acts 8:26-28:31

E. Christ's Use Of The Apostle Paul To spearhead Worldwide Outreach, Acts 14:4-28:31

17. Christ's Gracious Long-suffering With Paul's Human Weaknesses In Ministry (Acts 18:18-23a)

I. Introduction

- A. Though God calls each of us to do His will in our lives, we each have varying degrees of human and spiritual maturity, and varying degrees of faith in God's provision for the trials we face in the process.
- B. However, our Lord is graciously long-suffering with us regarding such weakness, a comforting truth that encourages and instructs us as we view an illustration of it in the Apostle Paul's own apostolic ministry:

II. Christ's Gracious Long-suffering With Paul's Human Weaknesses In Ministry, Acts 18:18-23a.

- A. After Paul stayed in Corinth with his important ministry there, he left it to sail back to Antioch of Syria, having shorn his head at the eastern Corinthian seaport town of Cenchrea due to a Jewish Nazarite vow he had taken at Corinth; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978 ed., ftn. to Acts 18:18.
- B. Such a vow covered a specific time period, the Mosaic Law requiring it end with the shaving of the head and going to the temple to make an appropriate sacrifice, Zond. Pict. Ency. of the Bible, v. Four, p. 393.
- C. However, Paul himself had before testified in his Galatian epistle that believers are free from the Law's stipulations such as the Nazarite vow, Ibid., Ryrie, p. 1662, "The Galatian Christians" with Gal. 5:1-6.
- D. To explain why Paul then had submitted to a Mosaic Law's vow rules even though he knew he was free from the Law, we view the circumstances to see Paul's human weakness had led him to fall back onto his heritage to handle a personally hard crisis, and that God was graciously longsuffering with him in it all:
 1. Before making this vow, Paul had traumatically been stoned at pagan Lystra on his first missionary journey, an event that led to ending that journey to return to his home church for rest, Acts 14:12-28.
 2. Then, on this his second missionary journey, Paul had arrived at very pagan Corinth to minister under stress due to its sin that recalled his near-death trouble back in pagan Lystra, Acts 18:1; 1 Cor. 2:1-3.
 3. Indeed, Paul was so afraid at Corinth for his physical welfare, Christ appeared to him in a night vision to encourage him to **stop** (present tense) **being afraid for his own benefit** (middle voice [*fobou*, cf. U. B. S. Greek N. T., 1966 ed., p. 489; Zondervan's Analyt. Greek Lex., p. 367], and **not start to be silent** (aorist tense, *siopeses*, Ibid., U. B. S. Greek N. T.; Ibid., Analyt. Greek Lex., p. 367), cf. Acts 18:9-10.
 4. F. F. Bruce, an authority on Paul, suggests Paul's vow may have been taken in connection to his Corinthian ministry, cf. Bruce, Com. on the Book of the Acts (NICNT), 1980, p. 377. If so, under the duress of that ministry, Paul had reverted to his heritage, committing himself to be separated unto the Lord for a period of time for special divine help as had previous Old Testament saints. God had thus given him a vision in response to this vow to tell Paul to **stop** being **afraid**, that He would protect him so no one would harm him as had occurred at Lystra, and that so Paul could disciple many people!
 5. Thus, since most Nazarite vows were limited in duration, when the vow had ended, Paul needed to shave his head and travel to Jerusalem, staying only briefly at Ephesus to reach the temple and offer his Nazarite vow sacrifice before going to his home Church at Antioch, Acts 18:19-22a, 22b; Ibid., p. 379.
 6. Thus, Paul's second missionary journey ended quickly due to his human weakness that had led to his performing a Nazarite vow! However, nowhere does the text show God critiquing Paul for weakness, but only encouraging and directing him to stop fearing harm so he could do God's will, Acts 18:9-10!

Lesson: *When Paul reverted back to his native heritage to plead for God's equipping to handle the fears he faced in his ministry at Corinth, Christ graciously worked to direct and encourage him in his human weakness, not condemning Paul for the fact that his vow had ended his second missionary journey!*

Application: *(1) May we be encouraged that God is compassionate toward our human frailty, and that He will work to encourage and direct us in relation to our weaknesses, Hebrews 5:6-10. (2) Yet, may we learn as did Paul that Christ is our All-Sufficient Lord Who equips us to fulfill His assignments no matter WHAT trials we face PROVIDING we DO HIS WILL in WHATEVER we face, Acts 18:9-10!*