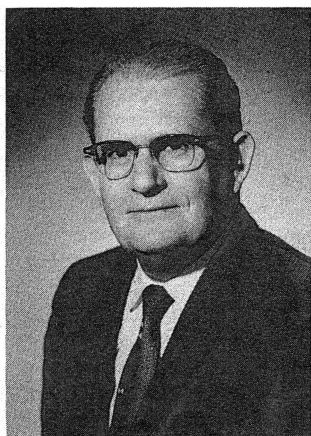


BAPTIST HOUR SERMONS

for September



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THE BONDAGE THAT DOOMS

September 6, 1959

"And some believed the things that were spoken, and some believed not" — Acts 28:24

As Paul neared Rome his heart was beset by two anxieties. Would the Christians shun him from fear of persecution? What would be the attitude of the Jews toward him and the gospel? The first concern was removed as a group of Christians welcomed him to Rome (Acts 28:15). Therefore, immediately after being settled in the city, Paul sent for the leaders of the Jews. He assured them that his imprisonment was not due to any disloyalty to Christ. Nor did he plan to bring any charge of false accusation against the Jewish people (vv.17ff). Instead it was the very "hope of Israel" which had brought him to his present unhappy state (v.20). They replied that they had received no letter of personal charges of accusation against Paul, but were desirous of hearing his own version of the Christian sect (v.22).

From this it appears that no apostle founded the church in Rome. Apparently Paul was the first Christian whom they regarded as authoritative to come to the capital city. So on an appointed day a large group of Jews came to hear Paul. From morning until evening he spoke. In the end "some believed" while others "believed not." Thus we are introduced to the bondage that dooms. This we shall see as we consider, first, the true Israel; second, the true bondage; third, the fatal choice.

First, note the true Israel. Paul said, ". . . for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain" (v.20). Thus he pointed up the hope which he held in common with these Jewish leaders. This hope involved the God-given destiny of the Israelite nation at the center of which stood the Messiah. Here as in many other of his utterances the apostle recognized no cleavage between the true Israel and Christianity. The former was the root of

which Christianity is the fruit. The cleavage resulted from a misunderstanding of both.

The "hope of Israel" invites a brief examination of the place of Israel in the economy of God. When she was constituted as a nation it was to the end that she was to be a priest-nation to a pagan world (Ex. 19:6), that it might be brought to the true worship of Jehovah. This relationship of Israel to God was conditional. In Exodus 19:5-6 God said, "Now therefore, *if* ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, *then* ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me . . . a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (author's italics).

Note the "if" and "then." Subsequent history reveals Israel's failure to keep the covenant. Therefore, in Jeremiah 31:31ff. God promised a "new covenant." The author of Hebrews interprets this new covenant as that which was sealed in the death of Jesus Christ (8:6ff). Thus in the New Testament as in the Old the "hope of Israel" is centered in the Messiah.

When the Messiah came He was rejected by official Judaism. Therefore, in Matthew 21 with two parables (vv.28-46) Jesus pointed up national Israel's failure and rejection as the "peculiar treasure" of God. I Peter 2:1-10 completes the picture as the apostle identifies the Christian family as the people of God. There are many problems involved in the details of which this is a bare outline.

The central difficulty in interpretation resides in the meaning of the "hope of Israel." If Israel be regarded as a nation, what of the promises made to her in the Old Testament? What of the continuing throne of David? However, the difficulty is resolved when we read Romans 9:1-11 where Paul clearly points out that the Israel of God is a spiritual and not a national group (9:6ff; cf. I Pet. 2:10). It is further resolved when we remember that the Messiah is a descendant of David (Matt. 1:1-17).

Thus when Paul preached to the Jewish leaders in Rome his theme was "the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus" (Acts 28:23). From the "law of Moses, and out of the prophets" he preached of the theocracy of God as finding its fulfilment in Jesus and His followers.

Luke comments that "some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not" (v.24). Literally translated this is a very revealing expression. "Some began to be persuaded, and some continued to disbelieve." This was ever the dual reaction among the Jews. It is still the responses given to the preaching concerning God's Kingdom and His Son.

Second, consider the true bondage. For the "hope of Israel" Paul was in chains, while his audience was comparatively free. A subject people, yet they enjoyed a fair degree of political liberty.

But when you look beneath the surface the situation is reversed. Paul is free, and the Jews are in bondage. This irony is everywhere evident throughout the New Testament. When Jesus stood trial before Pilate, He was free and Pilate was captive. Before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa, Paul was the only free man in the court. Before Nero, Paul was prisoner and the emperor was judge. History has reversed the order. Someone pointed out that today we name our boys after Paul and our dogs after Nero.

This reversal of order is detailed in John 8:32-36 where Jesus said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." The Jews replied, "We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man . . ." (v.33). Their Roman captors all about them denied their claim. They were in bondage but did not admit it. But their bondage, like that of Paul's audience, was more than political. The true bondage is that of the soul. What was the bondage which caused some of these Jews to continue to disbelieve?

There was the failure properly to re-

late the Old Testament teachings to those of the New Testament. They interpreted Paul's words in the light of "the law of Moses and . . . the prophets," rather than to interpret the latter in the light of the former. In their careful study of the plant they ignored the fruit. This is an erratic method in botany as well as in theology. You cannot understand the fruit without a knowledge of the plant. But the plant is meaningless apart from the fruit. So the proper relationship between the Old and New Testaments. In failing to discern this relationship the Jews missed their opportunity to drink of the fruit of the vine of true liberty in Christ.

Again their bondage was prejudice with regard to the true nature of Christianity. They regarded it as "this sect . . . that everywhere . . . is spoken against" (v.22). History tells us that some years earlier the emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome. If it were due to Christian disturbances, we may well understand these Jews' hostility toward Christianity. At any rate, failing to see it in its true light they listened to the false reports rather than to the gospel itself.

These two bondages are still with us. Multitudes endeavoring to confine Christian truth within Old Testament patterns miss the true liberty of salvation by grace through faith in Christ. Others remain in bondage to sin from fear of censure for turning from the world to a saving experience through Jesus. Even as I speak some of you are bound in the chains of Old Testament ritual and works as a means of salvation. Others of you think of the Christian *Way* as a sect everywhere spoken against rather than as the *Way* to life. From fear of losing the true values in life and of encountering the censure of your present way of life, you turn from the true values and the true life.

Third, the fatal choice. Note the sequence of events. Paul's final word was not spoken *after* they left. "They departed, after that Paul had spoken one word

. . ." (v.25). And what was the word? It was a quotation from Isaiah 6, a part of God's commission to the prophet. The import of this statement is that the Jews will hear without understanding and see without perceiving. Their hearts are heavy, their ears dull, and their eyes closed. This is a fatal condition wrought not by the arbitrary will of God, but as the result of their own obstinate wills. For this reason Paul says that "the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles . . ." (v.28). To them the apostle had made his last appeal. "The Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves" (v.29). And well they might, for they had made the fatal choice to their own loss of eternal life.

This is the inevitable result of rejected opportunity. Dr. G. Campbell Morgan reminds us that the words from Isaiah are quoted by Jesus (Matt. 13:14ff), John (12:40), and Paul. In each instance it was the pronouncement of doom upon those who had rejected the light of the gospel. The sense is that they closed their own eyes in refusing to see. They hardened their own hearts in refusing to yield.

Baptist Hour Sermon Topics for October

Dr. Herschel H. Hobbs

Theme: Judgment

- Oct. 4—The Two Faces of God (Romans 1:16-18)
- Oct. 11—The Impatience of God (Romans 1:19-32)
- Oct. 18—What Will You Say at the Judgment? (Romans 2:1-11)
- Oct. 25—Are the Heathen Lost? (Romans 2:12-29)

Hear them on

THE BAPTIST HOUR

Read them in

THE BEAM

God simply recognized the condition which they had willfully chosen. The Jew may still be saved, even as the Gentile. Both must yield themselves to Christ.

Let this be a warning to you. God gives you the light of truth, but you must see. He speaks the word of salvation, but you must heed. He opens the way, but you must walk in it. To refuse is for you to be spiritually blind, deaf, and lost. Like the Jews you may refuse only to be invited again. But the time will come when you can neither see, hear, nor re-

spond, either because of death or because of a final hardening of your heart. Then the choice is final and fatal. You will have been completely enslaved by the bondage that dooms.

While you can still see, hear, and respond, I beg you to do so. Your conviction of sin and consciousness of the need of salvation is God's Holy Spirit pleading with you about the "kingdom of God, persuading [you] . . . concerning Jesus." I pray that you will be fully persuaded as you place your faith in Him.

THE BONDAGE THAT SAVES

September 13, 1959

"Be it known unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it" — Acts 28:28

This is the last of our messages from the book of Acts. Luke has completed his account of the preaching of the gospel from Jerusalem to the uttermost part of the earth (1:8). Probably he intended writing another book (1:1). But for the present his purpose is realized. Many reasons have been suggested for this book. Perhaps all have merit. But we like that set forth by Dr. Frank Stagg that Luke is recording the first century struggle for an unhindered gospel despite persecution and rejection. The last word of Acts in the Greek text is an adverb (*akolutos*) meaning "unhinderedly."

After the Jews departed Paul remained in bondage for two whole years, dwelling in his own hired house, probably chained to a Roman soldier. Note that Paul practiced the complete separation of church and state. Out of his own funds he provided a place to preach and teach the gospel. In that regard he was "unhindered" by any obligation to the Roman government. During this time he wrote some of his greatest epistles and continued

to preach and teach with his customary fervor. Though the messenger was in bondage, the word of God was not bound (II Tim. 2:9). In this thought we are reminded of the bondage that saves. Though Paul was in bondage, he loosed the gospel which struck off the shackles of ignorance and sin which bound others.

This we shall see as we examine, first, the message declared; second, the message received; third, the message defined.

First, note the message declared. In verse 28 Paul describes it as "the salvation of God." The word translated "salvation" is often used in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) to refer to the Messianic salvation. It could also mean the One bringing salvation (Lk. 2:30). So the center of Paul's message was Jesus as the Messiah, the One bringing God's salvation.

We noted last week how Paul preached Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah or Christ. Remember also that some of the Jews began to be persuaded, while others continued to disbelieve. Therefore the apostle said that "the one bringing the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles,