

CHAPTER 30, PAUL'S FINAL DAYS

TIMELESS TRUTH: SUFFERING AND PERSEVERANCE ARE PART OF THE CHRISTIAN JOURNEY.

CHAPTER SUMMARY (Have someone in your group read the summary section.)

If one could earn frequent traveler miles two thousand years ago, Paul might hold a record. After spending nearly three years in Ephesus, he retraced his steps through Greece and Macedonia before docking in Miletus. There, he summoned the Ephesian elders for a tearful and final farewell. He charged them with shepherding the church of God. After a brief stay with Philip in Caesarea, Paul headed for Jerusalem, knowing that chains awaited him there.

Paul seemed to always be able to stir up a controversy. Just walking into the temple court stirred up trouble. The Jews tried to kill him in Jerusalem so the Roman authorities stepped in to arrest him. While being taken into custody, Paul gave his testimony before an angry crowd. The Roman commander brought him before the Sanhedrin to get some answers, but that only made the problem worse. Paul remained in protective custody and was transferred to Caesarea's higher court where he remained for two years before appealing to Caesar.

When Paul wrote to the church in Rome while still on his missionary journeys, he told them that he planned to visit them. He probably did not anticipate his "fourth missionary journey" to be under these circumstances. Luke joined him on this cruise to Rome with Julius, a kind Imperial centurion, as Paul's personal escort. Paul warned the crew that sailing on in bad weather would be disastrous, but they continued anyway. Conditions worsened to hurricane force winds off the coast of Crete driving their ship every which way. Weeks later the storm had not weakened, but all thoughts of survival surely had. Food was low, gear was gone, hope was gone. What seemed like a bad episode of Gilligan's Island became unlikely opportunities for Paul to talk about God. The next morning they arrived safely ashore on Malta where the islanders showed exceptional hospitality. When Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake without incident, the people thought he was either a criminal or a god. Paul healed many of the locals during their winter stay there. Three months later they were finally able to set sail for Rome.

Paul was greeted by believers at the port of Puteoli, modern day Pozzuoli, about 150 miles south of Rome. They encouraged him and he spent a week there before traveling on. When the Roman Christians heard he was coming, they joined him for the final forty miles of his trek to Rome where Paul was confined to house arrest under the supervision of a soldier. Paul invited the Jewish leaders to come to his house. There he told them about his conflict with the Jerusalem Jews and the fulfillment of the Scriptures by Jesus. Some believed, but others rejected his message. So, once again, Paul pronounced his mission to the Gentiles. He spent the next two years boldly teaching anyone who would stop by about Jesus (60-62 A.D.). In his spare time, Paul corresponded with some old friends.

Paul had a special place in his heart for the church in Ephesus. He had spent three years there developing the new church (Acts 20:31). He wrote to remind them of the high calling in Christ that is the basis of God's plan to unite all believers—Jews and Gentiles alike—in one body, the Church. Therefore, those who are called are to conduct themselves in the highest of ethical standards. Although the world is hostile, believers are to preserve unity in the Spirit. During his final Roman imprisonment (67-68 A.D.), Paul wrote to Timothy to encourage him to be faithful in preserving the gospel in the midst of persecution and false teachers. Timothy faced hardship in Ephesus. So knowing he was probably facing execution soon, Paul penned a heartfelt letter to strengthen this son even from a damp, cold dungeon in Rome.

ICEBREAKER QUESTION: Has there been a more mature Christian who has helped guide you in your spiritual growth? What did they do that most helpful for you?

1. From his farewell speech, describe Paul's ministry in Ephesus (p. 439-440). Look up 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. What did he teach about the responsibility of elders from his personal life, his farewell address, and his letters?
2. In 1 Corinthians 4:16 and 11:1 and 1 Thessalonians 1:6, how was Paul an imitator of Christ throughout his ordeals and what are the implications for believers today?
3. Paul was a Jewish Pharisee and a Roman citizen (p. 443) who exercised his rights as either at various times in his life. Discuss as a group the appropriate exercise of our civil rights in the light of our "heavenly citizenship".
4. What evidence of God's grace and sovereignty can you find in Paul's arrests, trials, and travels?
5. Look up Acts 28:30-31, Ephesians 6:20, Philippians 1:7, Colossians 4:10 and 4:18, and Philemon 1. How did Paul spend his two years while under house arrest in Rome (p. 452). What lessons can you learn about dealing with disagreeable and difficult circumstances?
6. Ephesians 1:1-10 (p. 452) teaches that as Christians we are "in Christ." What benefits and blessings does this status bring us?
7. Paul urged the believers in Ephesus to "*live a life worthy of the calling*" that they had received (p. 455, Ephesians 4:1). According to Paul's letter, what does that mean?
8. What makes the marriage relationship a good metaphor for the church's relationship to Christ? What does Christ do for the church (p. 455, Ephesians 5:21-33)?
9. Look up Romans 5:3-5 and 2 Timothy 3:10-17 (p. 457-458). What has Paul's life taught you about perseverance? What might perseverance look like for us today?
10. Paul reminded Timothy of his need to persevere in the work of preparing a future generation of Christian servants using the three illustrations of a soldier, athlete, and farmer (p. 457, 2 Timothy 2:1-7). How does each one help Timothy fulfill his call while facing hardships? Which of these traits do all believers need to fulfill their service to the Lord, even today?

In the time remaining ask your group members to share any of their personal reflection insights from their journal entries.

CLOSING PRAYER

CHAPTER 31, THE END OF TIME

Journal your answers to these questions as you read through the chapter this week. You may wish to read one day and journal the next, or spread the questions over the whole week.

DAY 1

1. As you study this final chapter of *The Story* throughout your week, develop a comprehensive description in your journal of God the Father and of Jesus the Son. For example, on page 459, Jesus Christ is “*the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.*” How does this portrait of Christ in Revelation compare to the Christ of the Gospels?
2. Jesus had a message for each of the churches in Asia (p. 461-462). Identify the problem and the solution in each church. What was promised to the one who overcomes it? How could we apply the messages to these Asian churches to ourselves today?

DAY 2

1. Sketch or paint the throne room of God as it is described on pages 463-464.
2. How will Christ’s second coming (p. 466) differ from His first coming in purpose and in scope? (See Matthew 25:31-34, 41; Mark 10:45; John 3:16-17; and Acts 17:30-31 for further insight.)
3. Read Matthew 24:29-44, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, and Titus 2:11-14. How should Christ’s second coming apply to your life now?

DAY 3

1. Now that you have studied the New Heaven, New Earth, and New Jerusalem, what do you look forward to the most (p. 466-469)?
2. What did this chapter of *The Story* contribute to your understanding of God’s Upper Story of redemption? How might you respond to a Christian friend who sees no value in or is confused by studying Revelation?
3. Spend a few minutes reflecting on your *Story* experience and then capture some of those thoughts in a paragraph below. Be sure to include how God’s Upper Story impacts how you live now.