

THE INCREDIBLE HISTORY OF GOD'S TRUE CHURCH - (5)

By

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CHAPTER FIVE - THE UTMOST BOUNDS OF THE WEST

OF St. Paul's journey to Britain, a point of great importance in the history of the gospel, and of the Protestant church, we fortunately possess as substantial evidence as any historical fact can require.

"Some of our most valuable Ecclesiastical historians have no scruple in acceding to the general testimony of the Fathers that the Gospel was preached in Britain by some of the Apostles soon after the middle of the first century."

So wrote Bishop T. Burges in 1815. *(1)* Burges was not alone in his view; many other authorities could be cited which uphold this position.

Even the most cautious of writers feels compelled to admit that "whether any apostle or companion of an apostle, ever visited Britain, cannot be determined; yet the balance of probability rather inclines towards the affirmative." *(2)*

William Cave presents the case in more positive terms when he relates that "Theodoret and others tell us that he (the apostle Paul) preached not only in Spain, but that he went to other nations and brought the gospel into the isles of the sea, by which he undoubtedly means Britain; and therefore elsewhere reckons the Gauls and Britons among the nations which the apostles, and particularly the tentmaker, persuaded to embrace the law of Christ." *(3)*

The actual statement of Theodoret made in A.D. 435 is as follows: "Paul, liberated from his first captivity at Rome, preached the Gospel to the Britons and Others in the West. Our fishermen and publicans not only persuaded the Romans and their tributaries to acknowledge the Crucified and His laws but the Britons also and the Cimbri [Cymry, i.e. Welsh]."

"When Paul was sent by Festus on his appeal to Rome, he traveled, after being acquitted, into Spain, and thence extended his excursions into other countries, and to the islands surrounded by the sea." *(4)*

Venantius Fortunatus in A.D. 560 mentions that "St. Paul passed over the ocean to the Island of Britain, and to Thule, the extremity of the earth."

It is significant to note that almost all early authorities relating to Paul's visit to Britain are non-British in origin, largely coming from a Greek or Latin background. There can be no possibility that the visit was a mere fabrication of British writers who were seeking an apostolic foundation for the British church on patriotic or political grounds.

Perhaps the most important of all sources concerning Paul's movements after leaving Rome is the epistle of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians. In an attempt to encourage the Christians at Corinth to remain firmly established in the true faith, he relates firstly how Peter, and then Paul met their deaths: "Let us set before our eyes the Holy Apostles: Peter by unjust envy underwent not one, or two but many sufferings; till at last being martyred, he went to the place of glory that was due to him. For the same cause, did Paul in like manner receive the reward of his patience. Seven times he was in bonds; he was whipped, was stoned; he preached both in the East and in the West; leaving behind him the glorious report of his faith.

"And so having taught the whole world righteousness, and for that end traveled even to the utmost bounds of the West; he at last suffered martyrdom by the command of the governors."(5)

This epistle was written in A.D. 95-96. Clement was not writing centuries after the events described but was in fact a contemporary of Paul, writing less than thirty years after Paul's martyrdom.

Iraeneus in the second century speaks of Clement, "who also has seen the blessed Apostles and conversed with them and had the preaching of the Apostles still ringing in his ears and their tradition before his eyes." Origen in the third century mentions "Clement the disciple of the Apostles" and "the faithful Clement to whom Paul bears testimony."

Not only Origen, but Eusebius and many other early writers identify Clement with "*Clement also, and with other my fellow helpers, whose names are in the book of life*" (Paul's epistle to the **Philippians 4:3**).

"The tradition that he (Clement) was the disciple of one or both of these Apostles (Peter and Paul) is early, constant, and definite; and it is borne out by the character and contents of the epistle itself."(7)

Some controversy has surrounded the question of what precisely Clement meant by his statement "*the utmost bounds of the West.*" Was he thinking of Spain or Britain?

In ancient times the term was used to define both Spain and Britain. The Greeks considered Spain to be the western extremity of the known world. When Clement was writing, Britain was commonly known as the western extremity or boundary of the Roman empire.

According to T. Burges, "This is not a rhetorical expression, but the usual designation of Britain. Theodoret speaks of the inhabitants of Spain, Gaul and Britain as dwelling in the utmost bounds of the west."

"Nicephorus says, that the Britons inhabited the utmost parts of the West." St. Paul therefore in going to the utmost bounds of the West went to Britain.

According to Jerome, "Between Spain and Britain there was a frequent intercourse."

The most logical conclusion must surely be that had Clement wished to specify one particular country, and one alone, he would have named it. By using a more general term, however, he could include Spain, Gaul (France) and Britain.

A work conducted in these regions would have been quite in keeping with Christ's command to His apostles to take the Gospel to "*the uttermost part of the earth*" (**Acts 1:8**).(7)

Paul spoke of those, including himself, who would spread glad tidings "*unto the ends of the world*" (**Romans 10:18**)

The warning given in **Revelation** that nothing should be added to, or taken from, "*the things which are written in this book*" (**Revelation 22:19**) might lead some to assume that all of the inspired writings of the New Testament Church are included in the canon of the Bible.

Internal evidence from the New Testament itself, however, clearly disproves any such assumption. Luke records that many accurate and authentic accounts of the life of Jesus Christ were in circulation at the time that he began his narrative (**Luke 1:1-2**).

Paul mentions in his "first" epistle to the Corinthians that "*I wrote to you in that letter*" proving that at least one other epistle had been written to the Corinthian church before his so-called "first" epistle (**I Corinthians 5:9**).

An epistle was also sent to the Laodiceans (**Colossians 4:16**) which is not included in the canon of the New Testament.

Several commentators have expressed their surprise at the obviously "*unfinished*" state of the book of Acts. It stops in the middle of the story, with some seven years of Paul's life yet to be covered. Luke, although an experienced and polished writer, does not even end with the usual "*Amen.*"

Some scholars feel that Luke had intended writing a third volume covering the remaining years of Paul's life. Perhaps a more logical view would be that he would write a continuation and conclusion to Acts.

Paul mentions that Luke was still with him about A.D. 67, shortly before Paul was martyred (II Timothy 4:11). The clear implication is that Luke remained with Paul for at least a part, if not all, of the remaining years between the conclusion of **Acts** in A.D. 61 and Paul's martyrdom in A.D. 68.

It would seem hardly logical that Luke would not fail to complete his narrative; the question should perhaps be asked, if the book of Acts was completed what became of the final section, and why was it left out of the New Testament canon?

Daniel records that some information relating to the history of the nation of Israel and the "*holy people*" or Church of God was to be "*closed up and sealed*" - that is kept secret - until "*the time of the end*" or our modern generation. The concluding section of Acts could well have been deliberately omitted, under God's inspiration, from the New Testament canon only to be "*discovered*" at a later time in history, near the time of the end of this age.

A Greek manuscript has indeed been discovered in the archives of Constantinople which purports to be the concluding portions of Acts, and reads like a continuation of it. Its origin is uncertain but it was translated into English in 1801 by C.S. Sonnini.

The fact that the M.S. was discovered at Constantinople could well be significant. Jerome records that Luke's remains were brought to this city in A.D. 357 and buried there. The Monarchian Prologue also seems to imply that Luke spent the later part of his life in this general vicinity. "*He never had a wife or children, and died at the age of seventy-four in Bithnia full of the Holy Spirit.*"

Constantinople, also known at times as Byzantium and Istanbul, lay at the border between the provinces of Thrace and Bithynia (sometimes spelled Bithnia).

It was also at Constantinople that a great many New Testament manuscripts were preserved, at least from the fourth century onwards. It was upon this Byzantine text that the later English versions were largely based

Although one cannot be dogmatic regarding the authorship of Sonnini's translation of what has

been called *"The long lost chapter of the Acts of the Apostles,"* it should be said that there is a great deal of information contained in this M.S. which can be verified by reference to other independent sources.

The terminology and style of writing in the M.S. is very similar, if not identical to that used by Luke in Acts.

The text of the M.S. begins at the point that Acts finishes, and reads as follows:

"And Paul, full of the blessings of Christ, and abounding in the spirit, departed out of Rome, determining to go into Spain, for he had a long time purposed to journey thitherward, and was minded also to go from thence into Britain.

"For he had heard in Phoenicia that certain of the children of Israel, about the time of the Assyrian captivity, had escaped by sea to 'the isles afar off,' as spoken by the prophet, and called by the Romans Britain."

"And the Lord commanded the gospel to be preached far hence to the Gentiles, and to the lost sheep of the House of Israel."

"And no man hindered Paul; for he testified boldly of Jesus before the tribunes and among the people; and he took with him certain of the brethren which abode with him at Rome, and they took shipping at Ostium, and having the winds fair were brought safely into a haven of Spain."

"And much people were gathered together from the towns and villages and the hill country; for they had heard of the conversion of the apostle, and the many miracles which he had wrought."

"And Paul preached mightily in Spain, and great multitudes believed and were converted, for they perceived he was an apostle sent from God."

Commentators have noted with interest the special attention that Luke, in Acts, gives to sea itineraries and ports of arrival and departure. A similar tendency is found in the text of the M.S. Ostium was the port used by sea travelers from Rome during the first century.

It was Paul's stated intention to visit Spain after leaving Rome (**Romans 15:24 and 28**), and not only Spanish tradition but also the testimonies of many early writers confirm that Paul did indeed visit that area after leaving Rome.

The *"haven of Spain"* mentioned in the M.S. was almost certainly the port of Gades or Cadiz. A colony of Israelite and Phoenician peoples was established here from very ancient times. This was probably the port of Tarshish (Spain) that Jonah was heading for centuries earlier, when he tried to escape from God.

"Cadiz was the commercial centre of Western Europe, and was no doubt the place St. Paul had in mind when, writing to the Romans, he spoke of his journey into Spain."

"His journey into Spain is mentioned, as if it were a well known historical fact by Jerome, Chrysostom and Theodoret... There was ample opportunity for St. Paul to visit Cadiz, and to found a church there, during the six years that elapsed between his first and second imprisonment at Rome; and among his Spanish converts there could hardly fail to be some who traded with the British Isles." (8)

There was nothing in the least unusual about a sea voyage between Rome and Cadiz during the

first century; *"the commercial and passenger traffic with Gades was intimate and constant."*(9)

Anyone who visits Cadiz and the surrounding countryside can readily equate this area with the *"haven of Spain"* and its nearby *"hill country"* described in the M.S.

To Be Continued

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