

## **Apostle Paul Offering Sacrifices**

**By Paul R. Blake**

A brother in a neighboring congregation asked the question: "Why was Paul involved in the temple and sacrifices in Acts 21? Since the Law of Moses was made of no effect in Christ, did he sin?"

Paul and his companions arrived at Jerusalem and met with the Jerusalem brethren who received them gladly. The next day, Paul and his companions met with James and the elders to give a description of the "things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry." The brethren glorified the Lord upon hearing these things. James and the elders explained to Paul the problem they faced. Many of Jews believed, but they were also zealous for the law and customs of Moses. They had been miss-informed that Paul taught Jews, living among the Gentiles, to forsake Moses; that is, Jews were not to circumcise their children nor keep the customs. They expected the Jewish believers to learn that Paul was in Jerusalem and that they would be troubled. James and the elders gave Paul a plan; he should accompany the four men who had taken a vow, purify himself, and pay their expenses, all in an effort to show that Paul still kept the customs of a Jew. They restated that the believing Gentiles were not subject to the law (Acts 15-25). Paul followed their plan. He took the men and was purified with them.

While the covenant of the Law of Moses was voided by the cross and justification was now in Christ and not the Law, it is true that God accepted the Christians of Hebrew origins to practice elements of the Law if their conscience required them to do so. For example, in Romans 14, Paul writes that some Christians feel compelled to observe the feast and fast days and to avoid unclean meats. While God is indifferent to those old restrictions from the Law of Moses, He expects Jewish Christians to continue to observe them if their conscience felt guilty if they did not do it. In fact, Paul said he would avoid meats if it troubled the tender conscience of brethren to see him eat it (1Cor. 8).

The vow under question is called the Nazarite vow. It was a custom among men who believed themselves blessed by God to undergo the Nazarite rites to discipline themselves as an expression of gratitude and a promise of future service in return for God's blessings. While this had nothing to do with salvation in Christ, it was a powerful custom among those with Hebrew heritage. Apparently these four men's conscience required them to do this, just as in Romans 14 those brethren avoided meat and observed the feast and fast days. God permitted them to do it because of their tender conscience.

In addition, Paul, by helping them with purifying himself with fasting and washing and by paying their expenses, was doing exactly what he wrote in 1Corinthians 8 about accommodating the tender consciences of weaker brethren.

Regarding the Nazarite customs of Paul's day: "Among the Jews, it was common to make vows to God on extraordinary occasions; and that of the Nazarite appears to have been one of the most common; and it was permitted by the law for any person to perform this vow by proxy. It was also customary for the richer sort to bestow their charity on the poorer sort for this purpose." (Barnes Notes)

As brethren grew in their understanding about the passing of the Law and that it was not necessary to keep on practicing the rituals, offerings, and vows for conscience sake, this sort of behavior would gradually disappear. As Jews became scattered after the destruction of Jerusalem, their customs would become increasingly irrelevant. But for a time near the beginning of the church, Christians with a Hebrew background often had strong conscience scruples toward practicing elements of the Law. God permitted it and continues to permit it today.

For example, if a man is converted out of Catholicism, but still feels guilty about eating meat on Friday, God expects him to avoid meat on Fridays for his conscience's sake, even though it is Catholicism. It doesn't matter one little bit whether or not you and I think he ought to cease practicing Catholic doctrine. What matters is God accepts him. It did not matter one bit that the Law of Moses was no longer valid. What mattered was that there were hundreds of Jewish believers who were troubled in heart and conscience about Paul, so he accommodated their tender conscience (Rom. 14:2-6, 20-23; 1Cor. 8:7-13).

### **Feeding Seagulls**

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2Tim. 2:15).

The story is told of a small fishing village where, for many years, a flock of sea gulls fed on the scraps the fishermen left. All was fine and good for the sea gulls until eventually the fishing became poor, and the villagers moved down the coast to a location where fish were more plentiful. The sea gulls did not follow the fishermen and--because they had lived off the scraps of the fishermen and never learned to feed themselves--the entire flock of birds died. Believers who feed only on what others teach them are like those foolish sea gulls. (From 1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching, p. 32)

### **Sister Ethel Palm By Carol Strum**

Sister Palm to Christians at TR was one of dearest, elderly, faithful Christian sisters who has gone on to be with our Savior. She, in our eyes, has very little. She lived in an old trailer with her husband who never did become a Christian. She had no children. She lost most of her hearing, but you never heard her complain. She felt very blessed in this life. You see, Jesus died on the cross for her; she had Jesus as her Savior. She had a Christian family at TR; she had God's word in her hands. She was very blessed.

She was an encouragement to us all. I was a child at the time. Many of us were young, but we still hold her dear to our hearts. You see, due to her loss of hearing, she did not notice when we finished a hymn. We all listened to sister Palm sing from the bottom of her heart as she finished the hymn. I have talked to many here who remember sister Palm. We all are in agreement. The Lord enjoyed her singing more than anyone else, because her hymns truly came from her heart.

### **A Moments Wisdom**

--We should never do by law what can be accomplished by morality.

--To talk a lot and say nothing is like climbing a tree to catch fish.

--Fortune lost, nothing lost; courage lost, much lost; honor lost, more lost; soul lost, all lost.