Bible Study 52

August 10th, 2022

The Letter to the Romans (continued)

There are two kinds of Jews in the era of Paul and Jesus: Palestinian Jews and Diaspora Jews. Jesus is a Jew who lives in Palestine; Paul is a Diaspora Jew who lives in Cilicia, born in the town of Tarsus. Jesus never leaves Palestine and speaks Aramaic and Hebrew. Paul travels widely throughout the Roman Empire and speaks Greek and Hebrew.

Why is there a difference between the Jews of Palestine and the Diaspora Jews? Several reasons come to mind. First Palestinian Jews were a conquered people living and ruled by the Romans. Whereas Diaspora Jews felt themselves a part of the Roman Empire. They had a wider education and accepted Rome as the natural authority.

Paul lived in a town that had self-rule because it was an important trading city. It had a Roman Garrison. Tarsus stood at a crossroads on major trade route north to south and east to west. The city had enormous wealth and the Jewish Diaspora community of merchants played a large part in that. Paul’s father seemed to have been so influential in his service to the Empire that the entire family were granted Roman Citizenship. Not something any Palestinian Jew could have accomplished.

Again, Palestinian Jews were steeped in the Torah, the Law of Moses, the Sects such as Pharisees, Sadducees and Zealots and Jewish daily practice and tradition. Diaspora Jews were much more influenced by Greek Culture. Greece was regarded as the home of Philosophy, and learning. Paul was obviously exposed to this, though it is not reflected in his epistles. Without doubt he is highly educated first in Tarsus and later at the rabbinic school in Jerusalem. Paul is a master of the Old Testament, the Law and the Jewish writings.

Chapter 13 begins with Paul extolling the virtues of the established authorities as having been put in place by God himself. Paul seems to support the Roman authorities even down to the obligation to pay taxes.

From verse 8 he extolls the ‘great commandment.’ It is the very center of the Jewish covenant: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Paul tells the Romans that the time for salvation is t hand comparing it to the end of darkness and the coming of the new day. Here we see clearly that Paul expects the end of this present world and the second coming of Christ in his lifetime.

Chapter 14: In this chapter Paul wants to stress that no one should lord it over anyone else for any reason. Not because of what they eat or the tradition in Judaism that they follow. Obviously, in dealing with long established Jews as well as newly converts who are Gentiles there will have been many conflicts in those early days. Paul stresses that Christ died for all and that we should not be judging our brother. He wants all arguments over clean and unclean food to stop and instead for all to concentrate on the grace that God gives us through Jesus Christ.

Read: Chapter 13 and 14