

Romans: Verse-by-Verse

Romans 15:23-27

Study Notes:

Now that Paul has explained to the Romans the character and the scope of his apostolic ministry, he lays out his travel plans – emphasizing his intentions to visit Rome: 1. He will sail from Corinth to Jerusalem. 2. He will go from Jerusalem to Rome. 3. He will travel from Rome to Spain.

Paul's Travel Itinerary:

- **The Journey to Rome**

At the beginning of this letter, Paul told the Romans that he had long desired to visit them – Now he's told them that his apostolic ministry to the Gentile world had occupied so many years. But now, he sees a window of opportunity.

Verse 23: "But now ... there is no more place for me to work in these regions..."

Is Paul saying there is nothing more he could have done in the Mediterranean area? I think he is reflecting on his primary mission stated in verse 20: "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation."

The work of laying the foundation of the Church among the Greeks has been accomplished. Paul has established leadership for the newly planted churches, and he is ready to move on. In that sense, nothing remains to be done.

Looking towards Rome, Paul's visit to Rome will be just that – a visit. Unlike his extended stay at Ephesus, Paul intends to visit Rome on his way to Spain. In this case, Spain is the true objective, not Rome.

Why? Paul is being consistent in his ministry objectives. Rome has an established Church. Rome is a stepping-stone to Spain. His true destination is Spain, where he can continue to plant churches and not “build on someone else's foundation”.

The 10-40 Window Parallel:

The single largest unreached region in our current world is called the 10-40 window (the region located between 10 and 40 degrees north of the equator, encompassing the Sahara and Northern Africa, as well as most of Asia).

Roughly 2/3rds of earth's population lives in the 10/40 Window. It has the greatest number of unreached people groups in the entire world.

It is predominantly Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist. Many of the governments in the 10/40 Window are officially or unofficially opposed to Christian work of any kind within their borders.

If Paul were doing apostolic/missionary work today, where do you think he would be focusing his attention?

I think he would be making every effort to impact the 10/40 window – where establishing a beachhead for Christ is most needed. That's what he did in the first century, that's what he would do in the 21st century.

This is one of the reasons that our church's missions' team has been focusing on sending new missionaries to the 10/40 window. There are already a great number of missionaries in places where the Gospel has long been established. The greater need is the 10/40 window.

- **Assisting Paul On His Journey:**

Verse 24: “... to have you assist me on my journey there...”

By this point in Church history, the Greek verb translated as “assist” had come to be a technical term for supporting missionaries in their work and travels.

Paul is hoping for an ongoing relationship with the Christians in Rome – and that they will continue to support him in the same way other churches had done in the past.

- **The Journey to Jerusalem: v. 25**

“Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there.”

Paul changes the discussion from his ground-breaking missionary work among the Gentiles to his service to the saints in Jerusalem. One is a pioneering effort; the other is a supportive role.

Look at verses 26-27:

“For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to contribute for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.”

Paul shows us both sides of his ministry: one to the unreached Gentile areas and the other to the established Messianic Christians in Jerusalem.

Paul may have been the premier apostle to the Gentiles, but he has not forgotten his obligations to the Jewish community.

Note: Some believers only want to take the Gospel to the unsaved. Others seem to only want to build up the body of Christ. Paul points to a balance of ministry. We must seek to win people to Christ, while not neglecting our ministry to the body of Christ. Both are necessary ministries.

Some insights on Paul's purposes in visiting Jerusalem: 1. The churches in Macedonia and Achaia (the northern and southern regions of Greece), were happy to contribute for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

How did Jerusalem end up with so many impoverished Christians?

Some have suggested it was a result of the "severe famine" that the prophet Agabus predicted in Acts 11: That a great famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This famine took place during the reign of Emperor Claudius.)

Because of this prophecy, the Christians in Antioch began to gather money to send to the believers in Judea. They sent the money with Paul and Barnabas.

A second explanation stems from the earliest days of the spread of the Gospel. When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, there were hundreds of Jewish visitors and Gentile Proselytes present. After Peter preached, some 3,000 people accepted Jesus as the Messiah.

In the days that followed, many of these visitors did not return home. They stayed in Jerusalem and became part of the embryonic Church. As a result, local Christians sold their possessions and made them available to support the growing population.

While we applaud their generosity, it's possible that this strategy resulted in a large group of poor Christians in Jerusalem. This may be the explanation for the need to take offerings and send them back to Jerusalem.

Getting back to Paul's statements, he writes that the Macedonian and Achaian Christians were pleased to contribute for the Jerusalem poor.

The Greek word for "contribution" stems from the word, "koinonia", which means a "common share". There is a play on words here as well. Paul says that they willingly offered these gifts – but they were

responding to Paul's urging that they give them. That's Christian fund raising! While we give willingly, it is usually after someone has impressed upon us the need to do so.

Verse 27: "They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings."

Paul says the Greek believers' gifts were really a payment of a debt! This is a throwback to Romans 11:11, where Paul makes it clear that Israel's spiritual failures led to the Gentiles being grafted into the vine. In that sense, the Gentiles owe a great debt to the Israelites!

For Paul, the gifts received from the Gentiles are symbolic of their understanding of their relationship to the Jewish Christians. If the Gentiles are being blessed spiritually by the Jews, then they ought to share financially with them.