

Tertius of Iconium: Apostle Paul's Secretary

(By Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

- A. Tertius of Iconium (also Tertios) acted as an amanuensis (a literary assistant, one who takes dictation or copies manuscripts) for Paul the Apostle, wrote down his epistle to the Romans
 - 1. Rom. 16:22 - "I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord."
 - 2. Tertius of Iconium (also Tertios) acted as an amanuensis (a literary assistant, one who takes dictation or copies manuscripts) for Paul the Apostle, wrote down his epistle to the Romans
 - 3. Tertius is believed to be numbered among the seventy disciples Jesus sent out in Luke 10:1. As this cannot be proven, and as Tertius is a Roman name meaning "the third child," it is doubtful that he was a Jew from Palestine. The names Secundus, Tertius, Quartus, Quintus, et al. were common among Romans
 - 4. He was also believed to be an elder at the church in Iconium along with Sospater, and that he died a martyr.

I. PAUL USED SCRIBES TO WRITE DOWN HIS DICTATION

- A. Jer. 36:1-8 - "We know that a number of Biblical writers did not pen their own works but rather dictated them to a scribe. In the ancient world many books were written by a person dictating... to a scribe. ... Jeremiah dictated his words to Baruch." (Don Stewart, Blue Letter Bible)
 - 1. Paul signed his epistles at the end to authenticate the writing, as a mark of his own personal interest in his readers' wellbeing, and as a precaution against forgeries by false teachers.
 - 2. 1Cor. 16:21; Col. 4:18; Phile. 19; 2Thes. 3:17; Gal. 6:11
 - 3. Peter used a scribe - 1Peter 5:12
 - 4. The use of a scribe had no impact on the authority of the scriptures.
 - 5. "The fact that the Biblical writers used a scribe or an amanuensis to write down their words does not affect Bible authority. The words and thoughts were Paul's own which the Holy Spirit directed. The scribe only recorded his words. The same holds true for the writings of the prophet Jeremiah and of Peter. The actual written words were the ones the Lord had given them. ... The fact that they did not actually do the physical writing has nothing to do with the Divine inspiration of the finished product. It was Paul's work guided by the Holy Spirit. The same is true for the writings of the prophet Jeremiah and the Apostle Peter. The key is where the words originated, not who put them into written form."
(https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_1243.cfm)
 - 6. "It was common in rabbinic literature to mention the name of an amanuensis. (Edwards, Romans: Understanding the Bible Commentary Series, 361)

7. "The sender of a letter in antiquity, after dictating most of it, frequently wrote the last few words in his own hand." (F.F. Bruce, Romans, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 265)
- B. Only Baruch and Tertius are revealed by the Holy Spirit as secretaries of Bible writers. There had to have been a purpose for that.
 1. Much is said about Baruch and his work with Jeremiah. We hold him in esteem for his humility and integrity in service to the prophet.

II. WHAT KIND OF MAN WAS TERTIUS?

- A. The likeliest explanation of how he met Paul is that it may have been in Corinth, where Tertius became one of Paul's traveling companions.
 1. Since Tertius greets the readers of Romans, it is at least possible he was known to Christians in Rome. It is at least possible he was one of the Jews expelled from Rome who found their way to Corinth, like Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:1-4).
 2. His greeting, which was permitted by the Holy Spirit, is very brief and to the point. He offers his name and the simple fact of his participation. It would support the apostle Paul's efforts to authenticate the epistle.
 3. The brevity of his greeting implies humility. He did not inflate his role as companion and aid to the apostle - 1Cor. 1:26, 29
 4. His greeting suggests an interest in the Roman disciples. It would encourage them to know that, not just Paul, but also his companions knew of and cared about the faith and struggles of the Roman brethren
 5. His greeting underlines the fellowship they share in the Lord. It expresses the same spirit of the apostle Peter - 1Peter 2:17, 5:9
- B. How important was Tertius' work?
 1. His role as a scribe was very humble, but as necessary as Paul's inspiration and zeal. We owe him gratitude for our possession of the epistle. The power generated by the nuclear plant depends on the small cog that transfers the energy as it does on the generator that produces the electricity
 - a. There is dignity, reward, and empowerment in subordinate work
 - b. Mark 9:41; 1Cor. 16:15-18
 2. His role as a subordinate required integrity and careful attention to detail. It was important that no jot or tittle was overlooked in writing down the words of the inspired apostle. Just as Paul had to speak every word from the Holy Spirit correctly, so Tertius would have to write them with equal diligence.
 3. His role as a subordinate did not require an ongoing public profile. His focus was on his work and his support of the apostle's inspiration. His personal ambitions were second to these concerns. It is more important that Christ be remembered by those we serve than that we are remembered for how we served Him

III. THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

- A. The Epistle to the Romans is Paul's magnum opus; the weightiest, longest, and most influential of the apostle's writings.
 - 1. It is the only letter that he wrote to a church that he did not begin and as such it lays the foundation for his teaching and an introduction to the church at Rome he planned to visit - Rom. 1:10-12, 15, 15:24, 28
 - 2. Some of Paul's company was with him in Corinth when he wrote Romans: Timothy, Luke, Jason, and Sosipater; a few Corinthian disciples sent their greetings as well: Gaius the host, Erastus the city treasurer, and Quartus
- B. How much work was involved in writing Romans?
 - 1. "Some have approximated an amanuensis' pace to be eleven words per minute. Given the time necessary to take normal dictation in antiquity, Paul may have taken over eleven hours to dictate this letter to Tertius. Given the cost of papyrus and of the labor required (though Tertius, a believer, might have donated his services), scholars estimate the cost of Romans at 20.68 denarii, which is roughly \$2,275.00 in recent US currency. The travel time to deliver a letter from Corinth to Rome by sea would have been about ten days; the same letter would have taken about two months to travel by land from Corinth to Rome. In other words, Paul did not simply offer this project as an afterthought; Romans is a carefully premeditated work. (Keener, Romans: New Covenant Commentary Series, 1-2)

IV. TERTIUS MODELED INTEGRITY

- A. Integrity is honesty, faithfulness, sincerity, and innocence; free from dishonesty and deception.
 - 1. "Integrity is telling myself the truth. And honesty is telling the truth to other people." (Spencer Johnson)
 - 2. Integrity is integrating faith and morals into daily actions.
 - 3. Integrity pleases God. Integrity simply means "You can count on me, I'll keep my word, I'll be true. I am not for sale at any price."
 - 4. Integrity is aged Polycarp about to be executed but offered his release if he would denounce his faith in Christ. He answered without wavering, "Eighty and six years have I served my Lord and He has done me no ill. I cannot recant."
- B. Wisdom and integrity - Prov. 10:9, 28:6, 11:3, 21:3
- C. Integrity and the Law of Christ - 1Peter 3:16; Col. 3:23; Luke 16:10
 - 1. 2Cor. 8:21; Titus 2:7

Conclusion:

- A. "I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions." (Lillian Hellman)
- B. "Real integrity is doing the right thing, knowing that nobody's going to know whether you did it or not." (Oprah Winfrey)
- C. "If it is not right do not do it; if it is not true do not say it. Waste no more time arguing about what a good man should be. Be one." (Marcus Aurelius)
- D. Phil. 4:8