

## Scripture Sketches

### —Christian Endurance— A Meditation on the Life of Aristarchus

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## Preface

The accounts of men and women recorded in the precious Word of God “...were written aforetime... for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). It is the blessed Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of truth” Who “will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself...He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew [it] unto you” (John 16:13,14). He may take, according to His perfect time and will, each of these divinely inspired records and apply to the seeking heart, innumerable precious, vitally important lessons and applications for the blessing and spiritual growth of each of God’s dear children.

It is one’s desire in presenting the following ‘Biblical character sketches’ to consider some of the more obscure figures found recorded in the Word of God. Though we do not know much of them, what our God has seen good to record of their lives certainly contains vitally important lessons. May we prayerfully and humbly meditate a bit on their lives, seeking to learn and profit from these divinely inspired accounts. Moral lessons gleaned from these accounts, because they are part of the Divine Canon of Scripture, present infinite applications for our lives—applications which may only be made good to each individual and their personal circumstances by the blessed Holy Spirit.

May our blessed Lord Jesus be honored in all that is written and may all who read these pages find true “*edification, exhortation, and comfort*” (1 Cor. 14:3) in them.

## Christian Endurance —A Meditation on the Life of Aristarchus

### Introduction

Years ago when a high school teacher, I sought to share the gospel with students who often were having problems or in trouble. Often I emphasized that becoming a Christian would bring happiness while the problems being encountering would be relieved. Though ‘things were better’—eternally so—for those who accepted Christ as Saviour, newly saved students often were confused and disheartened by the difficulties they began to experience in their Christian life.

Not infrequently I would hear these kinds of comments or questions from newly saved students: “I thought you said if I got saved things would go better, that I would be really happy. Well things aren’t going better. They’re worse! My friends don’t understand when I try to tell them about being saved. They call me a ‘religious nut’ or a ‘Jesus freak’ and they really ‘get on me’ when I say ‘no’ to doing some of the stuff that I used to do with them. Even my parents aren’t interested in talking about ‘my religion’. They think I’ve ‘gone off the deep end’. How come are things so hard?”

Such comments from these new believers caused many verses in the Bible to take on a much deeper reality in my own soul. “*Do not wonder, brethren, if the world hate you*” (1 Jn. 3:13, JND Trans.). “*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you*” (Jn. 15:18). “*...In the world ye shall have tribulation...*” (Jn. 16:33). “*But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye...*” (1 Pet. 3:14). “*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*” (2 Tim. 3:12).

The above verses are but a very few which speak of the trials encountered in the pathway of faith. The Holy Spirit has recorded such verses to encourage the believer in the face of such troubles. Those who belong to Christ are ‘*strangers*’ in an enemy land—a world that crucified our Saviour. The difficulties of the Christian path require *endurance*. James 5:11 presents a wonderful promise of God for our comfort; “*Behold, we count them happy which endure.*”

Dear Aristarchus was one who *endured* much and in doing so serves as a wonderful example and encouragement to believers.

## **Christian Endurance —A Meditation on the Life of Aristarchus**

### **Patience Endures—Acts 19**

*“And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul’s companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre.” (Acts 19:29).*

#### **Faith Enduring**

We may reasonably assume from the record of Paul’s travels given in Acts that Aristarchus (who was from Thessalonica) was doubtless saved through his preaching when Apostle visited there. Paul and his company certainly were no strangers to suffering and persecution as they preached the gospel. Paul and Silas were no doubt still healing from the unjust brutal beating they had so recently received in Philippi. As Paul told the Galatians, they both were bearing “*in my body the marks [‘scars’ or ‘brands’] of the Lord Jesus*”.

Aristarchus was surely aware of the persecutions and hatred displayed towards Paul and those in his company—the harsh treatment the Apostle and those with him received as they traveled. Doubtless he had some sense, even during the short time that Paul ministered in Thessalonica, of the great personal ‘cost’ he would have to endure if he became a traveling companion of the Apostle. Nothing but Aristarchus’ deep love and faith would cause him to take such a step. What a testimony to the grace of God that this dear believer did not turn back from a difficult pathway. Faith had wrought with him and so it was that Aristarchus became a faithful traveling companion of the Apostle Paul.

#### **Enduring Over Time**

Paul visited Athens for a short time, then spent 18 months ministering in Corinth. He stopped briefly at Ephesus, then visited Caesarea before coming back to the assembly at Antioch. After this Paul made shepherding visits to Galatia and Phrygia and eventually came back to Ephesus where he spent two years ministering and preaching so that “*...all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks*” (Acts 19:10). With the exception, perhaps, of Athens, it is reasonable to assume that these travels and visits may have taken several years. During all that extended period of time we read nothing about Aristarchus until the

great persecution instigated by Demetrius the silversmith against Paul, broke out in Ephesus (Acts 19). The very silence of God's Word regarding Aristarchus contains an important lesson for Christians.

This lengthy time evidently was used by the Lord to 'test' the reality of Aristarchus' desire to company with Paul. Also it doubtless strengthened dear Aristarchus' *endurance in patience*. Aristarchus did not travel with the beloved Apostle's company because of the attention brought to him or because he wanted others to think highly of himself. He was evidently pleased to quietly and humbly follow with the Apostle's company without much notice from anyone. Doubtless this silent time was one of learning for him as he *endured in patience* whatever confronted Paul's company. Dear Aristarchus was not turned aside by whatever hardships or persecutions he experienced. It was both a training time and a strengthening time for the path of service that still lay ahead for him.

We are reminded of the Lord's gracious dealing with the Israelites when He delivered them on the Passover night from Egypt's bondage. We read in Exodus 13:17: "*And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt*". God's beloved earthly people needed to learn 'endurance' for the trials and difficulties that lay ahead. As just delivered from Egypt, they were not ready yet for those battles.

How gracious is our blessed God! He lovingly and with perfect wisdom gives the necessary time to His beloved saints to develop the endurance needed to face the hardships of this wilderness journey before allowing trials and testings.

#### **Enduring Trials**

Now the time had come when our blessed God saw good to allow Aristarchus (along with Gaius) to face a severe trial of persecution caused by deceitful accusation (of Demetrius, the silversmith). By the grace of God these dear believers through their travel experiences with Paul, had become strong, able to bear the riotous persecution they encountered at Ephesus. They evidently tried to stay away from that unruly mob of Ephesian idolators. But the mob *caught Gaius and Aristarchus* and dragged them into the *theatre* being filled

with rage yet in confusion as to what they were about.

Hostility against Christianity is often marked by these two things. That is, (rage) hatred of God because the natural heart cannot fathom or know the love of God (nor does it desire to know the God of light and love); neither can it understand His perfect ways of grace and wisdom. Thus man's natural heart remains at enmity with God and in a state of constant confusion as to the truth of God, just as with Pilate who dared ask the One who is "*the way, the truth, and the life*", "What is truth?".

The Ephesian town clerk finally quieted the unruly mob and in the process rendered a sweet testimony to Aristarchus and Gaius saying: "*For ye have brought these men, who are neither temple-plunderers, nor speak injuriously of your goddess*" (Acts 19:37, JND Trans.). These dear servants of the Lord were above reproach in their lives, even in the eye of those idolatrous Ephesians who hated Paul's gospel. What a beautiful example of the fruit of the Spirit—"*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law*". These fruits were practically displayed in Aristarchus and Gaius so that no evil could be charged against them even by these idol worshipping men.

*"Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing"* (1 Pet. 3:16,17)..

## Christian Endurance —A Meditation on the Life of Aristarchus

### Fruit of Endurance—Acts 20

*“And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus” (Acts 20:4).*

Christian endurance produced precious fruit in dear Aristarchus. Perhaps many of us would have decided that accompanying the Apostle Paul was just too much trouble after the treatment he and Gaius had received in Ephesus. Perhaps we would have said, ‘that’s the last straw! I just can’t take the constant persecution and harassment that Paul meets everywhere he goes’.

Yet though little information is given in our verse much may be gleaned from reading it and meditating on the list of names of those who continued to travel with Paul.

First, we see the happy results of a good example of walking by faith. Aristarchus’ faith did not fail after the ill treatment received in Ephesus and though we have no record of anything he may have said to his brethren, his *actions spoke louder than words* for the number of names of those mentioned as traveling with Paul *after* the persecution has grown to seven. Aristarchus’ quiet endurance was producing a rich harvest! *“Be imitators all together of me, brethren, and fix your eyes on those walking thus as you have us for a model” (Phpp. 3:17, JND translation). “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1).*

Secondly, in considering the meaning of the names of the seven who travelled with Paul we find what morally characterizes those of the dear apostle’s company.

(1) Sopater—(*saving father*). In Paul’s company we will find those with the heart of a spiritual father, one who seeks the eternal welfare of those he comes in contact with. *“For if ye should have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the glad tidings” (1 Cor. 4:15).*

(2) Aristarchus (*excellent ruler*). In Paul’s company we will

find the authority of the Word of God submitted to which brings order and peace through obedience. *“If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them”* (Jn. 13:17, JND Trans.).

(3) *Secundus (the second)*. In Paul’s company we will find true humility and meekness—following the example of the perfect lowliness of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ who *“humbled Himself and became obedient unto death”* (Phpp. 2:8). *“...and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble”* (1 Pet. 5:5).

(4) *Gaius (I rejoice)*. In Paul’s company we will find true and lasting joy—*“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full”* (Jn. 15:11). *“Rejoice evermore”* (1 Thess. 5:16).

(5) *Timotheus (honoring God)*. In Paul’s company we will find that our blessed God and Father is revered and honored in every way. *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding”* (Prov. 9:10). *“Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen”* (1 Tim. 1:17).

(6) *Tychicus (fortunate-happy)*. In Paul’s company we will find true, lasting satisfaction and happiness, something the poor world is ever seeking and never finding. How *fortunate* those who are found in this blessed company! *“Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom”* (1 Kings 10:8). *“Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy”* (Jas. 5:11).

(7) *Trophimus (nourishment)*. In Paul’s company we will find that true spiritual food that nourishes the soul—the manna AND the old corn of the land—a rich feast provided for each believer. *“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”* (Rom. 8:32). *“And having food and raiment let us be therewith content”* (1 Tim. 6:8).

What a happy and blessed company. Surely *enduring* the trials of the way was well worth the fruit it produced in each of them and is well worth the fruit it will produce in each believer today who faithfully endures!

## Christian Endurance —A Meditation on the Life of Aristarchus

### Love Endures—Acts 27

*“And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us” (Acts 27:2).*

We read of divine love in 1 Corinthians 13. Among the precious qualities of this love (‘agape’) we find that love “*endures all things. Love never fails*” (1 Cor.13 7,8). The love of Aristarchus for the beloved Apostle Paul did not fail for he was willing to endure the long voyage to Rome in the company of Paul an outcast prisoner of Rome. The Saviour that Paul preached, the precious doctrines of the Christian faith, the fervor of the beloved apostle—all had won the heart of Aristarchus. He would not leave the apostle—willing to endure whatever hardships and uncertainties the trip to Rome held.

The Spirit of God has not been pleased to tell us who, if any, were the other travelers with Paul on this voyage except that we may easily understand that Luke, the beloved physician, also accompanied the apostle. ‘Us’ in our verse above may mean just the Apostle Paul and Luke, or it may include other unnamed brethren. But whoever was included as Paul’s traveling companions, love for the Lord Jesus, love for the Apostle Paul and the revelations of Christian truth he taught won the heart affections of Aristarchus and our blessed God has seen fit to specifically mention him by name.

What a comfort and encouragement to believers today! There are many circumstances of life which confront a Christian—trials that are very discouraging. How can a believer face such things without giving up in discouragement? The very same way dear Aristarchus did! Love, deep heart love for the blessed Lord Jesus Christ, for the doctrines of the Christian faith, for all God’s dear people—in short, obedience to the Lord’s own words: “*If ye love Me, keep my commandments*” and “*This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you*” (Jn.15:12). The voyage to Rome with Paul would prove to be a tremendously difficult voyage. Yet Aristarchus endured in love. May it be that each dear believer today also is able to endure in love the path of faith set before us.

## Christian Endurance —A Meditation on the Life of Aristarchus

### Enduring Imprisonment—Col. 4:10

“*Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister’s son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him)*” (Col. 4:10).

After the awful storm, the hardships of the fearful voyage, the shipwreck and being cast ashore on an island for three months, we might well question if dear Aristarchus’ endurance was still as strong and committed as previously. The Word of God only records trial after trial of this dear traveling companion of Paul. There seemed no let up of persecution from the riot in Ephesus, the stormy voyage to Rome where now he is a *fellowprisoner* with the Apostle Paul.

We may ask, ‘What good was Aristarchus’ endurance when all it brought him was persecution, trial and hardships? His travels with Paul afforded him little in the way of comfort.’ The answer lies in the fact that Aristarchus’ endurance was motivated by love for his precious Saviour and love for the beloved Apostle Paul. Love does not ‘count the cost’ but delights to be found in the company of the object of that love.

There was yet another blessing that Aristarchus’ endurance rendered to dear Apostle Paul. Being a *fellowprisoner* surely must have been a comfort to the apostle’s heart. Doubtless it was also a tremendous comfort to Aristarchus as well. And what happy communion they must have enjoyed together in that Roman prison!

Aristarchus does not seem to be at all discouraged but rather sends his greetings to the Colossian believers along with those of the beloved Apostle. Truly the “*trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ*” (1 Pet. 1:7) was a blessed result of Aristarchus’ endurance.

Perhaps we too feel constrained and unable to serve as we might have desired. Yet, love for our blessed Lord Jesus and love for His dear people will provide the endurance needed to press on, seeking no great thing for ourselves—only the honor of the Lord Jesus and the blessing of His dear people. “*But thou, O man of God, ...pursue righteousness, piety, faith, love, endurance, meekness of spirit*” (1 Tim. 6:11).

## Christian Endurance —A Meditation on the Life of Aristarchus

### Endurance Rewarded—Philemon, V. 24

*“Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers”*  
(Phm. 1:24)

First we find that Aristarchus was a *fellow traveler/companion* with the beloved Apostle Paul. Then we see that he is a *fellow sufferer*. After that, on the voyage to Rome, he was a *fellow comforter* of the apostle (along with Luke, the beloved physician). Then when in Rome Aristarchus became a *fellow prisoner* with Paul. Now, in the letter to Philemon, he is one of Paul’s *fellow laborers* who greets Philemon and the assembly there. What an encouragement to know that “*God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name ...*” (Heb. 6:10).

Can we doubt that dear Aristarchus, in enduring so much for the sake of the truth, surely received the blessed Lord’s approval? “*...Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord*” (Matt. 25:21). James declares “*Behold, we count them happy which **endure**. Ye have heard of the patience [**endurance**] of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy*” (Jas. 5:11).

What a bright shining testimony to Christian endurance we find in this dear believer. The world he passed through as a companion of the Apostle Paul—a believer in the Lord Jesus and His servant—offered him little more than problems, trials, persecutions, imprisonment and ridicule. Yet Aristarchus did not waver in the path of faith. He endured and has gained the promised rest in paradise with His Lord and Saviour. “*For I am ... having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better*” (Phpp. 1:23).

How often this dear believer must have been in *secret* prayer seeking the strength and courage to continue on—to endure all that he faced as he traveled with the dear Apostle Paul. The Lord not only graciously granted His request but in a coming day of glory those that “*pray to thy Father which is in secret ... thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly*” (Matt. 6:6).



# **Scripture Sketches**

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