

Preacher's Pen points

God's Triumphal Procession

The photo you see is a relief panel from the Arch of Titus in Rome. This scene depicts the triumphal procession of Emperor Titus after his successful defeat and destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. The toga-clad Titus is riding in a chariot accompanied by the winged goddess Victory (who places a wreath on his head) and by another goddess (Roma?) who leads his horses. Such triumphal processions were common in the Roman world. Roman generals used them to declare and celebrate their victory over their enemies. The procession would be accompanied by some of the spoils of battle and by captives who would be humiliated by the procession. Of course, the Romans would give due credit to the gods who they believed had given them their victory and offer sacrifices to them in connection with the procession. Knowing this background gives us greater insight into a number of NT verses that use this imagery to describe God's triumph over Satan.

God's Triumph Through Jesus Christ

Paul wanted the Colossians to appreciate their completeness in Christ. To that end he urged them to think about all that God had done for them through Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. In particular Paul affirmed the victory of God over the evil spirit world through Christ: "*When He had disarmed the rulers and authori-*

ties, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. (Col. 2:15) Just like the Roman generals "public displayed" their captives, so God did the same with Satan and his spiritual allies, showing His defeat of them.

A Giver of Gifts

On another occasion Paul used the image to affirm the means by which God seeks to unite His church: "*When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.*" (Eph. 4:8). Paul was affirming that, just as the



Roman generals gave gifts to their army as a reward for their efforts, so Jesus, upon His victory over Satan, gave "gifts" to His church. Those "gifts" are "*apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers*" for the perfecting of the saints (Eph. 4:8ff).

The Assurance of Victory

Just as the Romans celebrated the gods who "led" their generals in victory, so Paul thanked the true God who "*who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. (2 Cor. 2:14)*. The first Christians could not mistake the powerful messages drawn from the emperor's celebrations. Our God and the Father of our Lord Jesus has already conquered His enemies and leads all in victory who follow Him! —Johnny