

ACTS

A Focus on the Center of God's Fire



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ACTS
(A Focus on the Center of God's Fire)

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The Book of Acts

INTRODUCTION

The Beginning of the Church

Acts is a historical account of the *beginning* of the Church. When Christ declared, “I will build my church” (Mt.16:18), He started by preparing twelve foundation stones during his three-and-a-half year ministry. Jesus poured his life and message into the twelve apostles. These men would become the role models and writers of the New Testament. Our faith and indeed our very lives are *based* upon the eternal Scriptures which they and the prophets inscribed. The Apostle Paul confirmed this truth when he said we are “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph. 2:20).

Unworthy Foundation Stones Removed

Christ does not build his Church upon anything faulty. His foundation stones are “tried” stones. Before the new move of the Spirit in Acts, God weeded out all of those who had a treacherous spirit. Virtually half of chapter one concerns the replacement of Judas the traitor. In Acts 1:15-26, there is a shuffling of positions and offices. Today we see the same process going on in the Church. God is about to move again. Therefore, He is revealing who is who. All those who are traitors like Judas, usurpers like Absalom, Korah, and Adonijah, and all those who are unrepentant as Cain are being exposed and removed from leadership. Everyone is being tested today to see whether they will be worthy to have a part in the next move of God.

A Time of Transition

Acts is a divine account of a new move of God. The brethren had never walked this way before. It was not like anything they experienced in the past. Therefore, on the day of Pentecost, everyone was *amazed* and *confounded*. The emphasis of the Holy Spirit had changed. The winds of God were blowing in another direction. For Israel, it was a time of transition from the Old Covenant to the New. There was a new message and a totally different order. Many in the old regime *refused* to flow with the new move, being “old wine skins” who wanted to remain in their old traditions. Most of all, they resented seeing God bless the Gentiles whom they deemed quite inferior to themselves. Vexed with jealousy, Israel became the biggest opponents of what God was doing in their generation.

The twelve apostles themselves were also hampered during the transition. Even the chief leaders of the revival still had elements of prejudice and bigotry in their hearts. Ten years had passed since Pentecost and still they had preached Christ *only* to fellow-Israelites and Gentile proselytes who attended their synagogues. Evangelism to the Gentile world had been greatly impeded because of bias. After a notable vision from heaven (Acts 10:1 – 11:19), Peter and the apostles clearly understood that God had welcomed unreservedly *all the Gentiles* into His kingdom. Later, in chapter 15, a public statement was made at the Jerusalem Council clearly delineating which laws the Gentiles should observe, and which ones were unnecessary. This came about after “no small dissension.” We can see, then, that the newborn Church was imperfect in her infancy stage as she was learning to walk in the unfamiliar paths of the new covenant.

A Focus on the Center of the Fire

Acts focuses on *the center* of the fire. By this we mean the center of what God was doing. When fire-fighters are trying to determine the source of a fire, they look for the hottest spot. In Acts, the fire started on Mount Zion in the upper room, especially with Peter and the eleven apostles. Peter and the eleven were the center of the fire in chapters 1-12. Then the fire spread to Paul and the church of Antioch in chapters 13-28. Many were added to the center of what God was doing, while others dropped out.

After Barnabas was offended and separated himself from Paul, we see that he vanished totally from the narrative of Acts. Therefore, he left the center of God's move to labor on the perimeter of God's vineyard. Silas came into the center of the fire, and so did Timothy and Luke. We should guard our hearts very carefully so that we always stay in the middle of what God is doing. Every one of us is going to be tested by *offenses*. Will we also be offended and leave? Remember, there is always a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense in Zion because Zion is God's hottest spot (Isa. 4:4, 33:14). It is the place of holy devouring fire, the habitation of God's presence (Psa.132:13,14). Who is able to dwell among everlasting burnings?

The Two Main Leaders

In chapters 1-12, *Peter* was in the forefront of the new move of God. He ministered primarily to the Jews (the circumcision). In chapters 13-28, *Paul* emerged as the main leader. He brought the Gospel to the Gentiles (the uncircumcision). It is interesting to note that both leaders of the new move of God had major failures in their past, which should be a comfort to us.

Formerly, Paul had persecuted the Church. During that time he considered himself "blameless" with respect to the [ceremonial] law (Phil. 3:6). He never violated a sabbath or missed a feast day, yet his heart was full of hardness and controversy. Paul had relied on his own righteousness, but he utterly failed. Peter also was confident in the flesh, boasting, "Though all men forsake thee, I will never." In actual fact, only *dependent* men and women are protected by God from temptation. People remove themselves from God's protection when they make proud, boastful statements. Peter was left unprotected because of his lofty assertions and became an open target of the enemy. What was the result of his pride? Fear overtook him and he ended up cursing and swearing, and denying the Lord. Yet, God extended grace and retrieved both Peter and Paul from their failures. Both of these men became the main leaders of the revival.

The Two Main Mission Bases

Jerusalem was the main headquarters for the Jewish Church. James the Lord's brother was the presiding elder of the Jerusalem Church. As a young man, James himself wavered in his faith and was double-minded (Jn. 7:5, Jas.1:6-8). He did not believe his older brother was the Messiah until after the resurrection when Jesus appeared to James causing a profound conversion (1 Cor.15:7).

Antioch in Syria was the headquarters of the Gentile Church. There were fifteen Antiochs in the world at that time, but it was here in Antioch, *Syria* that believers were first called Christians (11:26). Before that, they were called "disciples." Antioch became Paul's home base, and it was from here that Paul was launched into all of his missionary journeys, and he always returned there.

Summary of the Book of Acts:

- Acts records the *beginning* of the Church (the birth and infancy of the Church).
- Jesus started building his Church by preparing the *foundation stones* during his ministry.
- The foundation stones were his twelve apostles. Christ Himself is the Chief Cornerstone.
- The apostles gave us the New Testament Scriptures upon which we base our lives and faith.
- God first removed unworthy foundation stones like Judas before he built his Church.
- The Lord did not allow treacherous men to have a part in the new move. It is the same today.
- Acts is an account of a fresh, new move of God. It was unlike anything in the past.
- Every new move of God is unpredictable. It staggers the mind...like on the day of Pentecost.
- Many people did not flow with the new move because of their love of tradition.
- Acts was a transition time from the old covenant to the new. It required many adjustments.
- Many Israelites hated the new message; They resented seeing God bless those who received it.
- Jealousy is a curse that infects those who spurn God and refuse what He is saying.
- The greatest opponents of a new move *often* are those who were in the center of a previous one.
- The twelve apostles still had prejudice and bigotry in their hearts.
- Evangelism to the Gentiles was impeded because of bias.
- The vision to Peter (Acts 10:1-11:19) persuaded the Jews that God had accepted the Gentiles.
- The Jews had numerous “disputations” about what standards the Gentiles had to observe.
- The Church needed *clarification* in her infancy stage as she began walking in the new covenant.
- It took a number of years after Pentecost to properly understand the true tenets of faith.
- Acts focuses on the center of the fire. The apostles were in the center—the hot spot.
- Some people remained in the center of the fire, but some like Barnabas left it.
- Others were brought into the center of the fire like Silas, Timothy, and Luke.
- Zion is the center of the devouring fire. There are many stumblingblocks in Zion.
- We will be given every excuse to be offended and quit if we are in or near the center of the fire.
- In chapters 1-12, Peter was the main leader of the new move of God to the Jews.
- In chapters 13-28, Paul was the main leader of the new move of God to the Gentiles.
- Jerusalem was the main missionary base for the Jewish Church.
- Antioch was the main missionary base for the Gentile Church.
- Acts is a book of rain—the outpouring of the Spirit.
- In Acts we see the early rain—a light rain for softening ground and planting.
(The Church was planted and germinated in the first century.)
- In the last days there will be the latter rain—a heavy rain to bring God's Church to maturity.
- The miracles we see in Acts will be mightily intensified in our days.
- The apostolic, prophetic and teaching ministries will be very prominent, just as in Acts 13:1-2.
- Judgment will begin in the house of the Lord, as it did with Ananias and Sapphira.
- People will be transported as was Philip. They will be taken bodily from one place to another.
- The greatest opposition to the new move will come from Bible-quoting believers who have not moved on with God. *Jealousy* will be the greatest problem, even as it was in the first century.

Luke - The Writer of Acts

Luke was a traveling companion of the Apostle Paul. Paul's reference to Luke as "the beloved physician" indicates his sweetness of character (cf. Col.4:14). He was a loyal friend to the finish (cf. 2 Tim. 4:11). Luke had a great capacity for research. He was an accurate and able historian, and possessed a polished vernacular that no New Testament writer could excel. Besides his medical knowledge, he had interest in ships as well as experience at sea. This is evidenced in his narratives in Acts. In Acts 16:10, he joined Paul on his missionary travels and continued in close contact with him until Paul's death. He never discloses his name in the Acts narrative but includes himself inconspicuously, saying *we* or *us* (16:10-17, 20:5, 21:18, 27:1-28:16). This signifies humility.

Acts—A Continuation of Luke's Gospel

Luke's two literary masterpieces (The Gospel of Luke / The Book of Acts) could be considered volume one and volume two of *one work*. The Book of Acts continues where his Gospel leaves off (compare Luke 24:47-53 / Acts 1:1-14). Probably Acts was written shortly *after* his Gospel. (The Gospel perhaps in A.D. 62, Acts in 63). Both books were written to a high ranking Greek nobleman named Theophilus and those surrounding him. Luke entitles him, "Most Excellent Theophilus" (Lk.1:3, Acts 1:1). Thus, Luke was writing to a cultured Greek society. His presentation of the Gospel was to the educated, the thinkers, and those who appreciated beautiful speech and intricate details. The Book of Acts appears to be in chronological order from start to finish.

Date

The Book of Acts opens with the resurrection and ascension of Christ (April / May, A.D. 30). The resurrection was in April, the ascension in late May, and the day of Pentecost was ten days later in early June. The final chapter concludes with Paul being released from prison in Rome in the early part of A.D. 63. Paul had been under house arrest for two full years (61-63). He stood before the emperor Nero in early 63 A.D. and was acquitted. The Book of Acts covers a total of 33 years—(from the resurrection in *April, A.D. 30* to Paul's release in the early spring of *A.D. 63*).

The beloved physician obviously could not have completed writing Acts before spring, 63. Since Luke's Gospel and Acts were written consecutively and probably close to each other, our dates seem safe. (Luke's Gospel in 62, and Acts in later 63). While Paul was in prison, his faithful traveling companion probably had the time to collect his material and finish his Gospel, and have the resources for his Acts narrative well under way.

Luke's Sources for Writing

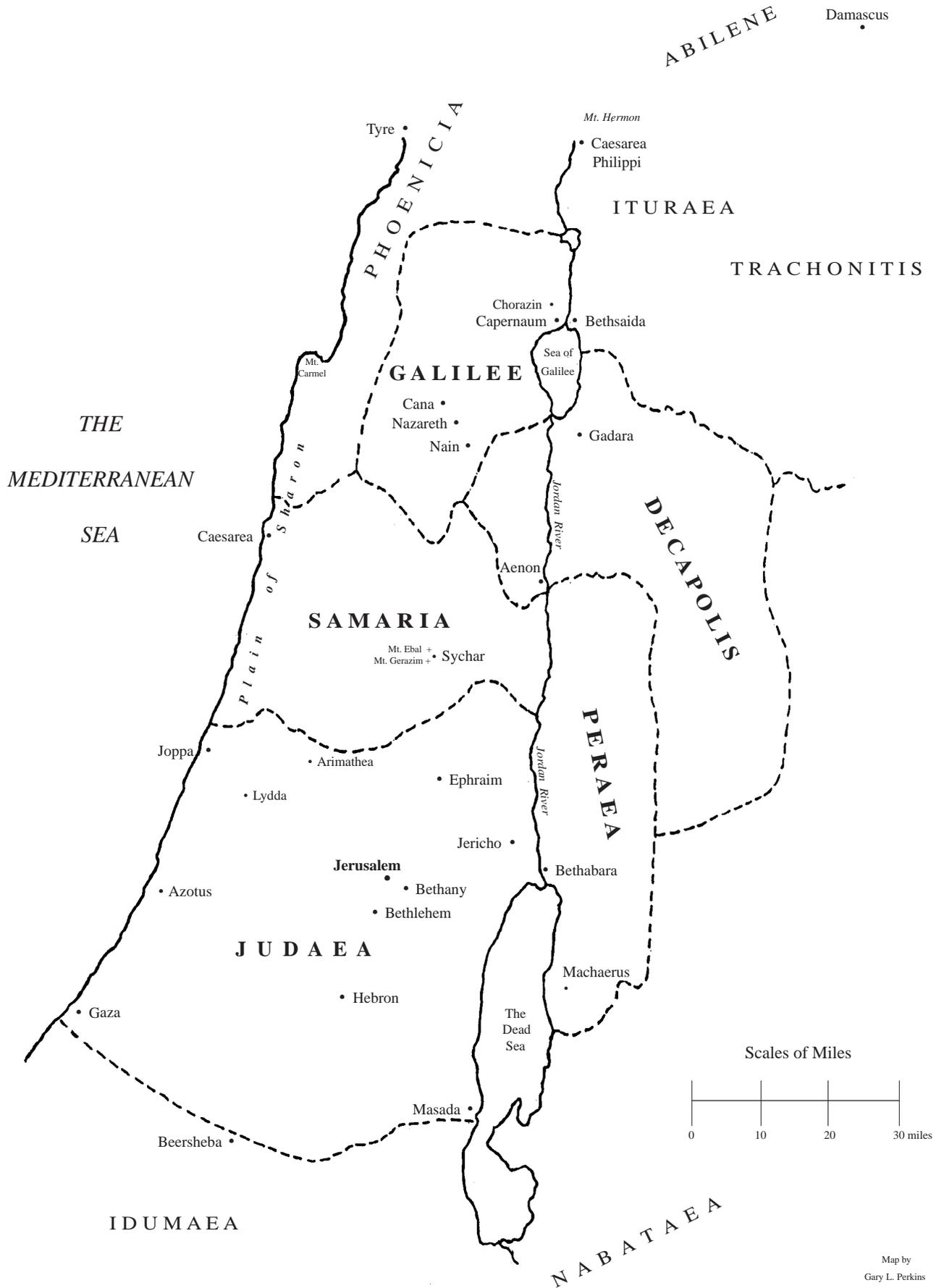
For many years, Luke had close contact with Paul and numerous Christian leaders such as Philip, Timothy, Silas, Mark, Barnabas, James the Lord's brother, the twelve apostles, and many of the five hundred brethren who had witnessed Christ's resurrection (cf. 1 Cor.15:6). As a result of being in Jerusalem (Acts 21:17), Caesarea, and other places where Christ and his apostles ministered, Luke had splendid opportunities to obtain firsthand knowledge regarding our Lord, his teachings, his miracles, and the beginnings of the Church.

CHRONOLOGY FOR ACTS

(Most dates are conjectural but reasonably close)

Chapter	Date	Event
Chapter 1-2	30 A.D.	The Lord's final words, the ascension, and the Day of Pentecost — Resurrection, Ascension, and Pentecost - April / May / June - 30 A.D.
Chapter 3-8	30-34 A.D.	From Pentecost to Stephen's martyrdom, and the revival in Samaria — Some estimate that it was 3 1/2 years from Pentecost to Stephen's death.
Chapter 9	34-37 A.D.	Paul's conversion in 34, his three years in Arabia (between 9:22-23) — His brief return to Damascus and his escape to Jerusalem where he meets Peter and converses with him 15 days. Paul is sent home to Tarsus by the brethren (9:23-31, Gal.1:15-24) and not heard of until about 44 A.D.
Chapter 10	40 A.D.	About ten years after Pentecost the Gospel was brought to the Gentiles, starting at the house of Cornelius. Peter had the vision that God had accepted the Gentiles and was not to call them “common or unclean.”
Chapter 11	40-44 A.D.	From the opened door to the Gentiles (approximately 40 A.D.) to Paul's coming out of obscurity in 44 A.D. to teach at Antioch (Acts 11:25-26).
Chapter 12	44-45 A.D.	James is martyred, Peter is delivered, and Herod is slain by the Lord. A.D. 44 is an established date in secular history for these events.
Chapter 13-14	48-49 A.D.	First Missionary Journey (13:1 – 14:28) — They launched from Antioch and returned there. Then they had a long rest.
Chapter 15	50 or 51 A.D.	The Jerusalem Conference (to consider what laws the Gentiles should observe) — Paul and Barnabas soon split up; Silas replaced him.
Chapter 16-18	51-54 A.D.	The Second Missionary Journey (15:40 – 18:22) — The Philippian, Thessalonian, and Corinthian churches were started on this journey. While at Corinth (18 months) Paul wrote <i>I-II Thessalonians</i> .
Chapter 19-21	54-58 A.D.	Third Missionary Journey (18:23 – 21:17) — While at Ephesus Paul wrote <i>First Corinthians</i> . In Macedonia, he wrote <i>Second Corinthians</i> . When he came back to Corinth for a third visit, he wrote <i>Galatians</i> and <i>Romans</i> .
Chapter 22-26	58-60 A.D.	Paul's last visit to Jerusalem, where he was rejected and imprisoned. Under Roman custody for two years at Caesarea, he testifies before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa. He appeals to Caesar, and heads for Rome.
Chapter 27-28	60-63 A.D.	Paul starts for Rome but is shipwrecked en route. Remaining on Malta (or Miletta) for the winter, he preached there. Paul came to Rome in the Spring, and was under house arrest for two full years. While in Rome he wrote <i>Ephesians</i> , <i>Colossians</i> , <i>Philemon</i> , and <i>Philippians</i> . Acts ends here. In early spring, 63, he appeared before Nero, was acquitted and released.

PALESTINE IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES



Map by Gary L. Perkins

Chapter One

THE TEN DAYS

The Former Treatise – Luke's Gospel

1:1-3 *“The former treatise [or account] have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach. Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he showed himself alive after his [death] by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”*

“The former treatise” is a reference to Luke's Gospel. A short time earlier, Luke had written a detailed account to Theophilus concerning “all that Jesus began, both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up.” Acts continues where Luke's Gospel ended. Luke 24:49-53 concluded with Christ's ascension back into heaven after a solemn charge to “tarry in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high.”

Many Infallible Proofs – Numerous Appearances After His Resurrection

“To whom also he showed himself alive after his [death] by many infallible proofs.” Christ made numerous appearances after his resurrection. On one occasion, he appeared to over five hundred brethren at once (1 Cor.15:6). There are ten or more appearances recorded in sacred Scripture:

To Mary Magdalene (Jn. 20:14-18, Mk.16:9-11)

To the Other Women (Mt. 28:8-10)

To Peter (Lk. 24:34, 1 Cor.15:5)

To the Two Emmaeus Disciples (Lk. 24:13-33, Mk.16:12-13)

To the Apostles, Thomas Absent (Mk.16:14, Lk. 24:34-43, Jn. 20:19-25)

To the Apostles, Thomas Present (Jn. 20:26-31)

To Seven Disciples by the Sea of Tiberias (Jn. 21:1-23). Here, Peter was recommissioned.

To Over Five Hundred Brethren and the Apostles (1 Cor.15:6)

To James the Lord's Brother (1 Cor.15:7). After this, James never wavered.

To the Disciples to Open the Scriptures (Lk. 24:44-49)

To Make His Final Appearance, and His Ascension (Acts 1:9-12, Mk.16:19-20, Lk. 24:50-53)

“Being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” The resurrected Christ showed himself alive for forty days. During those forty days, Christ opened the Scriptures to the apostles (Lk. 24:44-45) and explained to them his purposes for the Church. He was already building his Church, but his focus was upon the foundation stones—the apostles.

The Promise of the Father—The Baptism in the Holy Spirit

1:4 “*And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father...*” What was this “promise of the Father” that the disciples were commanded to wait for in Jerusalem? It was and is the baptism in the Holy Ghost, an experience they received ten days later on the Day of Pentecost. This is something that is totally separate from the new birth. The disciples had already received new birth from Christ when he “breathed” upon them several weeks earlier (Jn. 20:22). The baptism in the Holy Spirit is different. It is another experience and is absolutely essential for our spiritual growth and perfection. It is an integral part of our redemption. Consider the following.

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit:

- Brings greater strength in the inner man to help us bear up under pressure.
- Gives added power to overcome sins, habits, and other bondages.
- Helps conquer self-pity and persecution complexes because of joy and strength.
- Sharpens our vision of what God is doing today.
- Makes us more sensitive to spiritual matters and the spirit realm.
- Opens our understanding of the Scriptures.
- Helps us pray more effectively.
- Gives greater power over Satan.
- Enhances the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.
- Endues us with the nine gifts of the Spirit.
- Brings many other blessings.

Men in the Old Testament like Elijah and John the Baptist collapsed from the pressure because they did not have strength in the inner man. Others like David and Samson could not rule their passions because of the lack of inner strength. Today, this power for inner strength is made available to us. Many people cannot break the power of alcohol or drugs without being baptized in the Holy Spirit. It is very rare for people to have an end-time vision for revival without being baptized in the Holy Spirit. For many people, the extent of their vision is only that the world will get worse and worse until the rapture. In actual fact, it is a tragedy to reject the baptism in the Holy Spirit because by doing so, it retards one's spiritual growth in every area. How tragic indeed, when God has provided a means for victory, to ignore or reject it.

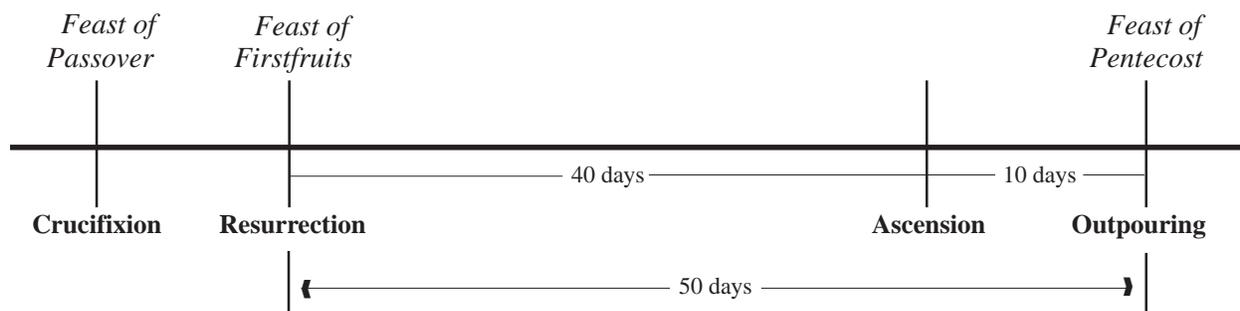
The Holy Spirit Was Promised:

- By the Father to the Son: “I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed” (Isa. 44:3).
- By Joel: “...I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh...” (Joe. 2:28, Acts 2:16-17).
- By Isaiah: “With stammering lips and an unknown tongue...yet they would not hear” (Isa. 28:11,12).
- By John the Baptist: “He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and fire” (Mt. 3:11-12).
- By Christ repeatedly: “I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter” (Jn.14:16).
- “He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (Jn.14:17).
- “I send the promise of my Father upon you...” (Lk. 24:49) (Jn.14:26, 15:26, 16:7, 16:12-15).
- “Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence” (Acts 1:4,5, 1:8).
- When the promise finally came on the Day of Pentecost—they all spoke in tongues.

1:5 “For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.” Christ did not tell them exactly how many days they would have to wait, only that it would be “not many days hence.” Therefore, it was a test. If this command to tarry in Jerusalem extended to the 500 brethren (1 Cor.15:6), then only 120 fully obeyed. Only one of every four waited till the Spirit came. The promise arrived ten days later on the Day of Pentecost. *Ten days* signifies “a period of trial” (cf. Dan.1:12, Rev. 2:10, Jer. 42:7). Everyone was being tried. Those who waited to the end received more powerful baptisms. God is testing our hearts today, too. Are we preparing our hearts for a new outpouring? Many believe we are in that *ten day* waiting period now.

Ten Days

How do we know for certain that the disciples waited ten days? It never explicitly says so. The only way we can determine the number of days is by *the feasts*. Let's consider the chart below:



- On the Feast of Passover - Christ was crucified. He was the perfect Lamb of God.
- On the Feast of Firstfruits - Christ rose from the dead. He was the Firstfruits of those who slept.
- On the Feast of Pentecost - Christ sent the promised Holy Spirit. Another was sent in his place.
- Christ ascended to heaven 40 days after the feast of Firstfruits. This left 10 days to Pentecost.
- Thus, the disciples tarried in Jerusalem for ten days until the Promised Holy Spirit was given.

When, Lord?

1:6 “When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” All of Israel cherished the restoration of a physical kingdom. Even in the minds of the disciples there was still a restoration for Israel that had not yet taken place. The Lord did not rebuke the disciples for asking. He simply said that the time for Israel's restoration was known only to the Father. (It will take place in the Millennium, at Christ's Second Coming.)

1:7 “And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.” God did not want them to know *when*. The question of “when” is a problem for many Christians. *Dates* and *details* are information that God often does not want to divulge. It is so human to want to know everything beforehand. However, there is great wisdom when God does *not* tell us future dates. Faith could not develop if we knew the outcome of everything. Knowing the precise date of Christ's coming could totally disrupt and immobilize our lives. What effect would it have had upon the disciples if Christ had told them that Israel's restoration would be two thousand years later? They were thinking in terms of Israel's return to a great world power again. Instead, for now, Christ was thinking about an inward, spiritual kingdom. Vs. 8 “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses...”

1:8 “*But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*” This promise of power was made to *devout* men and women. Some baptisms today are very shallow and contain very little power. If one's vessel is ninety percent filled with clutter, only ten percent of their capacity can receive an impartation from God. Sometimes God waits for people to empty themselves of much carnality before He fills them. Then they are able to receive more.

“*And ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*” The revival would start in Jerusalem. It would spread throughout Judaea, then Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the world. Verse 8 helps us dissect the Book.

- Chapters 1-7 - Jerusalem / Judaea (This was the hub, the home base.)
- Chapters 8-10 - Samaria (Nearby Samaria was a mixture of godliness and paganism.)
- Chapters 11-28 - The uttermost parts of the earth (The heathen who had no knowledge of God.)

1:9 “*And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.*” After his parting words, Christ ascended back into heaven from the Mount of Olives (cf. 1:12). This is an important fact because Christ not only ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives, He will also return there (cf. Zech.14:4). This is confirmed in verses 10,11. He will descend upon the Mount of Olives in the same way he ascended to heaven.

1:10-11 “*And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*”

Two men in white apparel appeared to the disciples as Christ ascended up into heaven. From the description of their apparel they were heavenly messengers. Possibly these were Moses and Elijah, the two companions who accompanied Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration. Since they are “the two anointed ones who stand before the God of the whole earth” (Zech. 4:14, Rev.11:4), it would seem credible that these should escort him on such occasions. They could also have been the same messengers who appeared at Christ's empty tomb (cf. Lk. 24:4-7).

“*Ye men of Galilee.*” The disciples of Christ were not from Judaea, but Galilee (cf. 2:7). They were eighty miles from home. Galilee was to the north, Judaea to the south (see map - p. 6). God bypassed many who were born and raised in Judaea, probably because they were so entrenched in *tradition*. Christ had a new message and new order to proclaim. He would only select pliable men to represent him. Therefore, he chose Galileans who were known for being innovative. The Galileans possessed great openness of spirit, a quality always needed for a new move of God. It is unfortunate that God has to bypass so many today because they want to stay in their traditions. Let's be new wineskins.

1:12 “*Then they returned unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey.*” Christ ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives, just opposite Bethany (Lk. 24:50). After the ascension, the disciples returned to nearby Jerusalem which was “a sabbath day's journey.” A sabbath day's journey, according to Jewish tradition, was about 5/8 of a mile.

1:13-14 “*And when they were come in, they went up into [the] upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.*”

After Christ ascended into heaven, the disciples departed from Olivet, being filled with great joy (Lk. 24:51-52), and walked a short distance into Jerusalem. Here the eleven apostles entered the upper room. *The upper room* is believed to be on Mount Zion, the same building where Christ served the last supper. During designated prayer hours (9:00 am, 12:00 noon, 3:00 pm), the apostles and disciples worshipped in the temple (Lk. 24:53, Acts 3:1).

The eleven apostles made the upper room their residence during those days. Also, joining them in prayer were Mary the mother of Jesus, his brethren, and certain devout women. There were a number of pious women mentioned in the upper room who were important figures in the establishment of the early Church. The Lord's brethren would certainly include his brothers, James and Jude.

Peter Rises Again

1:15 “*In those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said...*” From the beginning, Peter had always been the natural spokesman of the twelve apostles. Then Peter suffered a serious setback when he denied the Lord with cursing and swearing. It was a bitter failure for Peter, but Christ had prayed that his faith would not fail (Lk. 22:32). Peter needed to be converted. The truths he had learned while being with Christ had to be more than just head knowledge and information. Usually it takes much weeping and pain to *become* our message. After Christ publicly restored Peter in the presence of his brethren (Jn. 21:14-17), Peter took courage and began to recover from the shame of his failure. When Christ told him three times, “Feed my Sheep,” he was reassuring him that the call of God would surely be fulfilled in his life. Therefore, only seven weeks after his failure, Peter *stood up again among his brethren* in the upper room and issued prophetic direction and counsel to the 120.

The Replacement of Judas

Virtually half of chapter one is dedicated to the replacement of Judas (1:15-26). Before a new move of the Spirit, God must sift out treacherous men like Judas from the groups He will use in revival. God is trying to tell us something in the introduction to the Book of Acts. During those ten days in the upper room, everyone was being tested before a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. There had to be a sorting out. Over 500 brethren knew that the Promised Holy Spirit was about to be sent from heaven, yet Scripture only records 120 being present and eagerly awaiting His arrival.

God not only separates the mediocre from the diligent, *He also separates the treacherous from the loyal* before He moves. There can never be unity as long as Judas is in the group. Judas caused a lot of trouble among the brethren. When the disciples had *indignation* against Mary of Bethany for pouring expensive ointment upon Jesus, it was Judas who infected the others (Mk.14:4,5, Jn.12:3-6). He complained that the ointment could have been sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor. Then the others also started murmuring against this good woman. Judas was like a cancer cell that spread through the whole body. It is also interesting to note that Christ did not preach on unity and loving one another until Judas had left the group. Later, Judas betrayed not only the Lord but his eleven brethren (Jn.18:1-8).

Judas Was Foretold in Scripture

1:15-17 *“And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,) Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.*

Many verses from David's Psalms foretell the life of Judas. During the last supper Jesus quoted Psalm 41:9: “He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me” (Jn.13:18). Although this was a reference to the betrayal of Ahithophel, a close confidant of David's, it looked ahead to the treacherous act of Judas against the Savior. David was a profound type of Christ. Many of his experiences were similar to Christ's. Psalm 69:25 is applied by the Holy Spirit to Judas: “Let [his] habitation be desolate.” Psalm 109:1-19 is attributed to the life of Judas. Peter quotes 109:8: “Let his days be few; and let another take his office.” Judas was a major apostle. He was one of the twelve. He could have sat with the eleven, ruling the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt.19:28, Lk. 22:30). What a high calling! Instead, he was the guide of those who sought to kill Jesus and had the impudence to appear at the forefront of the mob that seized him (Mt. 26:47, Lk. 22:47, Jn. 18:2-3).

Suicide of Judas

1:18-19 *“Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.” 19 And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood.”*

At a convenient time and in the absence of the multitude, Judas had bargained with the religious leaders to betray Jesus (Mt. 26:14-16, Lk. 22:3-6). Judas accepted their offer of *thirty pieces of silver*, fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 11:12-13. Later Judas was remorseful and brought back the money but it was too late. He had crossed a line and there was no recourse. In despair, he threw the coins into the temple, went out, and committed suicide (Mt. 27:3-10). Judas died by hanging or suffocation, which made him swell until he burst. All his entrails gushed out, as Doctor Luke would describe. The fate of Judas was known to all of Jerusalem. It was *headline news* as a remarkable judgment of God upon him who had betrayed his Master. The thirty pieces of silver (which Peter calls “the reward of iniquity”) was used to purchase the potter's field and became known as “the field of blood.”

Qualifications for Judas' Replacement

1:20-23 *“For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his [office] let another take” (cf. Psa. 69:25, Psa.109:8). Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.”*

At the direction of the Holy Spirit, Peter made a motion that three necessary stipulations be required of the man who would replace the fallen Judas. He had to be:

- 1.) A man who had companied with the twelve all the time Jesus went in and out among them.
- 2.) Beginning from the baptism of John (i. e. from the commencement of Christ's ministry).
- 3.) Unto the same day Jesus was taken up (i. e. an eye-witness of the resurrection).

Therefore, it could not have been the Apostle Paul, since he met *none* of these descriptions.

What man could fit these requirements? Undoubtedly, the man who took the place of Judas was one of the *seventy*, a notable group of men who were constant hearers of Christ's doctrine and witnesses of His miracles (Lk.10:1,17). The candidate had to be actively involved among them from the time of John's baptism until the ascension. He had to be an eye-witness of the resurrected Christ. Two men who met these conditions were selected and set apart; they were Joseph (Barsabas), and Matthias.

Matthias Chosen

1:24-26 *“And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen, 25 That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. [That place was hell.] 26 And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.”*

This is a very important prayer: *“Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen.”* Only God knows the heart of a person (1 Kg. 8:39). People can appear to be one thing today but what will they be like in five years, ten years, or twenty years? Only God knows what is really in the heart. When you are selecting a lifelong companion, ask God to help you. He alone understands the motives of men (1 Chron. 28:9), and ultimately how they will end up.

By faith, the apostles appealed to the Most High to reveal which of the two candidates he had chosen. Therefore, they drew lots, a custom practiced frequently in the Old Testament. The matter was done prayerfully and sacredly before the Lord, and Matthias was selected. Proverbs 16:33 indicates that even in “chance” situations such as the drawing of lots, God has the final say. I might add, however, that when people become *overly involved* in such things, it can lead to divination.

Summary of Judas

Judas was a major apostle. He had been with the Master for three years, hearing the finest teachings and observing the greatest role model of all time. Judas was anointed with the mighty Spirit of the Lord. He had performed many miracles—healing the sick and cleansing the lepers. He had preached the kingdom of God, just as his eleven brethren had done. Judas helped feed the five thousand, the bread multiplying in his hands as he gave it to the multitudes. He was in the ship when the Lord commanded the violent winds and waves to be still. He saw Peter walk on water. Judas even saw the dead raised. Yet, in spite of all these things, he did not go to heaven. He sold his soul for money. He never allowed God to cleanse his heart. Judas held the truth in unrighteousness. He did many wonderful works, but on Judgment Day the Lord will sadly say: “Depart from me, you who practices lawlessness, I never [was allowed to become acquainted with you]” (Mt. 7:22-23). Remember, a great ministry and anointing does *not* save us. We must live right. Actually, we prove that we do *not* love the Lord when we break his commandments (Jn.14:15, 24).

Judas:

- Was a *major* apostle, a minister.
- Had the mighty Spirit of God upon him.
- Performed many miracles.
- Cast out demons, healed the sick, cleansed the lepers.
- Preached the Kingdom of God and repentance
- Fed five thousand, the bread multiplying in his hands as he gave it.
- Heard the finest teachings from the greatest Teacher.
- Had the privilege of walking and interacting with the Messiah himself.
- Saw Peter walk on water.
- Heard Christ command the sea and wind to be still.
- Saw Christ raise the dead.
- Appeared to be just like all his eleven brethren.
- Beheld the majesty and glory of the Lord.
- Never let his real heart be known. (He kept himself well covered.) A hypocrite, pretender.
- Heard but would not obey the words of the Lord (Mt. 7:26,27). Built his house upon sand.
- Full of covetousness, a thief. (He *never* allowed Christ's Words to cleanse and change him.)
- Was a subtle sower of discord among his brethren.
- Loved cursing (Psa.109:17).
- Delighted not in blessing (Psa.109:17). He counted the sacred things of God a light thing.
- Had a seared conscience, a condition resulting from hearing but not *doing* the Word (Jas.1:22).
- Was not ashamed to boldly lead a mob unto Christ and his eleven brothers to betray them.
- Judas was a traitor, a devil. It would have been better if he were never born.
- He went through all the motions and appeared to be just like the rest, yet he was not sincere.
- Held the truth in unrighteousness. He knew the truth well and preached it, but would not live it.
- He is in the category of Matthew 7:21-23. He was *used* of God, but *not approved* of God.
- He was the servant of sin and did not abide in the house, and was cast out (Jn. 8:34-35).
- He was a branch that did not abide in the Vine. Withered, cut off, and cast into the fire (Jn.15:6).

There will be many believers in hell! Judas was a believer, a minister. Having a great ministry, anointing, and unusual gifts does not save us. The only thing that saves us is Jesus' blood and righteousness. Just because we believe in Jesus does not necessarily save us! Satan is the greatest believer of all but he is not going to heaven. The replacement of Judas occupies half of Acts chapter one. Men like Judas must be removed from the group before God moves in a new way.

Does being a believer *guarantee* that we are going to heaven? No, it does not! Even Satan believes, and so do all the demons and fallen angels (Jas. 2:19-20). Cain was a believer. He knew the voice of God but thought nothing of lying to Him. Wicked Ahab was certainly a believer. He believed in the God of Abraham. When he wanted direction he looked to the spirit of prophecy for direction. His life depicts that of a backslidden Pentecostal minister. King Saul was anointed by God, yet he ended up attacking David and murdering eighty priests of the Lord. When Saul was in dire need of direction, even in his backslidden state he inquired of the Lord, but God would not answer him. Then he enquired of a witch. God had removed his mercy from him (2 Sam. 7:15). It is not enough just to believe in Jesus, and then live a life of apostasy and rebellion. If we are counting on making it to heaven, we must *continue* to walk with God and obey his voice.

Chapter Two

THE DAY OF PENTECOST

Christ made numerous appearances to his disciples for forty days after the resurrection. Just prior to his ascension back into heaven, He charged them to tarry in Jerusalem until the arrival of the promised Holy Spirit. Christ said, “Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence” (Acts 1:5). He did not tell them exactly how many days they would have to wait. To them it could have been thirty days, or maybe seventy. Therefore, it was a test. The disciples were Galileans, and were a long way from home. Probably it was not convenient to stay in Jerusalem.

During those ten days between the ascension and Pentecost, God was testing the dedication of his followers. There was a sifting. God was removing men who were not loyal. Judas was replaced by Matthias. Others like Peter came to the forefront. The focus came upon 120 devout men and women who waited eagerly in the upper room. It was now early in the morning, perhaps around 6:00 a.m. The Day of Pentecost had fully come.

God's Set Time

2:1 “*And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.*” God has a set time in which He moves. The Day of Pentecost had “fully come.” It was now fifty days since the resurrection. Fifty is the number of jubilee, restoration, and liberty. All of these are blessings associated with the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit Himself is mentioned over fifty times in the Book of Acts.

In One Accord

“*They were all with one accord in one place.*” To see the brethren in unity was a miracle in itself. Only fifty-four days earlier the disciples were arguing around the Lord's table about who would be the greatest (Lk. 22:24). There was jealousy, ambition, and boasting among themselves, even after three years of teaching. What brought the disciples to brokenness of spirit, humility, and unity? *It was failure!* Every one of the apostles suffered the humiliation of failure. All of them had fled when their Lord was taken in the garden (cf. Mt. 26:31, 56). Furthermore, their hearts were broken to see their Savior so brutally beaten and slain upon the cross. After that, no one cared anymore who was the greatest. In addition to this, Judas, the discord-sower was gone.

Tongues of Fire

2:2-4 “*And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*” The time had come; the promise of the Father had arrived. The Holy Spirit came suddenly like a mighty wind and filled the room where the 120 were sitting. The wind turned to fire. Fire appeared, and when the fire parted and rested on each of them, their tongues became like fire (cf. Psa. 29:7). And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other languages, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Speaking in Tongues

The Scriptural Way of Being Baptized in the Holy Spirit

There were many promises that the Holy Spirit would come, (see Isa. 28:11,12, 44:3, Joel 2:28, Mt. 3:11,12, Lk. 24:49, Jn.14:17,26), but when He finally did arrive that Pentecost morning, they all spoke in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. This is the *Scriptural* way of being baptized in the Holy Ghost. This is the way the apostles received the Holy Ghost, including Paul and all of the early Church.

The Holy Spirit has not changed since the first century. The Biblical way of being baptized in the Holy Ghost is an experience evidenced by speaking with other tongues. Speaking in tongues is literally speaking another language. These are not just sounds, noises, or jibberish. The apostles had tongues of fire and they were all speaking in many foreign languages.

My life was utterly transformed after I was baptized in the Holy Spirit on October 12, 1966. It was a landmark experience. I was uncomfortable for a whole year as the fire of God consumed the dross in my life. My experience of the Holy Spirit was based upon Scripture. I received the Holy Ghost the way they did on the Day of Pentecost. I am glad I am not at the mercy of a theory. When people claim they are filled with the Spirit, but not according to Acts 2:4, they are hoping in a theory.

Foreign-born Jews Hear the Phenomena

2:5 *“And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.”* What were these devout foreign-born Jews doing in Jerusalem at this particular time? They had come from faraway countries to celebrate the feast of Pentecost. They were obeying the command of Deuteronomy 16:16 to observe the three major feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles in Jerusalem. It was a great sacrifice of time and money to make this journey. They had to leave their occupations for a long time and incur high travel expenses. These were devout men with spiritual hunger who had come to Jerusalem to honor the Lord at Pentecost.

The 120 had just been baptized in the Holy Ghost earlier than morning. By 9:00 a.m. (being the third hour of the morning), the excitement and action had spread and caused a great stir in the city. Therefore, many of these devout, foreign-born Jews gathered around the scene. They were awe-struck as these “Galileans” were all speaking in their own native languages. Not only were they speaking in their own native languages, they were speaking “the wonderful works of God.” These Galileans were speaking the mysteries of God. They were prophesying and revealing the ways and purposes of God, all in languages the Galileans themselves did not understand. The episode was entirely supernatural and it confounded everyone.

2:6-11 *“Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.”*

What were they saying in other tongues? They were declaring “the wonderful works of God,” the mysteries of God—and they were speaking them all in foreign languages. This is why we should never take “speaking in tongues” lightly. The curious spectators were hearing marvellous prophetic utterances and revelations of God's ways and plans, all in their own languages. However, the most amazing thing of all was the fact that the 120 Galilean disciples did not understand one word of it.

Everyone Was Confounded

2:12-13 - “*And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? 13 Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.*” The new move baffled everyone. Some were amazed and others mocked. Every new move of God is like that. It is different from anything known in the past but draws the same reactions. Some stand in awe while others mock. Every battle recorded in Scripture had a different stratagem. Even so, every revival has a different emphasis and manifestation. It comes with a distinct sign. It is hard to predict exactly how God will move again. He has an appointed time to move, and often it is with great suddenness and surprise.

Notwithstanding, God always has men he has prepared for the next move. God needs men and women who can *explain* what the new move is all about. This explanation is needed, not only in the world but in the Church as well. At this point we see Peter and the eleven standing up. They were heading the new move, and Peter in particular is going to explain to the bewildered multitudes what God is doing. Think of it! Just fifty-four days before, Peter was cursing and swearing, and denying the Lord. Christ reinstated him and now he has become the main spokesman of the new revival. How gracious of our Lord and Savior!

Peter Explains the New Move of God

2:14-16 “*But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: 15 For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day (9:00 a.m.). 16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel.*”

While some were *mocking* the new manifestation of the Holy Spirit, Peter stood up to speak. Unfortunately, opposition to what God is doing does not come only from the world. There are humanistic minds even within the Church who would also mock. For example, some would say that the baptism of the Holy Ghost and speaking in other tongues is of the flesh or of the devil.

The new move of God from Pentecost onward was opposed and challenged most by men who were *closest* to the truth. We would think it should be the opposite. The greatest opposition did not come from the Romans or from the heathen but from Bible-believing, Bible-quoting Israelites. They were vexed with *jealousy*. They felt they owned a monopoly on spiritual matters and highly resented anyone else being blessed besides themselves. The greatest opposition to any new move of God is always from those who have been touched by God in a previous visitation but have not moved on with God. History bears this out repeatedly. Such was the case throughout the Book of Acts.

In Peter's sermon (verses 15-36), ten verses are quotes from the Old Testament. Peter is now going to explain (in v16-21) that the present move of the Holy Spirit was promised by the prophet Joel.

The Outpouring of Rain

2:16-21 “*But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*” Verses 17-21 are quotes from Joel 2:28-32.

In these passages Peter is quoting from Joel 2:28-32. The subject is rain. “I will pour out my Spirit.” Rain was clearly understood to be symbolic of the Holy Spirit. What would be the result of this outpouring of rain upon “all flesh?” The spirit of prophecy would come upon male and female alike and they would prophesy. The Holy Spirit would not be limited by social boundaries. Not only the sons and daughters, but the servants and handmaidens would prophesy. The young men would see visions, and the old men dream dreams. Male and female, young and old, servants and handmaidens alike would all be touched by the outpouring of this rain. This happened at Pentecost.

You would think from the way Peter was preaching that Christ's coming was imminent in the first century. Obviously, Christ did not return in the first century. Thus, Joel's prophecy only had a *partial* fulfillment in the early Church. Certainly, there were signs and wonders in the earth at that time also, but the truest and greatest fulfillment will be in our days. What happened at Pentecost was only a small sample, a *type* of what God will do in the last days, at the time just prior to His coming.

Joel 2:28-32 is more for our days because it includes Christ's coming. Although Peter quoted Joel at Pentecost, it only had a *partial fulfillment* then. At Pentecost, they only experienced “the early rain.”

Two Rains—The Early and Latter Rain

The Book of Acts is a book of rain—an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. There were two rains in Israel, the *early rain* and the *latter rain*. We must understand the geography of Israel to appreciate these truths. In November / December, there fell the early rain. This *early rain* was light and it softened the earth and prepared the ground for sowing. Then in April / May came the *latter rain* which was heavy. When Israel tried to cross the Jordan River in the first month (April), the river had overflowed its banks because of the latter rain (cf. Josh. 3:15, 4:19). This was the rain that brought the crop (wheat / barley) to ripeness and prepared it for harvest.

In actual fact, the spiritual rain that fell on the Day of Pentecost was only *the early rain*. This outpouring was a light rain that prepared the ground for planting. The Church was planted and germinated at the time of Pentecost. A much heavier rain in the last days (the latter rain) will bring the Church to maturity. Then the harvest will be ready. When James 5:7 speaks of “the precious fruit of the earth,” it is a reference to His people. The Church will not come to maturity until it has experienced the former and latter rain. See James 5:7. Christ the Husbandman has shown long patience in waiting for His people (His bride) to come to maturity. It will take the latter rain (a heavy outpouring of the Spirit in the last days) to bring the Church to complete ripeness.

The Book of Acts, therefore, is a record only of *the early rain*. It is a small sample, a foretaste, an “earnest” of something much greater that is coming in the last days. Joel 2:28-32 will have its fullest fulfillment in our times. It was only fulfilled *in part* in Peter's time on the Day of Pentecost. This truth is further illustrated in the chart below:

Early and Latter Rain Compared

Early Rain	Latter Rain
For Sowing	For Harvesting
Nov / Dec	Apr / May
Light rain	Heavy rain
<i>Early Church</i>	<i>End-time Church</i>

- These two rains have a natural and a spiritual meaning.
- A light rain fell in November / December for planting a crop.
- A heavy rain fell in April / May to ripen the crop and make it ready for harvest.
- Jordan overflowed its banks at the time of the latter rain (Josh. 3:15, 4:19).
- Ruth was gleaning barley after the latter rain.
- In the first century, the early rain fell. It was for the planting of the Church.
- In the end times, the heavy latter rain will bring the Church to maturity.
- Christ cannot come for a perfected harvest until the Church has had both rains (Jas. 5:7).
- The Lord is a Husbandman. He eagerly awaits “the precious fruit of the earth.”
- Remember, we are “the planting of the Lord.” (Isa. 61:3). We are His garden (1 Cor. 3:6-9).
- Peter's quote from Joel 2:28-32 was only partially fulfilled in the first century.
- Joel 2:28-32 will have its ultimate fulfillment in our time, then the Lord will come.
- What happened at Pentecost was only *a sample* of something much bigger and better to come.
- The latter rain will be characterized by the spirit of prophecy coming upon the whole Church.

Let's resume now with Peter's sermon. The *sign* that the Holy Ghost had come was the speaking in other tongues. It was something they saw and heard. “Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now *see and hear*” (2:33). What did they *see and hear*—they saw and heard them speaking in other tongues. This was evidence of the resurrected Christ. In the remainder of Peter's sermon (v22-36), he explains four major tenets of the Christian faith to his bewildered audience:

- That the Messiah was ordained to die, in the purposes of God. v23
 - That the Messiah was ordained to rise from the dead. v24-31
 - That the Messiah would ascend into heaven, and be exalted at the Father's right hand. v32-35
 - That the Messiah is Jesus Christ, and He is both Lord and Christ. v36
- “The evidence of this,” said Peter, “is what you are now seeing and hearing” — The resurrected Christ has poured out His Spirit upon his believers and they are speaking in other tongues. v33

Jesus—a Man Approved of God

2:22 *“Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.”* Jesus performed many signs and miracles. This was well known; it was the talk of all Israel. He healed multitudes, walked on water, and even raised the dead. There are many tests to pass in order to receive such power. God cannot give power to everyone, for it requires great discipline to have power. We will have to pass through *intense* heat and pressure to obtain the power of God. Jesus was a man approved of God.

The Indictment of Israel

2:23 *“Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.”* In the foreknowledge of God, Jesus had to die for the sins of the world (cf. 1 Pet.1:19-20, Rev.13:8). Only a few weeks earlier, Peter himself did not understand this truth. Peter had drawn a sword to defend the Savior. Before the foundation of the world it was determined that Christ should come to earth and be sacrificed for the sins of the world. Evil men placed Christ upon a cruel cross, yet it was allowed of God and foreknown by Him.

The full blame is placed upon Israel, and rightly so. *“Ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.”* It was not the Roman soldiers who were responsible for the crucifixion, but Israel. Israel rejected the Lord and delivered him to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, with false accusations. In the Book of Acts we see a continual indictment of the Jews for this atrocity:

2:23 - *“Ye...by wicked hands have crucified and slain.”* 2:36 *“Whom ye have crucified.”*

3:13 - *“Ye delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go.”*

3:14,15 - *“Ye...denied the Holy One...and desired a murderer...and killed the Prince of life.”*

4:9-11 - *“Whom ye crucified...this is the stone which was set at nought of you builders.”*

4:27 - *“Against thy holy child Jesus...the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were gathered together.”*

5:30 - *“Whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.”*

7:52 - *“The Just One...of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers.”*

13:27-29 - *“Yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain.”*

It was envy and jealousy that put Christ on the cross (Mt. 27:18, Mk.15:10).

Now Peter is going to quote Psalm 16:8-11 regarding the resurrection of Christ.

The Resurrection Foretold in Psalm 16

2:24-31 - *“Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.”* (Psa.16:8-11).

In Psalm 16:8-11, David is speaking in reference to Christ, although he is speaking (in part) of himself also. David, too, had experienced the Lord standing at his right hand to help him. He had found fullness of joy in God's presence. But David, being a prophet, had a *glimpse* of what was going to happen to the Holy One when he came to earth and became a man.

“For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: 26 Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: 27 Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

29 Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. 30 Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; 31 He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.” (Psa.16:8-11).

David, as a prophet, understood that he was prophesying of Christ's death and resurrection. King David said, *Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, nor suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.* Obviously, he was not speaking of himself here, but of another. When Christ died on the cross, his soul descended into the lower parts of the earth, into hell. Meanwhile, his body was placed in the tomb. His flesh rested in hope and did not see corruption because in three-and-a-half days, He rose from the dead. His flesh did not have time to experience the normal putrefaction of death. On resurrection morning, His soul was rejoined to his body and was not left in hell. (cf. Acts 13:34-37)

The Old Testament prophets had *few* details. They only had *glimpses* of Christ's suffering, and the glory that would follow. “Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow” (1 Pet.1:10-11). Isaiah chapter 53 is another classic declaration of the suffering Lamb and the glory that would follow.

2:32 *“This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.”* Peter testified to the multitude that he and all the others with him had seen Christ alive after His resurrection (Acts 10:40-41).

Christ's Exaltation

2:33 *“Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.”* What were they seeing and hearing? What was the evidence of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to celebrate the glory of the risen Lord? They saw and heard them speaking in other tongues.

2:34-35 *“For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool.”* Again, David is not speaking of himself, but of Christ's exaltation. Peter is quoting Psalm 110:1. The fact of Christ being seated at the right hand of the Father is mentioned no less than twenty times in the New Testament. Psalm 110:1 is quoted or alluded to more than any other verse in the Old Testament.

2:36 “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Peter is saying it bluntly to Israel. Jesus was a man approved of God by many great signs and miracles. His death, resurrection, and exaltation at the right hand of God were all prophesied in the holy Scriptures. “And you, Israel, are guilty of crucifying Him who is both Lord and Christ.”

The Decision

2:37 “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” They were asking what direction to take. They were yielding to the sword, the Word of God. When people are confronted with their sins, they can either yield to the sword or harden their hearts. In this case, they were yielding to the sword. In Acts 5:33, another group resisted the sword. “When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.” This was an entirely different response. They were rejecting what the Spirit of the Lord was saying. One group was softened while the others were hardened. Herein lies the choice in the hearts of men. We can yield to the sword of God, or we can reject it. Here are the two decisions men make when under conviction:

2:37 - “They were pricked in their heart and said...What shall we do?” Yielding to the sword.

5:33 - “They were cut to the heart...and took counsel to slay them?” Resisting the sword.

7:54 - “They were cut the heart...and gnashed [at] him with their teeth.” Resisting the sword.

To Whom is the Gift Offered?

2:38 “Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” What a marvelous promise to those who will repent and be baptized—“Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” This is a *separate* experience from new birth. The baptism in the Holy Ghost is a sacred gift that breaks bondages, imparts strength, and gives vision. This is an integral part of salvation's package. Without this blessing, we cannot come to perfection. It is a sin to take this experience lightly.

2:39 “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” To whom is this promise made? The gift of the Holy Ghost is promised to every born-again believer. It is promised to you, your children, and to as many as the Lord our God shall call. Yet, it is given only to those who are obeying God (Acts 5:32). Sometimes people cannot receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit because they are not living in obedience.

There are some who argue that the Pentecostal experience is not for today. Their rationale is that some people who do not speak in tongues have better fruit than others who do speak in tongues. This is like saying that water baptism is not valid because Bill Clinton, the world's best known Baptist, does not have good fruit. The argument is just not valid.

To receive the Baptism in the Holy Spirit:

2:38 - Repent. This means to change our minds, which affects the way we live. It is ongoing.

2:38 - Be baptized. Submit to water baptism. Be dead and buried to our old life.

5:32 - We must be living a life of obedience. The Holy Spirit is only given to those who *obey*.

Save Yourselfs

2:40 “*And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward [crooked, perverse] generation.*” Peter preached “many” other exhortations that are not recorded in the Acts narrative. “Saving ourselves” is something that we have to do. Man has a part in his salvation. We have to humble ourselves, apply ourselves, shake ourselves, deliver ourselves, take heed to ourselves, and exercise ourselves to godliness. We are to “save ourselves.” This is likened to a man adrift in the ocean having a lifeline thrown out to him. He has to grab hold of it. Often times you throw out a lifeline to people when you are preaching, but they do not take hold of it and they die. We have to “lay hold of eternal life,” as Paul said to Timothy (1 Tim. 6:12,19). We are living in a crooked generation and we must have *a firm grasp* of what God is saying. The Word commands us to *cleave* to the Lord our God (Josh. 23:8, Deut. 4:4, 30:20) for He is our life.

Three Thousand Added to the Church

2:41-43 “*Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. 42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.*”

Suddenly, with Peter's powerful preaching, accompanied by the signs of Pentecost, there were 3000 new members added to the infant Church. Those tongues of fire must have done quite a purging in Peter and the apostles. Christ had given unto Peter the keys to the kingdom. With these keys he was used by God to open the door of the Church. The same man who had been a dismal failure only fifty-four days earlier was now transformed into a man of boldness. The Holy Ghost had removed all fear.

We Must Continue in the Faith

Not only were 3000 added to the Church, but they *continued stedfastly* in the apostles doctrine and fellowship. This is so important! Often people are told by the preacher that all they have to do is believe and they will be safe and secure forever. Seldom is it preached that we must *continue* in the faith in order to be saved (Heb. 3:14). It is he who endures to the end that will be saved. In these last days, many will depart from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1-2), signifying they were once *in* the faith. It does not matter how well we begin, it is how we end that is important. We must *continue* in the faith.

Holy Fear Needed to be Kept From Falling

“*And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.*” The fear of the Lord is greatly needed in the Church today. This is actually an anointing; it is one of the seven spirits of the Lord (Isa.11:2). The fear of the Lord is something holy, and it makes us afraid to sin (Prov. 8:7, Jer. 32:40, Psa.19:9). It is impossible to live a holy life without God's fear. When a person loses the fear of God, they drift into adultery, and with adultery comes deceit, lying, and a seared conscience (Pro. 30:20). The fear of the Lord gives us a keen sense that we can lose our reward, even our soul, if we do not take heed to our ways. Let us seek for this anointing! It will keep us clean. Today, the Church has *no fear*; but look at how defiled and powerless she is. She is not the head but the tail. She *follows* the world instead of leading. Therefore, the world has no respect for her.

No Communal Living

2:44-45 - “*And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.*” These passages do not suggest that the believers sold everything they had and gave it away. Some of the brethren were poor, unemployed, or ostracized for their Christian testimony. Those who had excess blessings and possessions sold them and gave charitably to the others who had special needs.

Sometimes enthusiastic saints who want to give their all to the Master make grievous errors of judgment with these verses. In his zeal for Christ, a believer may sell his house and business and give away his inheritance to join a certain ministry or to live in a communal setting. Then he ends up disillusioned and out in the cold. These things should never be.

Acts 2:44-45 does not imply communal living. Unfortunately, Christian communes start because of a distortion of these verses. In the early Church, they did not sell all they had, put it all into one pot, and live collectively in one large apartment house. Communism is like that. It teaches that all are alike and equal, and that everyone should have the same thing, but it is a system that never works.

In actual fact, the communal setup produces *contempt*, not love and unity. Do you know what it is like to have two women sharing the same kitchen? That in itself should tell it all. What if ten women were using the same kitchen? Can you imagine five or ten families using the same washing machine? I still remember the couple who complained bitterly about a mother who had just used the washing machine. There was quite a lot of residue left in the machine from the diapers. The whole situation became a very unhappy affair. This is some of the fruit of communal living.

Unity is Dependent Upon Privacy

The key to unity is *separation*. Unity depends on maintaining our own privacy, not blending everyone together in one house. What does the Word of God really teach about the subject? The right deduction is found in Proverbs 25:17. “Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour’s house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee.” Familiarity breeds contempt. When people overstay their welcome in your house, it brings grief, not happiness. Every family needs its own privacy and its own time alone. Communal living for any length of time is unscriptural.

Favor / Popularity Will Not Always Continue

2:46 - “*And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, 47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*” The infant Church had such joy. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. However, this “favor with all the people” only lasted a short time. Man does not love the truth, nor does Satan. They will always oppose it. Be careful about desiring popularity and favor. Christ was popular in His second year of ministry, but by the third year He was hated. If we are going to follow in the Master's footsteps, we will have seasons of great success, but also seasons when we are despised and rejected. We should expect both. In revival, there will continually be new ones added to the Church because the Lord is constantly drawing people.

Feast of Pentecost

(Leviticus 23:15-22)

According to Leviticus 23:15-17, Israel celebrated the feast of Pentecost *fifty* days after the feast of Firstfruits (23:9-14). Pentecost is governed by the number *fifty*—the number of jubilee, release, and restoration (Lev. 25:10). The baptism in the Holy Ghost has a message of proclaiming liberty to those who are bound. Thus, fifty days after Christ was resurrected the Holy Spirit came. Pentecost is to proclaim liberty from oppression and bondage.

Two Wave Loaves

Leviticus 23:17 - Two wave loaves made of fine flour were to be offered to the Lord on the feast of Pentecost. Both loaves were “baked with leaven.” On the day of Pentecost the Gentiles came into the Church; they joined Israel. This is the reason there were *two* loaves. The two loaves signify two peoples—the Jews and the Gentiles. On the day of Pentecost, these two were made one people (cf. Eph. 2:15-16).

Characterized by Leaven

But there is one other subject we should not overlook when we consider the Feast of Pentecost. The offering made on this feast day was baked with *leaven*. Leaven represents sin, hypocrisy, and false doctrine (cf. Mt.16:11-12, Lk.12:1, 1 Cor. 5:6-8). You will find all of these things in Pentecostals. If you understand this symbolism it will help you tremendously.

The Pentecostal experience is associated with leaven. The baptism in the Holy Ghost does not come upon perfect little saints. No, it comes upon *all flesh*. “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.” When someone who has been on drugs gets saved and baptized in the Holy Ghost, instantly he does not become a perfect little angel. He still has areas of his life where there is sin and hypocrisy. Just look at the Corinthian church. They were born again and baptized in the Spirit, yet they were carnal. It takes *time* for God to purify men and women from the dross of sin. God said the sacrifice on the day of Pentecost had to be “baked with leaven.” The Lord was showing us that the Pentecostal experience was for people who had *mixture* in their lives—people like you and me.

**The Holy Spirit is not given to us because we are holy.
The Holy Spirit is given to us to *make* us holy**

Chapter Three

A NOTABLE MIRACLE

This chapter records a notable miracle—the healing of a man who was lame from birth. He had never walked in over forty years (4:22). The lame man (whose name is not disclosed) had sat conspicuously at the gate of the temple for many years, asking alms of all who entered the temple. He must have been there during the Lord's three-and-a-half year ministry. Christ must have seen his outstretched hand there on numerous occasions, but He purposely passed him by over and over again. How could this be? What would be the purpose?

Surely, God has an appointed time to heal people. He reserved the time for this man's healing by Peter and John because this act would glorify the *resurrected* Christ. A miracle *after* the resurrection would prove that Christ lived *in* his disciples, and was working *through* them. The healing of this man *by the apostles* was more effective than Christ healing him during His earthly ministry. The result of delaying this miracle of healing also brought many more souls to Christ. Unto the Church were added another five thousand (4:4). Let's summarize the four Gospels and Acts like this:

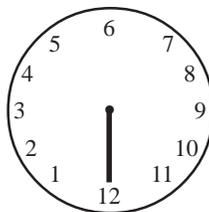
The Four Gospels - are the acts of Christ.

The Book of Acts - are the acts of Christ *through his apostles*.

3:1-2 “Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple.”

Luke is using Hebrew time. Roman time is the same as ours. The Jewish day started six hours earlier than ours, at sunset. Instead of starting at 12:00 midnight, their day started at 6:00. Consider the chart below:

Jewish Time



*The Jewish day ended at sunset
and a new day started.
(equivalent to our 6:00 p.m.)*

Peter said in Acts 2:15, “These men are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but *the third hour* of the day.” The third hour was 9:00 a.m. our time. In 3:1-2, Peter and John went into the temple at the hour of prayer, being *the ninth hour*. This would be 3:00 p.m. our time. There were three designated hours for prayer in the temple—the third, sixth, and ninth hours. This was probably based upon Psalm 55:17: “Evening, and morning, and at noon will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice.”

3:3-8 “Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. 4 And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. 5 And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. 6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. 7 And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. 8 And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.”

Something Better Than Silver and Gold

“Silver and gold have I none.” Peter did not have money. He had something far better—he had the true riches. He possessed the priceless power of God. Peter gave to this man what the best doctors and hospitals could never afford. The tremendous resurrection power that flowed through Peter caused this man who never walked to suddenly jump up and leap and run around the temple.

3:9-10 “And all the people saw him walking and praising God: 10 And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.”

Remember, this man had never walked. He had been lying there for years. Everyone knew him. Yet, at his instant healing, he started jumping and leaping. Initially, people need to see signs and wonders to help them believe (Jn. 4:48), for they do not have the necessary faith in them. As we mature, however, we are *not as dependent* upon the signs and wonders because Christ's faith is being developed in us. Mature believers learn to walk by faith, not by sight. Yet now we have a problem—the people want to worship Peter.

Peter Deflects the Glory

3:11-12 “And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering. 12 And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?”

“Why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?” It is so important to *deflect* praise away from ourselves unto the Lord and others. This is a safeguard for us when we are being used of God. In the Welsh revival of 1904, Evan Roberts became a key instrument of the Lord. When news reporters from around the world came to interview Mr. Roberts, he said: “There are twelve counties in Wales. God is moving in every one of them and he is using hundreds of other ministers.” He always cited all the other places and people God was using. He turned the focus *away from himself*. This is wisdom! If we focus on ourselves, we will quickly be overtaken with pride. Peter turned all the attention back to the Lord Jesus Christ (v13-16).

3:13-15 “The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. 14 But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; 15 And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.”

God's Faith, Not Our Own

3:16 *“And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.”* Peter made it clear that it was not his faith nor the lame man's faith. It was “the faith of God” that brought the healing. God's faith did this. Mark 11:22 says “Have faith in God” in the KJV. However, in the original language it is rendered, “Have the faith of God.” Paul said, “I live by the faith of the Son of God” in Galatians 2:20. Thus, it is God's faith, not our own.

Ignorance Played a Part in the Crucifixion

3:17 *“And now, brethren, I wot [or know] that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.”* Ignorance played a certain role in the crucifixion. Ignorance, however, does not save or excuse us. There are people who believe they are “not responsible for what they do not know,” but they are sadly mistaken. Leviticus chapter 4 warns us that we are still guilty, even when we are ignorant of the law of God (cf. Lev. 4:13, 22, 27). Peter later warns against willful ignorance (2 Pet. 3:5).

3:18 *“But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.”* All the prophets foretold a suffering Christ. The Jewish nation overlooked the “suffering” aspect of Christ. They only comprehended a conquering Christ. That is the mentality of the Church today. The thought of *paying a price* to be a real Christian is a foreign concept to many believers because they are listening to another gospel (1 Pet. 2:21, 2 Tim.1:8, 3:12).

Honest Confession Necessary Before Forgiveness / Blessing

3:19 *“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”* Peter told Israel that an honest confession of our sin is necessary before we receive blessing from God (Prov. 28:13). There is no release from sin or guilt until there is an acknowledgment before the Lord, and often *before men* as well. Some sins have to be confessed to men. Joseph's ten brothers still had a troubled conscience many years after they had betrayed their younger brother because they failed to confess their sin to Jacob their father.

Denial is a major problem for *believers* as well as unbelievers. Knowing the truth does not set us free; it is *admitting* the truth, and *obeying* the truth that sets us free. For some, it is so hard to concede to any wrong, any failure, or any weakness. Their whole life is a life of denial. Therefore, they are never released from their bondages and guilt, and there are no real breakthroughs in their lives. Remember, we become very good at what we practice. To practice denial is to become an expert at denial and cover-up. It is very hard to humble ourselves and admit our faults when we are out of practice. Let us face ourselves and our sins honestly by God's grace, and begin to free ourselves from the web of deceit, denial, and pride. Some confessions *must* be made before man. Do it!

Christ Returns Only When All Things Are Restored

3:20-21 *“And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: 21 Whom the heaven must [contain] until the times of [restoration] of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”*

Until everything is restored and put right in the Church, Jesus will remain in heaven. He is not coming again to earth until the Bride is ready for the Bridegroom. Certainly, Christ can come at any moment for our lives individually, but not for the Church. Heaven must retain Him until everything is restored (everything, that is, that has been spoken by the prophets since the world began).

Christ cannot come tonight because:

- Everything must be restored and put right before He comes (Acts 3:21).
- His Bride has not made herself ready (Rev.19:7-8).
- Christ will not be wedded to an immature bride.
- He is coming for a *glorious Church without spot*. She is not in that condition today (Eph. 5:27).
- The latter rain (revival) must first come to bring the Church to maturity (Jas. 5:7, Joe. 2:28-32).
- The glory of the latter house (end time Church) must be greater than the former (Hag. 2:9).
- The Man of Sin must first come (2 Thes. 2:3). He will come to sift and purify the Church.
- The earth must be reaped first (Rev.14:14-16, the good harvest; Rev.14:17-20, the evil harvest).
- At the world's darkest hour, the greatest revival light will shine (Isa. 60:1-3).

Christ—The Prophet of Which Moses Spoke

3:22-23 *“For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. 23 And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.”*

Now Peter is quoting from Deuteronomy 18:15,18,19. The prophet which Moses prophesied of is clearly the Lord Jesus Christ. Moses said the prophet would be “like unto me.” Christ was very much like Moses in his prophetic office. *“Every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.”* This means Jesus is the only means of pardon and salvation, the only way to forgiveness. Anyone who will not hear his words will be cut off and lost eternally. To confirm that Christ is the prophet mentioned by Moses, see also John 6:14, 7:40.

Samuel / The Prophets – Spoke of Christ

3:24 *“Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.”* Samuel marked a major turning point in Israel. He was used by God to raise up whole schools of prophets. When Samuel was a child, the word of God was scarce in Israel (1 Sam. 3:1). However, by the time he was old, he had raised up schools of prophets all over the land (cf. 1 Sam.19:20). Samuel was responsible for raising up the prophetic office throughout Israel. Many of the prophets who followed Samuel prophesied of Christ, especially David.

Samuel was the spiritual father of David. Of course, David was the greatest of all the prophets of his day. If we want to be “anointed above our brethren” as was David, we have to follow the Lord wholeheartedly (Acts 13:22, Psa. 45:7). So many only follow the Lord for a few years and then slacken their pace or even go back, but God is looking for men and women who will march forward to the very end. Those who will be faithful to the end will receive the mighty anointing of the Lord.

The Blessing of Forgiveness

3:25-26 “*Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. 26 Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.*” What a blessing it is to have God's Son sent to us so that our iniquities can be purged and our sins forgiven. What a glorious blessing! He was sent *first* to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles. The promises were *first* given to Abraham and his descendants. Therefore, salvation and all of the blessings were *first* offered to Israel (cf. Rom.1:16, 2:10), then to the Gentiles.

Christ was that Prophet who would come into the world. Deuteronomy 18:15-19 is quoted or alluded to often in the New Testament (see John 6:14, 7:40, 1:21, 1:25, Acts 7:37, Acts 3:22-23). “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; 16 According to all that thou desiredst of the Lord thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. 17 And the Lord said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. 18 I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. 19 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, *I will require it of him.*” Acts 3:23 says he “*shall be destroyed.*”

Israel heard God's voice and saw His majesty on Mount Sinai. It was so horrifying to them that they wanted God to stop speaking. Instead, they wanted Him to speak to them *through a man*. Therefore, God became a man and dwelt among them. Jesus was that man, that Prophet. God became a man and spoke to Israel, and yet as a nation, they rejected Him.

Summary: (v22-26)

- God promised Abraham: “In thy seed shall all the earth be blessed.”
- That seed was Christ (Gal. 3:16).
- Christ was sent to bless us by turning us away from iniquity.
- The promise was confirmed through Moses (Deut. 18:15-19).
- God would raise up a Prophet who would speak the words of God. Jesus was that Prophet.
- Anyone who refused to hearken to Him would be destroyed.
- Samuel and all the prophets who followed (especially David) prophesied also of Christ.
- Because the Israelites were the children of Abraham, of the prophets, and of the covenant God made, they were the *first* to have the blessing of forgiveness offered to them.
- This crucified / resurrected Prophet, who was Abraham's special Seed, offered them salvation.

Chapter Four

PERSECUTION BEGINS

Before the healing of the lame man, the brethren had favor with all men (2:47). After the miracle, the leaders of the people were vexed with *jealousy* and were vehemently opposed to them. This always happens. Now the persecution is going to begin. In every new move of God there is trouble because of jealousy. Certain people want to be at the forefront, but when God bypasses them and uses others to start the revival, they become infuriated with jealousy.

Jealousy is always related to being *number one*. If the desire of our heart is to exalt the Lord as number one and to keep ourselves out of the limelight, we will never have jealousy. However, if our motives are wrong and *we* are trying to be number one, jealousy will surely be a major problem. King Saul was troubled with jealousy when David posed a threat to his position. God himself is jealous, but rightly so because He alone deserves to be Number One (Ex. 34:14, 20:5, Josh. 24:19).

Miracles Draw Some / Provoke Others

4:1-3 *“And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, 2 Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3 And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide.”*

The Sadducees in particular were outraged because the apostles preached the resurrection. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, or anything supernatural (Acts 23:8). You wonder why some people are in the ministry at all. Usually, spiritually dead clergy like the Sadducees are in the ministry only because it is a profession and a position of honor. Their main purpose is to have the honor of man. Now that the people are turning away from them unto Peter and John who have spiritual life, the religious leaders are maddened with jealousy.

4:4 *“Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.”* This notable miracle added a significant number, about 5000 new believers to the Church. Later, in Acts 6:7 it says: *“The word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.”* The Church was continually growing. Many of the *priests* also became believers. However, because they *continued* to function in the Levitical ordinances of the Old Covenant, Paul was later prompted to write his epistle to the Hebrews to correct this practice.

Numbering the Converts

“And the number of the men was about five thousand.” Luke, the writer of Acts, is a statistician. He often records numbers. For example, on the Day of Pentecost, he said there were three thousand added to the Church. Now another five thousand believers were added. Moses was told to number the tribes of Israel. When David numbered the people, he was judged. Therefore, what is right for one man may not be right for another. We should remember this! Luke frequently records numbers.

The Apostles On Trial

Acts 4:5-7 *“And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, 6 And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. 7 And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?”*

“And it came to pass.” This expression is a Hebraism and it is used by Luke 50 times in his Gospel and 15 times in the Book of Acts. It suggests that Luke himself had been thoroughly immersed in the Jewish faith, although he may have been part Gentile. After the healing of the lame man, the Jewish authorities arrested Peter and John the same day. The next day the authorities questioned them, saying: “By what power or name have ye done this?” The miracle was obvious and could not be denied by the rulers. Now, Peter, full of the Holy Ghost, speaks up.

Peter's Defense of the Gospel

4:8-12 *“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, 9 If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; 10 Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. 11 This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. 12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”*

Peter and John were asked, “By what power or name have you performed this miracle?” Peter replied—*the means* by which this lame man has been healed is “by the Name of Jesus Christ.” There is tremendous power in the Name of Jesus. That Name is above every other name in heaven and earth (cf. Phil. 2:9-11). All power is given to Him in heaven and in earth (Mt. 28:18).

Jesus—The Only Way

This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Peter is making reference to Christ's words in Matthew 21:42-45 (cf. 1 Pet. 2:4-8). Christ is the chief corner stone of God's building, the Church. In a building, all dimensions are taken from the corner. Peter was very blunt with the religious leaders. He said, “Whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead...This is the stone which was set at nought of *you* builders, which is become the head of the corner.” The “builders” were Israel's ministers. These religious leaders were the ones most responsible for the crucifixion. Leaders can be the greatest blessing or hindrance to God's purposes.

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” This is very clear. Jesus is the only way to heaven, the only way to have forgiveness. There is no other name in the universe (except Jesus Christ) by which we may find salvation. This is the most fundamental truth of the Church. It is the most important tenet of faith. Christ is the only way. See Mk. 6:16, Mt. 11:27, John 3:16, 8:24, 14:6, 15:23, 1 Tim. 2:5, 1 Jn. 5:12. Israel tried to come to God *their way* and on their own terms. They rejected God's provision—the sacrifice of His Son. Israel tried to establish *their own* righteousness (see Romans 9:30 to 10:4).

Unlearned and Ignorant Men

4:13 “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.”

The apostles were ordinary men, born in Galilee, and fishermen by trade. They were not educated at the rabbinical schools, and had no “degrees.” For that matter, neither did Jesus (cf. Jn. 7:15). The educated Jewish leaders looked down on the apostles with scorn, yet the Jewish leaders possessed no power to heal the lame man. They had no ability to deliver *anyone* held captive by Satan.

Many religious institutions are like the rabbinical schools of Peter's time. They turn out students whose heads are filled with information but whose hearts are void of faith. Philosophies, theories, opinions, politics—none of these produce *life*. An education cannot buy the power of God. The true anointing is bought at a very high price. The anointing is *preceded* by many trials and usually an extraordinary crisis in one's life. Then after many costly commitments, there is a vivid meeting with Christ. After a person has received a mighty anointing from God, that anointing is maintained by an obedient life.

The apostles had no university training or degrees. Yet, *they had been with Jesus*, and because they had been with Jesus, they were healing the sick, raising the dead, and delivering men from their sin and bondages. Therefore, we must conclude that education *by itself* does not give anyone spiritual authority. Authority comes from “being with Jesus,” by being in union and in communion with Him. Nothing can be a substitute for personal commitment and intimate fellowship with Christ. If *relationship* with Jesus and the Spirit-filled life is not our main emphasis, we will all fail miserably.

The Threat to the Apostles

4:14-18 “And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. 15 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, [Jewish supreme court] they conferred among themselves, 16 Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. 17 But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. 18 And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.”

Their Reply—God's Law is Above Man's Law

4:19-20 “But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” Here is a case where they were not obeying the authorities. We are obligated to obey the ordinances of man until they conflict with God's laws. At that point, we must obey God. God's laws are higher. When nations prohibit us from preaching the Gospel, we are authorized to preach by a Higher Power—by the One who commanded us to teach all nations (Mt. 28:19-20).

Brian J. Bailey said that when he was first going into the ministry, the one who objected the most to that vocation was his own father. As Dr. Bailey obeyed God and went into the ministry, God changed his father's heart. Matthew 10:37 governed his life: “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” When there is a choice between the wishes of our parents or God's way, we must choose God's way.

Common Man Glorified God / The Rulers Were Jealous

4:21-22 *“So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. 22 For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was showed.”*

Because of jealousy the rulers wanted to inflict punishment upon Peter and John, but popular opinion would not allow it. “All men glorified God for that which was done.” A man who had never walked in over forty years was now walking and leaping and praising God. You would think that a notable miracle should have caused the leaders to rejoice too, but it evoked the opposite reaction. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the rulers tried to kill both Lazarus and Jesus (Jn.11:44-54, 12:9-11).

You will observe in the Book of Acts that frequently the apostles were *beaten up* after performing a miracle. God actually uses the jealousy and rage of Satan to keep us humble because there is a great temptation to be lifted up with *pride* when we demonstrate the mighty power of God.

4:23 *“And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.”* After their release, “they went to their own company.” This statement is so meaningful. Spiritually, we all gravitate to people who are of like mind and vision. Peter and John departed and headed straight to their fellow-apostles and close friends. They told them how they had been forbidden to preach the Gospel and about the threats of the Jewish council. Then in verses 24-30, they besought the Lord in fervent prayer for divine boldness.

The Prayer for Divine Boldness

4:24-30 *“And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together. For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.”*

The apostles were facing a tremendous battle, and they prayed fervently for the Lord's intervention. Every spiritual battle is won in prayer. When the authorities commanded them not to preach the Gospel, the apostles did not try to retaliate for the battle was not against flesh and blood. Instead, they went to prayer and appealed to the highest power—the most High God. First, they exalted Him as the One who made heaven and earth and the sea. The sea represents people. Often the sea is turbulent, but God is the Master of the sea. They were asking the Creator to come and take charge of the raging sea.

“Lord, the heathen are raging and coming against your Son. Behold their threatenings. Lord, look at the way they are coming against you and your Son. Lord, this as a personal insult to you! Their raging and their threats are directed against you. Therefore, give your servants *all boldness* to declare your Word, and stand behind your Word with signs and wonders.”

The Apostles Use Psalm Two For Their Appeal

The apostles cited Psalm 2:1-2 and appealed to God for help on the grounds of Psalm Two. Psalm 2:4-6 declares God's *response* when the heathen rage and take counsel together against the Lord and his Christ... “He who sits in the heavens will laugh. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.” In spite of all the anger and opposition from the jealous adversaries, the Father promises to “set his Son upon the holy hill of Zion,” the highest position of authority.

In the remainder of Psalm two, the inhabitants of the earth are warned to submit to the Son, seeing that all the nations (the heathen) are his inheritance. Christ will break the *rebellious* with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces. Thus, the apostles asked God to defend them and their cause for Christ.

Psalm Two Partially Fulfilled at the Crucifixion

Psalm two had a *partial fulfillment* at the time of the crucifixion. This is brought out in the prayer of Acts 4:25-28. It also has a fulfillment in the last days. The nations led by the Antichrist will be gathered against Christ at His Second Coming (cf. Rev.19:19-21), but they will be utterly defeated. 4:25-28 show a partial fulfillment of Psalm two during the crucifixion.

4:25-28 “Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy [servant] Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together. For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.”

At the time of the crucifixion, Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate, the Romans, and the nation of Israel and their leaders were gathered together against the Lord and his Christ. The rulers of the earth had taken counsel together against the Lord and against his Christ. God allowed these evil men to do to His Son only what He had determined before the foundation of the world.

The Response From Heaven

4:31 “*And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.*” Sometimes the power of God literally shakes a building. In response to their petition for boldness, God shook the building with His power. There was a fresh *refilling* with the Holy Spirit. Initially they had been filled with the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost. In this case, they were *refilled*. We are vessels that are constantly being refilled. Ephesians 5:18 says: “Be filled with the Spirit.” In the original language it is better rendered, “Be ye *being* filled with the Spirit.” It is present tense—being refilled time and time again. When you are full of the Holy Ghost and joy, you cannot have a persecution complex or be dragged down with self-pity.

We Are Vessels

Frequently we see the words “filled” or “full” in the Book of Acts. This is because we are vessels. Paul was a *chosen vessel* (9:15). We are capable of *containing* something. Some men were filled with wrath, envy, confusion, or the devil. Others were filled with the Holy Ghost, joy, or faith. What we allow ourselves to be filled with determines whether we are a good or evil vessel.

All Things Common

4:32 “*And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that [any one] of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.*” The believers loved one another dearly, and the numbers were increasing all the time. There were three thousand on the Day of Pentecost, and another five thousand because of the healing of the lame man. Besides this, others were “added *daily* to the church” (2:47). The new converts were many and from varied backgrounds, ages, temperaments, and denominations. The Jewish religion had many sects. Yet all differences were laid aside and they were unanimous in their faith in Christ. When God blesses His Church, people have great joy and they forget their differences. Also, they are generous. “The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul.”

“*Neither said any of them that [any one] of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.*” The wealthier brethren sold pieces of land to give charity to the less advantaged. Therefore, no one lacked of this world's goods. The brethren were liberal to the poor, and dead to the things of this world. They were more enthralled with their eternal inheritance than their temporal earthly possessions. No longer did these Jews boast of their money, property, or commerce. Instead, they abounded in charity and were eager to distribute to their poorer brethren.

4:33-35 “*And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. 34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold; 35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.*” This was a voluntary system to help out the poorer ones. The apostles never forced the believers to make these sacrifices. No one was ever compelled to give and no one was dominated in any way by the apostles. Everything was a *freewill offering*.

These passages do not suggest that the people sold *all* of their possessions. The joy of the Lord had caused the new believers to forget their differences and have a benevolent spirit. Yet it does not say that they gave away *everything* they had. I am emphasizing this point for an important reason.

Several years ago a young couple I know were living in a large house with several other families. During that time the wife's father passed away, leaving her an inheritance of about \$35,000. In their zeal for the Lord, they decided to give all of that money to the people who were operating the work there. The ministry should *never* have received it. It was not long before the couple had financial troubles which added stress to their marriage. In addition to this, they were no longer in agreement with the vision of that place, and they left. It is for reasons just like this that I urge people to manage their inheritance with great prudence and good counsel. Unfortunately, I have seen other brothers and sisters give their all to a ministry or work, only to be very disillusioned later. Exercise caution!

First Mention of Barnabas

4:36-37 “*And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, the son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, 37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.*” This is the first mention of Barnabas. He was a good man and had a ministry of encouraging others. His name means, “The Son of Encouragement.” Barnabas sold a piece of land and brought the money to the apostles. This prepares the setting for chapter 5.

Chapter Five

JUDGMENT BEGINS IN GOD'S HOUSE

In chapter 5:1-11, the scene changes. Now, God begins to judge his own house. The Church is the light of the world. She is a reflection of the Heavenly Bridegroom, a representation of the Truth. Therefore, when her members live deceitfully and hypocritically, God cannot tolerate it and He has to move in judgment. In these passages we have the tragic account of a notable couple who had been touched by God and filled with the Spirit, yet they never allowed God to cleanse their hearts which eventually led to their destruction. This account should serve as an awesome warning to all.

Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, were members of the church in Jerusalem. In all probability they had been baptized in the Holy Spirit just as all the others had been during the new move of God. Unfortunately, something else was able to fill their hearts because Peter had to say to Ananias, “*Why hath Satan filled thine heart?*” (5:3).

Ananias and Sapphira had just sold some property and *retained part of the sale price* for their private use, which they had every right to do. Ananias brought the *balance* of the property sale to the apostles to be used for community purposes. However, he represented the balance as being the total sale price. He was saying: “We have given our all,” but he was seeking to gain a reputation for greater generosity than he and his wife actually deserved. Ananias and Sapphira were trying to deceive the Church community and the apostles, but in doing so, they actually were trying to deceive the Holy Spirit. Thus, they were “tempting the Spirit of the Lord,” and *lying* to Him.

5:1-6 “*But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why has thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.*”

The Rebuke—Not for Withholding, But Lying

Remember, the rebuke was not for stealing or withholding, but for deceiving and lying. Peter said: “The land and money was yours before and after you sold it. It was at your own disposal to do what you wanted with it. What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not *lied* to men but to God.” The rebuke was *not* for keeping back part of the sale price. Ananias and his wife did not have to give *anything*, had they so chosen. God's anger was against their deceit, lying, and hypocrisy. They had no fear of God. In the middle of revival glory they had the audacity to lie and deceive in the presence of God, and they thought nothing of it. For this, the Spirit of the Lord was angry.

In a real sense, Ananias and Sapphira had a seared conscience. They had no sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. Both must have ignored *many* warnings from the Spirit of the Lord about deceit, lying, and ulterior motives, yet they had given no heed. God would never have judged a babe in Christ like this.

“Why Hath Satan Filled Thine Heart?”

Ananias and Sapphira were church members. Certainly, they were born again and probably filled with the Holy Spirit. Both were part of the Christian community in Jerusalem. Notwithstanding, Peter had to confront Ananias and say: “Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?” This account should help settle the controversy over whether or not a Christian can have another spirit or be overtaken by another spirit. Certainly, Satan can gain an entrance into the life of a Spirit-filled believer if there is an open door, an invitation given to him. See Ephesians 4:27.

Satan found a resting place in Judas, a minister and major apostle. Judas was anointed and used by Christ to minister to others. Yet Judas was covetous, and Satan found in him a man with a nature compatible to his own. Therefore, Judas became a channel, a conduit through whom Satan could enter and work. Demas was a fellow minister and personal friend of Paul. Later he turned his back on Paul, but not because Satan had overpowered him. Demas forsook Paul, “*having loved this present world*” (2 Tim. 4:10.) Certainly, Satan deflected Demas, but the real problem was a heart that was never completely cleansed from lust and the love of the world. Therefore, the real issue in life is this: “*Why hath Satan filled thine heart?*” *Why* did he get in? What open door in your life gave Satan the advantage to enter and overtake you? Is it perverse motives, evil desires, or areas in the heart that were never cleansed or consecrated to God? A pure heart keeps Satan out (Jn.14:30).

Achan held up the whole congregation and immobilized everyone from going on into the land of promise. The first sin after crossing Jordan into Canaan was keeping back part of the treasure and lying about it. Achan's deceit stopped the flow of revival. (See Joshua 7:1-26). Israel could not stand before their enemies anymore because of the deceit and covetousness of one man, Achan. He had to be removed from the congregation.

No Fear / Much Fear

5:5 “*And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.*” Ananias and Sapphira had no fear whatsoever. They were not afraid to lie and deceive right in the presence of God and in the midst of revival fire. Today, many things are glossed over in the Church and people have little sense of the fear of God. This is one of the major reasons there is so much sin and iniquity in the house of the Lord today. However, when God moves in His power, there is greater light, and these sins will be exposed and judged, causing others to be much more careful. When Ananias and Sapphira fell down dead for lying to the Holy Spirit in Peter, *great fear* came on all who heard these things. Peter later stated that judgment must *begin* at the house of God (1 Pet. 4:17). God cannot judge the world until he first judges his own Church.

5:6-11 “*And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.*”

Wrong Submission / Wrong Unity

5:9 “Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.” Is a woman always to agree with and submit to her husband? Here is a situation where the wife was rebuked by God for being in agreement with her husband to do evil.

“How is it that you have *agreed together* to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?” This is the wrong kind of unity and the wrong kind of submission. In this case, the wife should not have agreed with her husband. She should have politely objected. If her own heart had been pure, she would have appealed to her husband not to follow this course of action. She could have saved herself and possibly her husband as well. This is why blind submission is not right. There are times when it is right to disagree and object, but always in the spirit of meekness. Sapphira lost her life and her husband died as well *because she agreed* with him. A wife can often turn her husband's heart one way or another. A wise woman must stay in tune with the Lord and influence and encourage her husband to take the right direction. A man listens to the one closest to him.

Summary of Ananias and Sapphira:

- They were born-again, Spirit-filled believers in the church community of Jerusalem.
- They were not obligated or compelled to give *any* of their property or profits to the apostles.
- They wanted a reputation for greater generosity than they deserved.
- They desired the praise of man more than God's, saying, “We have sacrificed our all for the poor.”
- They never allowed God to thoroughly cleanse their hearts of perverse motives.
- They had no fear of God and were unafraid to lie and deceive the brethren and the ministers.
- The fact that they had no fear meant they had no wisdom. Holy fear is the beginning of wisdom.
- Remember, the fear of the Lord is clean, and keeps us clean (Psa.19:9).
- They had a seared conscience and must have *ignored numerous warnings* from the Holy Spirit.
- There was an *over-familiarity* with the movings of the Holy Spirit; they took sacred things lightly.
- God would never have judged *babes in Christ* as severely. They must have had much light.
- God's anger was *not* for withholding money, but for lying, deceiving, and hypocrisy.
- They lied and deceived in the presence of God, in the midst of revival fire, in the light.
- Their judgment caused many to fear the Lord and walk circumspectly.
- In this case, the wife should have *disagreed* with her husband and politely objected.
- With this couple, we see the wrong kind of unity and agreement.
- If the wife had had pure motives, she could have saved her own life and possibly her husband's.
- The lack of holy fear today is the reason for so much sin in the Church.
- Judgment on people like Achan, Ananias, and Sapphira will happen again in revival.

Power of Unity

5:12-14 “*And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon’s porch. 13 “And of the rest [dared] no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. 14 And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)”* There is tremendous power when there is unity (cf. Gen.11:6).

Many startling signs and wonders were performed by the apostles. They were the center of the fire, and no one else dared to join them, though the public held them in high regard. The fire continued to spread. Many more were added to the Church, especially when the gifts of healing were operating.

Everyone Healed

5:15-16 “*Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. 16 There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.”*

Peter, in particular, had unusual gifts of healing. Even his shadow brought healing. The shadow was the anointing that covered him. It is probable that there was a visible glow emanating from Peter. Paintings from the first century portray halos around the heads of pious men. This is because the anointing upon those men could be seen visibly. When Peter passed by, *every one* was healed. That is what happens in revival when the anointing is operating. There is tremendous power released.

Persecution is Necessary When We Have Power

Whenever these men performed miracles in Acts, usually they were beaten up the next day, or were slandered and reproached. Paul said he would have been “exalted above measure” unless God had allowed *a thorn in the flesh* to keep him humble (2 Cor.12:6-10). This is the reason persecution is necessary—so that our haughty opinions about ourselves are held in check. When God uses us in extraordinary ways, extraordinary pressures are also necessary to keep our hearts modest. Yes, Satan is provoked to jealousy when he sees the power of God manifested and the name of Jesus glorified. Yet his rage and persecution against those God uses *are necessary* to keep them humble.

5:17-18 “*Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation.”* This is precisely what Peter needed to keep him in his proper place. Vs. 18 “*And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.”*

The Angel Opens the Prison Door

5:19-23 “*But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, 20 Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. 21 And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. 22 But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, 23 Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within.”*

When God moves, even physical walls cannot keep a person in a prison. In the last days, the Spirit of the Lord will instantaneously transport people from one place to another. Look at Philip after he baptized the Ethiopian (Acts 8:39-40). God defies natural laws when His power is upon us. It does not matter how much our heads have been filled with information. It does not matter how well we know the original Hebrew or Greek languages. The thing that matters is *the life of faith* which comes from a life of obedience and a close relationship with the Author and Finisher of our faith.

Before the Council

5:25-27 *“Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. 26 Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. 27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them...”*

The “council” is found in Acts 14 times, and 22 times in the New Testament. It means the *Sanhedrin*, the Jewish supreme court. It was made up of 70 members, the president being the high priest. The system was patterned after Moses and the 70 elders.

The Command Not to Preach Reiterated / The Apostles' Response

5:28-29 *“Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. 29 Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.”*

“We ought to obey God rather than men” (see 4:19). People sometimes use this verse as grounds for civil disobedience, demonstrations, protests, and even violence. Yet our battle is not against flesh and blood. The apostles themselves never retaliated in the physical realm (threats, marches, anger, weapons). The Pauline epistles and Peter's letters clearly teach submission to secular and spiritual authorities. There are instances, however, when man's laws directly conflict with God's laws. In such cases, God's law is higher. The parents of Moses did not respect Pharaoh's command to destroy all the male children (Heb.11:23). They disregarded his decree. In crossing into countries that are belligerent to the Gospel, we must exercise the prudence and wisdom that God gives to us. We have to be wise as serpents but *harmless* as doves.

When one man was questioned at the border concerning his purpose for coming into the country, he replied: “My Elder brother died, and I have come to read his last will and testament.” Another time several missionaries were surrounded by communist guerillas armed with machine guns. The guerillas said, “What do you think about communism?” The missionaries said: “We do not know a lot about politics, but if God wants this country to be communist, that is what we want too. We want what God wants.” Of course, they knew that form of government was not God's first choice. Anyway, their answer delighted the guerillas and they went on their way smiling. How we answer our adversaries can literally be a matter of life and death. Therefore, we must have God's wisdom. The missionaries did not degrade the convictions of the guerillas, nor did they get entangled with political rhetoric. They simply said they wanted God's choice of government, an answer which was not offensive to anyone. It is best to avoid politics and always speak in a spirit of meekness. The apostles practiced the words of Christ to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Mt.10:16-20).

Summary of the Gospel

5:30-33 *“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. 31 Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him. 33 When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.”*

This is the same Peter who had denied the Lord earlier because of fear. Once again, Peter indicts Israel and the supreme court for their crime of crucifying the Son of God: *“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.”* In these passages, Peter sums up the heart of the Gospel message—Christ was crucified and resurrected—and He offers forgiveness to those who repent and the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who *obey*.

The Spirit—Given Only to Those Who Obey

“And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.” Peter and the eleven were eyewitnesses of the crucifixion and resurrection, and of course, so also was the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a precious gift, but He is only given to those who obey. Sometimes a Christian cannot receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit because he is not obedient. Often a person cannot receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit because of pride and an unyielded mind. *Stubbornness* is another form of disobedience and saying “no” to God.

One time an evangelist was praying for a woman to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit. She had sought this blessing for over 25 years but was unable to have a breakthrough. Praying alongside the evangelist was a minister from India. Finally, the impatient evangelist asked the woman, “Don't you have *any* words coming to you at all?” She replied: “Yes, but they sound too silly to utter.” The evangelist insisted—“Speak them out anyway.” Reluctantly the woman uttered a few words which seemed to her as unintelligible, nonsensical gibberish. Then the minister from India gasped. He said to the woman, “You were speaking in my dialect.” “What did I say?” she inquired with great interest. It was embarrassing for the minister to tell her. Finally he told her what she had said in his language—She had said, “The Lord wants me to speak in tongues but I am too stubborn!” Isn't that incredible that the Holy Spirit would speak those words through her own mouth. Not only does the Holy Spirit have a good sense of humor, He also has a special way of telling us what our real problem is—it is usually stubbornness and blockages in our minds that hinder His Spirit.

Gamaliel's Warning

5:34-35 *“Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.”* The Jewish supreme court had determined to put the apostles to death (v33). But Gamaliel, a notable and reputable teacher among the Jews and a member of the council, stood up and issued a warning against such an action. Verses 34-39 record the advice he gave regarding the treatment of the apostles. He was so held in esteem by all the people that his counsel was heeded, and God used it to give a needed respite to the infant Church.

Gamaliel's Advice

5:35-40 “*And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. 37 After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. 38 And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: 39 But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God. And to him they agreed...*”

Gamaliel was a man of moderation. He was able to calm the people and persuade them not to be hasty in their actions toward the apostles. He cited *two examples* of men who rose up to draw men to themselves, and emphasized that both movements came to nothing.

- *Theudas* “boasted himself to be somebody.” As many as obeyed him were brought to nothing.
- *Judas of Galilee* “drew away much people after him.” As many as obeyed him were dispersed.

You will notice that both leaders *drew men to themselves*, not to God. This is the hallmark of men who are imposters. Without exception, every true leader of a true movement seeks to turn men to God, not to himself. Paul brings out this truth later in Acts 20:30 when he warns the ministers in Ephesus about wrong motives: “Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.” See John 7:18. The genuine always point men to God.

Gamaliel's philosophy was this: “If a movement is of God, it cannot be overthrown. It will remain. If we fight against something God has started, we will be fighting against God Himself. If it is not of God (as with Theudas or Judas of Galilee), it will come to nothing anyway. Therefore, we should leave these men alone.”

Inasmuch as Gamaliel believed in God's sovereignty, his advice was sound. Beneath this, however, was the implication that whatever succeeds is good and whatever fails is evil. But the Scriptures, Old and New Testaments alike, do not teach this (cf. Psa. 73:12, Psa.109:22-26, Job 21:7-15).

Gamaliel's philosophy was not entirely correct. Unfortunately, some movements do *not* come to nought but endure a long time before they come to an end. Buddhism and Hinduism have been around for centuries, and they are still thriving. Today there are many other cults which are growing and flourishing. All of Satan's thrones are built on sinking sand and *ultimately* they will come to nothing, but some of them stay around for a long time. Nevertheless, Gamaliel's advice restrained the supreme court and spared the lives of the apostles.

Summary of Gamaliel's Advice:

- He believed that any movement that was not of God would come to nothing (a partial truth).
- He cited two men who led uprisings. Both men died; those who followed them were scattered.
- His belief in God's sovereignty was correct. God certainly has the final word in everything.
- The implication that whatever succeeds is of God and whatever fails is of evil, is *not* correct.
- *Eventually*, every work that is not built upon the Rock, Christ Jesus, will come to nothing.
- However, some of Satan's thrones last a long time and are still thriving. Ultimately they will end.

The Apostles Beaten / Released - But Had No Persecution Complex

5:40-42 *“And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”*

This is the attitude that we should have in our sufferings. After being beaten and humiliated, they departed from the council *rejoicing* that they were counted worthy to suffer *shame* for the name of Christ. If we are full of the Holy Ghost and joy, we will not be plagued with the malady of self-pity or have a persecution complex. The joy of the Lord is our strength. The apostles had conquered embarrassment and shame (cf. Col.1:11). They were not offended at all. The Holy Spirit in them had made them mighty in spirit.

Chapter Six

THE FIRST DEACONS

Controversy Between the Grecians and Hebrews

6:1 “*And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.*”

It is important to realize that there were *two kinds of Jews* in those days. Unless this is properly understood, we will not be able to appreciate some of the incidents in the Book of Acts. They were:

- The Grecians (or Hellenists) – Jews who were born and raised in Gentile countries.
- The Hebrews – Jews born and raised in Palestine.

The Hellenized or Grecian Jews were foreign born Jews who had grown up in Gentile countries outside of Palestine. Centuries earlier these Jews had been dispersed throughout these nations as exiles from the homeland. They adopted the Greek language, dress, and customs while retaining their Judaistic faith in varying degrees. They were also more liberal and adaptable to other lifestyles. Most of them knew the Greek language better than Hebrew. They read the Septuagint (Greek version of the Old Testament), welcomed Gentiles into their synagogues, and made many proselytes. Many Gentiles attached themselves to their synagogues (cf. Acts 13:42). Paul himself was a Grecian Jew, born and raised in Tarsus. The synagogue he attended in Tarsus undoubtedly had many Gentile converts and used the Greek version of the Old Testament.

The Hebrews were ultraconservative Jews, many of whom were born and raised in Palestine. They did not like to associate with Gentiles, fearing they would “defile” or contaminate themselves with the *heathen*. They retained not only their Judaistic faith, but also the Jewish language and customs, thereby incurring Gentile hatred for their standoffishness. Some would even wash their hands after coming in contact with a Gentile. In Acts 11:2-3, even some of the Christian brethren “contended with Peter” for eating with a Gentile. The Hebrews thought they were superior to the Grecian Jews. They felt that their blood was *a little more royal* than their brethren who were born and raised among the heathen. It was a matter of pride but it represents a distinct mentality found in the Church world in every generation that says: – “I am a notch or two better than other brethren.”

There was not a lot of unity in the Jewish world. In Jerusalem alone there were 480 different synagogues, many of them representing the different denominations and flavors of Judaism around the world (cf. Acts 6:9). There were many conflicts among the Jews. Even in the Christian community at this point in Acts, we are now seeing little jealousies surfacing as the number of disciples increases, whereas before the believers had all been in one accord.

In these particular passages (v1-6), one group was murmuring against the other. The Grecian Jews complained that favoritism was being shown to the Palestine Jews. The complaint of the Grecians was that their widows were neglected in the daily administration (that is, in the distribution of the public charity). Therefore, the twelve apostles delegated these duties to seven deacons.

Do Not Detract From Spiritual Ministry by Menial Tasks

6:2-4 “*Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.*”

The twelve apostles were highly trained specialists. They understood and interpreted the mysteries of the Kingdom. You would never take highly skilled technicians and make them janitors. It was not their job to spend their time with food distributions and menial tasks. They were specialists in spiritual matters. Their mission was to build the Church. The twelve were commanded by God to give themselves unreservedly to the ministry of the Word, and to prayer. The menial tasks were to be carried out by other men. In these passages, we see that the key to good administration is to delegate these duties to other faithful men.

The apostles certainly had the humility to do menial tasks, but they did not have the *time*. Their emphasis was to look after the *spiritual* needs of the Church. Therefore, they were directed by the Holy Spirit to select deacons who could look after these other matters. There are times when a young pastor may have to work to provide for his family, especially when he has a small church. However, the main responsibility of a pastor is to hear from God and care for the spiritual needs of the flock. A pastor should not have to expend all of his time and energy doing what the deacons should do.

Selection of Deacons

6:5 “*And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch.*” It is interesting that each one of the deacons that were chosen had Greek names. With all Greeks heading the food distribution, the Grecian Jews could no longer complain about partiality.

6:6 “*Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.*” It is important to have the anointing even for menial tasks. With food distributions, taking care of the widows, and administrating the natural affairs of God's kingdom, there was still a need for the anointing. The men who were chosen were full of the Holy Ghost and faith and wisdom. The apostles laid their hands upon them to impart unto them the ability to perform these natural tasks. Thus, we have the first ordination service of deacons. Some of these men were also very good preachers.

6:7 “*And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.*” As a result of delegating the physical tasks to others, the apostles were freed to concentrate their efforts solely upon the ministry of the Word. Therefore, the Word of God increased, and the number of converts multiplied greatly.

Luke also records that many of the *priests* believed the Gospel of Christ. Unfortunately, many of these priests clung to the old Levitical ordinances and continued offering sacrifices in the temple. This is the reason Paul later wrote his *Epistle to the Hebrews*, endeavoring to wean them away from the old religion. Many believers in Jerusalem would not break free from the old rituals and sacrifices. Just a few years later (A.D. 70), the temple was destroyed and all sacrificing ceased.

Stephen

6:8 “*And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.*” Stephen was a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost (6:5). He was a deacon. There is no mention of Stephen being a prophet or evangelist, yet several of the spiritual gifts were operating in his life. He had the gift of faith, wisdom, and the working of miracles. It is irrelevant whether or not a person is a minister. God wants every one of his believers to have more than one gift of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor.12:11). The Holy Spirit divides *several* gifts to each believer.

6:9-10 “*Then there arose certain [ones] of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.*” There were numerous synagogues in Jerusalem representing Jews from all over the world. Some sources claim there were nearly 500 synagogues in Jerusalem at that time. Stephen began pleading the cause of Christianity to a company of Grecian Jews who disputed against it, but they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke (cf. Lk. 21:15). Stephen's adversaries thought they were only disputing with Stephen. In actual fact, they were disputing with the Spirit of God in him for whom they were no match. Enraged with jealousy, his enemies brought him before the council.

The Disputing Spirit

“*Disputing with Stephen.*” Where did Stephen's peers learn the *disputing* spirit?—It came from the rabbinical schools of their day. The students of those institutions were exposed to debates, differing opinions of their teachers, several translations of the Scriptures, and various opinions of ancient authorities of the law. They heard the text allegorized and spiritualized. All of these methods produced *indecision* in the young scholars. It developed “disputers and debaters,” but authority was lacking. The same disputing, debating spirit is clearly seen in Paul when he was first converted (9:29). Later, he learned to “reason” and “open the Scriptures” to his listeners (17:2-3). He instructed Timothy not to strive, but to be gentle and patient (2 Tim. 2:24-26). Debates are rooted in *pride*. Proverbs 13:10 warns: “Only by pride cometh contentions [debates, arguments].” The debating spirit is the fruit of spiritual and intellectual pride, and we must guard against it.

Jesus taught as one having authority and not as the scribes (Mt. 7:29). People said; “Never man spake as this man” (Jn. 7:46). The Lord never discussed differing opinions and views, and He never disputed or debated with anyone. He presented the truth with authority, but only those who found favor with God could understand. The theological schools had the *original* Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, still they could not see eye to eye. Truth can only be perceived if God gives someone *grace*, not by an intensive study of the original Hebrew and Greek.

Before the Council

6:11-15 “*Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council. And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.*”

Before we get into the charges that were hurled against Stephen, it would be good to have another look at the “council” (or Jewish Supreme Court), because unconverted Paul was in all probability a member of this council and was present while Stephen gave his lengthy testimony.

The Council

The “Council” or Sanhedrin was the Jewish Supreme Court. It consisted of seventy members and was presided over by the high priest. It was patterned after the government of Moses and the seventy elders. The seventy members of the council were drawn from three classes of people mentioned in the Gospels—the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders.

Chief Priests – the acting high priest, former high priests, and members of their priestly families.

The Scribes – the Pharisaic element of the council.

The Elders – tribal and family heads of the people and priesthood, the secular nobility of Jerusalem.

The council met daily in the temple area, except for sabbaths and other holy days. While in session, they sat in the form of a half-circle, the scribes being at the extremities, and the high priest at the front. Its jurisdiction exceeded the boundaries of Palestine at the time of Christ. For example, Paul received authority from the council to bind and punish people in distant cities like Damascus (26:12). It even commanded a police force. The Romans allowed the Jews to handle many of their own religious and domestic matters within certain limits.

This council was the Jewish governing body. It was the highest court, with seventy judges, and had the power of life and death, although it had to submit its actions to the review of the Roman authorities. This was the same council before whom Jesus stood, as well as Peter and John. Stephen's death was probably a lynching. The Jews would assume as much power as they dared when the honor of Moses and the temple seemed in jeopardy. Stephen's death was unauthorized. He was executed behind the back of the Roman authorities.

Paul—a Member of the Council

It is believed that unconverted Paul was one of the council members at this time. This would be rather unusual because he was so young. Yet Paul testified later in his Epistle to the Galatians that he had prospered and profited “above many his own age” in the Jewish religion (Gal.1:14). He stood out boldly among all of his peers. Paul was a Pharisee of all Pharisees, being exceedingly zealous of the traditions of his fathers.

To be a member of this governing body, the candidate had to be married. In the Jewish mind, a man who was married and had children would be more mellow in his judgment. Since Paul was present when Stephen testified, and gave his *vote* against him (8:1, 22:20, 26:10), it is believed that Paul was a member of the council and therefore must have been married at this time.

Bachelorhood was *very rare* among the Jews because it was important to have offspring to carry on the family name, but it is clear that later in life Paul was single (1 Cor. 7:8). It is most probable that his wife or children did not long survive, and that Paul had not remarried.

Summary of the Council:

- The “council” was the Jewish supreme court.
- The “council” is found 14 times in Acts, and 22 times in the New Testament.
- “Council” is the Greek word *synedrion*, the Talmudic Hebrew word *Sanhedrin*.
- The council was patterned after Moses and the seventy elders.
- It consisted of seventy members and was presided over by the high priest.
- The seventy were made up of chief priests, scribes, and elders.
- Jesus was tried and condemned by this council.
- Several members, like Joseph of Arimathea, did not consent to Christ's death (Lk. 23:50-51).
- Peter and John were summoned and imprisoned by the council.
- At the time of Stephen, unconverted Paul and Gamaliel were members.
- The council met daily in the temple area, except for sabbaths and other holy days.
- While in session, the council sat in the form of a half-circle.
The scribes were at the extremities, and the high priest at the front.
- It had a police force; Rome allowed the Jews to handle many of their own domestic matters.
- Its jurisdiction exceeded the boundaries of Palestine.
Paul had authority from them to bind and punish people in distant cities such as Damascus.
- The council was the highest court; it had seventy judges. It had the power to pass the death sentence, but no authority to carry it out without Rome's consent.
- Stephen's death (and others) were probably lynchings, behind the back of Roman authorities.
- The Jews assumed as much power as they dared when the honor of Moses, the law, and the temple seemed in jeopardy.

The Charges Against Stephen

6:13-15 *“This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: 14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. 15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.”*

The adversaries of Stephen brought him before the council. At that moment, the Spirit of God gave Stephen the wisdom and words to speak before the assembly (Lk. 21:12-15). As he addressed the council, his face glowed with the glory of God because of a tremendous anointing upon him. Yet the council members hated him and had him stoned. Unconverted Paul was one of them. They were uncircumcised in heart and ears, and they were resisting the Holy Ghost (7:51).

Paul listened intently to Stephen's defense of the Gospel, but was “kicking against the pricks.” He was adamant in his beliefs and traditions and was not ready to hear anything new. Stephen's message in chapter seven was an exposition of the Old Testament Scriptures that Paul had never heard before. After his conversion, Paul followed the same style of preaching as Stephen. Paul never forgot this sermon, nor did he ever forget the glory he saw upon Stephen's face.

Stephen was a young man, perhaps only thirty; yet he had finished his course in life. John the Baptist was only in his early thirties when he gave his life for the Gospel of Christ. There are some today who believe that it is a curse not to live seventy or eighty years. Psalm 90:10 is used to bolster this concept. However, it is simply not true. Even our Lord Jesus Christ was only 33 years of age when He was nailed to the cross. It is important to *rightly divide the word of truth* in everything.

Stephen is Falsely Accused

6:11-14 *“Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council. And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.*

When Stephen's enemies were confounded and unable to answer any of his reasonings, they made him out to be a criminal and accused him of blasphemy. To say that they “suborned men” meant that they instructed men beforehand what to say, and then hired them to swear by it. By all possible means the enemies sought to incense both the government and the mob against Stephen. “They stirred up the people.” This brought the authorities to the scene.

Betrayal

“And the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council.” This was real betrayal. “They caught him.” This phrase suggests he was not expecting to be arrested and taken into custody. He was treated as a dangerous man who had to be taken by force. As he stood before the council, the false witnesses brought these charges:

- This man *ceases not* to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law.
- We heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place...
- And shall change the customs which Moses delivered unto us.

Blasphemy means to speak contemptibly and reproachfully of God. They claimed blasphemy was a way of life for Stephen, his common talk. *“He ceases not to speak blasphemous words.”* Wherever this man goes, he makes it his business to instill contempt for God into all to whom he speaks.

The adversaries charged that Stephen blasphemed against the Law, or the writings of Moses, but Stephen had not reviled the Law. He simply explained the deeper spiritual implications of the Law. He had not spoken evil of “the holy place”—the temple. The temple was more than a magnificent edifice in Jerusalem. Men's hearts are God's dwelling place. He said: “The Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: and what is the place of my rest?” (Acts 7:48,49, Isa. 66:1,2).

“For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.” These were exaggerations and distortions of what Stephen had said. The accusers were twisting the Word of God unto their own destruction. Accusations like this are typical of men whose hearts are jealous and perverse.

None of the New Testament preachers ever *attacked* the customs of the Jews, the Law, or the temple. They simply taught that Christ was the *fulfillment* of all the sacrifices. He had not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. Circumcision is an inner work of the Sword in our heart, not only an outward act in the flesh. The temple in Jerusalem represented a spiritual temple—a living temple where God can find rest. That temple is the life of each believer. We are the temple of God.

Chapter Seven

STEPHEN'S SERMON / MARTYRDOM

Summary of Chapter Seven

Chapter seven records the sermon of Stephen. It is a lengthy sermon, but it can be easily summed up in several main points. The theme of his message is—*Israel's continual rejection of the men God chose to lead them into their inheritance.*

God promised Abraham and his descendants an inheritance, the land of Canaan. Before they received the inheritance, the patriarchs were in Egypt with Joseph their brother, whom they had envied and rejected. When the time came for Abraham's descendants to receive the land of promise, God raised up Moses to lead them into that inheritance. What was their attitude toward the man God chose to bring them into their inheritance? —“Get out of my life...who made you a ruler and judge over us.” That was their attitude toward Moses, toward the law, toward Joseph, and toward all of the prophets who prefigured and foretold of the coming Christ.

God was going to raise up another prophet *just like Moses*. This Prophet was going to bring them into the fullness of their spiritual inheritance. Anyone who would not hearken to Him would be cut off from among the people. That Prophet was Jesus the Messiah. What was the attitude of Israel toward the Man who would lead them into the fullness of their spiritual inheritance? It was just like the attitude of their forefathers toward Moses—“Get out of my life...who made you a ruler and judge over us.” Israel reacted the same way to Christ as they had reacted to the leaders and prophets sent to them through out all of their history.

Stephen concludes: “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murders” (7:51-52). Unconverted Saul of Tarsus was sitting there listening to all of this. He was “cut to the heart” as were all the others but he would not hear because he himself was uncircumcised in heart and ears, resisting the Holy Ghost, and kicking against the pricks.

Stephen Begins His Message to the Council

7:1 “*Then said the high priest, Are these things so?*” This question regards the accusations brought against Stephen in chapter 6:13-14. Stephen is now going to answer for himself, and he is going to give a panorama of Israel's whole history starting from Abraham. All the apostles gave a quick history of Israel when they preached, and then climaxed that history with the coming of Christ.

7:2 “*And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran [Haran]..*” In this passage, Stephen is supplying revelation that was not recorded in the Old Testament. It never says that the God of glory *appeared* to Abraham while still in his homeland. It only says God had *spoken* to him (Gen.12:1), *took* or *led* him (Josh. 24:3), *chose* and *brought* him (Neh. 9:7). Abraham had a tremendous visitation from God before he left his homeland to go toward the land of Canaan, his inheritance. “The God of glory had *appeared* unto him.”

7:3 “*And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee.*” Abram had to leave his father's house in order to fulfill God's call upon his life. Often we have to do the same. When people are overly attached to family and sentiment, they fall short of God's purposes. That is a very serious thing! We have to be careful how we apply submission principles. Obedience to the wishes of our parents is good and right, but when God has different wishes, we must choose His. “If any man love father or mother more than me, he is not worthy of me” (Mt.10:37).

7:4 “*Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in [Haran]: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell.*” Abram's father's name was Terah, which means “delay” in Hebrew. Abram was *delayed* and held back from the call of God. He had lost a lot of time because he was still clinging to his father's house.

7:5 “*And he [God] gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.*” God had promised Abram and his descendants all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession. Yet while Abraham was alive, God did not give him one square foot of that land. Stephen is clarifying many truths from the Old Testament.

7:6-7 “*And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years. 7 And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place.*” In Genesis 15:13-16, God showed Abram that his descendants would be in Egypt for several hundred years and become bondsmen. Then God would judge Egypt and bring Abram's seed into Canaan, the promised inheritance. This is an amazing revelation. Before Abram's descendants received the inheritance, first they would be in Egypt as slaves and then be delivered by Moses through the ten plagues. Abram understood all of this before he had one child. At that time, he and Sarai were barren. It is important to firmly fix the chronology of the Old Testament in our minds.

7:8 “*And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.*” God promised Abram and his descendants all the land of Canaan. That was God's part. Abram's part was to be circumcised. Unless Abram and his descendants were circumcised, they could not have the inheritance (Gen.17:7-14). Therefore, Isaac was circumcised. Isaac had Jacob, and he had twelve sons.

7:9 “*And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him.*” When Jacob and his twelve sons were dwelling as strangers in Canaan, Joseph was betrayed by his brethren and sold into Egypt as a slave. This is another important point that Stephen brings out—the Israelites (right from the start) were plagued with envy against the righteous. The patriarchs moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt. It was envy that put Jesus on the cross (Mt. 27:18, Mk.15:10).

Joseph is a profound type of Christ in many aspects. He was rejected by his Jewish brethren because of envy, but was well received by the Gentiles. Joseph gave bread to a starving world, even as Christ is the Bread of Life to a famished human race. When his brethren came to Egypt in search of food many years later, they did not recognize their brother. When they returned *the second time*, then they recognized him, and wept and mourned. Israel did not recognize Christ at his first coming.

7:10-13 “*And [God] delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and [Canaan], and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph’s kindred was made known unto Pharaoh.*” Stephen is being very prophetic here. Joseph was not recognized by his Jewish brethren the first time. Their eyes were opened when they saw him *the second time*. In similar fashion, Christ was not recognized by His brethren at His first coming, but they will “look upon Him whom they have pierced” when He comes again, and at that time they will weep with remorse.

7:14-17 “*Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls. So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers, And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem. But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt.*” This promise is a reference to God's oath to Abraham of receiving the land of Canaan for an inheritance.

Birth of Moses / Forty Years in Pharaoh's Court / His Rejection

7:18-29 “*Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. The same dealt subtly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live. In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father’s house three months: And when he was cast out, Pharaoh’s daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds. And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not. And the next day he showed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another? But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday? Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of [Midian], where he begat two sons.*” Here is the reason Moses fled—his own brethren said, “We will not have this man rule over us!”

Moses—Another Forty Years in the Wilderness / His Commission

7:30-34 “*And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount [Sinai] an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush. That angel is the Lord Himself, the Great I Am. “When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him, Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold. Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground. I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.”*”

Rejection of Moses Prefigures the Rejection of Christ

7:35-37 *“This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush. He brought them out, after that he had showed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years. This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear”* (cf. Deut. 18:15-19).

7:38-41 *“This is he [Moses], that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel [Christ] which spake to him in the mount [Sinai], and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt. Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we [know] not what is become of him. And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.”* (cf. Ex. 32:1-10).

Israel Brought Their Idols From Egypt

7:42-43 *“Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets [Amos 5:25-27], O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? Yea, ye [have borne] the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan [worship of Saturn], figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.”*

The Israelites brought many strange gods with them from Egypt (cf. Ezek. 20:5-24). Israel *loved* idols! She had never allowed God to cleanse her heart from the love of idols. She was rebellious from the day God brought her up from the land of Egypt (Deut. 9:24). While they were offering sacrifices to the Lord during their forty years in the wilderness, they were also worshipping the golden calf at Mount Sinai. Later they joined themselves to Baal-peor, a Moabite deity (Num. 25:3, Psa.106:28). Stephen adds that the Israelites were carrying the tabernacle of Molech, and cherishing the worship of Remphan (Saturn). For the wickedness of their hearts, God smote Israel with mental blindness, even in the wilderness. He “gave them over” to strange delusions so that they embraced Molech, a heathen deity who was worshipped with gruesome orgies in which their children were sacrificed. Moses had sternly forbade its worship (Lev.18:21, 20:1-5). Later in history, God raised up enemies to carry them away into captivity (to Assyria and Babylon).

7:44-45 *“Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen [cf. Ex 25:40, Heb. 8:5]. Which also our fathers that came after brought in with [Joshua] into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David.”*

Israel had the tabernacle of God with them in the wilderness. They saw the glory of God, yet they continued to cherish and serve other gods. Later, the tabernacle was carried over Jordan (under Joshua's direction), and was set up in Shiloh in Canaan land. The tabernacle remained here for several hundred years. It was not until *the days of David* that Israel dispossessed all the inhabitants of the land and captured Zion. They had been slack and quite content to coexist with their enemies.

A More Important Temple

7:46-50 “[David] found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built him an house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, [Isaiah 66:1-2] Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?” This is beginning to anger the council. Stephen is turning the emphasis from the physical temple to a spiritual temple. He is quoting from Isaiah 66:1-2.

Going back in history, God was not in any hurry to have a temple built for Himself. He stated in His Word that the erecting of a temple was not God's idea, but David's (2 Sam. 7:4-7, 1 Chron. 17:1-6). As a matter of fact, David was not allowed to build a temple for God (1 Chron. 29:2-3). Later, Solomon built him a temple, and yet even Solomon said: “Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built” (2 Chron. 6:18). God also warned Solomon that the temple he had just built *would be destroyed* if he and the people turned away from Him to live in hypocrisy (cf. 2 Chron. 7:19-22).

God said repeatedly through the prophets of the Old Testament that He would not accept the offerings and sacrifices made in the temple if the hearts of the people were not right. The Lord despised their feast days and the smell of their offerings because the people had perverted justice (Am. 5:21-24). God desired obedience, not sacrifice (Jer. 7:22-23, 1 Sam. 15:22).

“Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, 49 Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? 50 Hath not my hand made all these things?”

God asked: “What kind of house will you build for me?” This is the heart cry of the Lord. He is seeking a place of rest, a home in which to dwell. God made the heavens and the earth; that was His part. What is our part? What can we do for Him? He wants men and women to prepare a place of rest for Him in their hearts, in their temples. Sometimes the Lord does not feel at home in our temples because of the unsavory things in our lives. Therefore, He has to enter our temple with a scourge. The Spirit of God has to *overturn* many things in our lives. He first has to cleanse our temples before He can find rest and feel comfortable within us. Stephen is emphasizing to Israel the true meaning of the temple—we are the temple of the Holy Ghost. God does not dwell in temples made with hands. He is looking for a resting place, a dwelling place in man.

True Circumcision

7:51-53 “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.” Now Stephen gives the true meaning of circumcision. Israel was occupied with the rite of physical circumcision, but had failed to grasp its spiritual meaning. True circumcision is a work of God done in our hearts by the Sword of His Word so that our hearts are yielding and compliant. An uncircumcised heart is full of resistance and stubbornness and is very insensitive to the Holy Spirit.

“Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.”

Not Ritual But Relationship

God is not interested in outward religion and ritual. The only thing He really cares about is a genuine heart—a heart that loves and serves Him out of sincerity. He wants a living temple where He can dwell and feel at home. God desires to live and move within each of His people. It isn't *ritual* but *relationship* that God seeks. Israel was absorbed with traditions, rituals, and symbols, but inwardly many of them were void of any spiritual life. They were uncircumcised in heart and ears.

Israel Could Never Recognize the True

Israel was unable to recognize or discern the true anointing. They could never recognize God or the men He sent (cf. Ac.13:27). As a nation, they rejected *every single prophet* that God ever sent them, and these prefigured the coming Christ. Israel was given the Law and the Scriptures supernaturally, yet they never obeyed them. The prophets often received their messages from heavenly visions and angelic visitations. Moses received the Law on Sinai from the pre-incarnate Christ Himself. Yet they rejected Moses and the One who gave them the Law. Israel “tempted Christ” in the wilderness (1 Cor.10:9). Christ was that Rock who accompanied them in the wilderness (1 Cor.10:4). Is it any wonder at all that Israel could not recognize Christ when He came?

Israel said to Jesus: “If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.” Christ said: “Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers” (Mt. 23:30-32). They were just like their forefathers. They had rejected every prophet, especially Moses. Now that Christ had come, the One who was like unto Moses, they were going to live up to their reputation to the fullest extent. Jesus said: “*Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.*”

The Response to Stephen's Message

7:54 “*When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.*” Paul heard all of this, and now he is beginning to appear in the Acts narrative. He and the council were convicted by the Holy Spirit, but they were rejecting that conviction. Instead of yielding to the Spirit, they were hardening their hearts. An uncircumcised heart does not yield to God. Many Christians are very uncircumcised in heart, and therefore are uncircumcised in ears.

7:55 “*But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.*” Normally Jesus is *seated* at the right hand of the Father. Now, He is *standing*. Christ was standing up and taking notice of his servant Stephen. Much grace is given to a martyr, but it is only given when that time comes. God will not give us grace today for something we need thirty years from now. Grace is not available for martyrdom until that day comes. Do not live in the future and do not have anxiety about the future. Just believe the Lord for the grace you need today. Tomorrow, start that all over again. Just live one day at a time. Rely upon His grace for today.

Stephen's Martyrdom

7:56-60 “*And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, [who] calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*”

Do you see the grace of God that was given to Stephen at this moment in his life? His eyes were opened to see the glory of God. He probably felt little pain as he was being stoned. Unconverted Paul was standing by giving his consent to the lynching. Stephen was dying as a perfect lamb. That left an impact upon unconverted, uncircumcised Paul. Later in life, Paul imitated Stephen. He even laid down his life in the same spirit as Stephen (cf. 2 Tim. 4:6,16). If we are called upon to give our lives, we must offer ourselves as harmless lambs. If we are “calling down fire from heaven” upon our adversaries, it will be a denial of the whole Christian message. The message of the new covenant is *meekness*, a heart without vengeance. At the required hour, God will give us the required grace.

Summary of Stephen's Message:

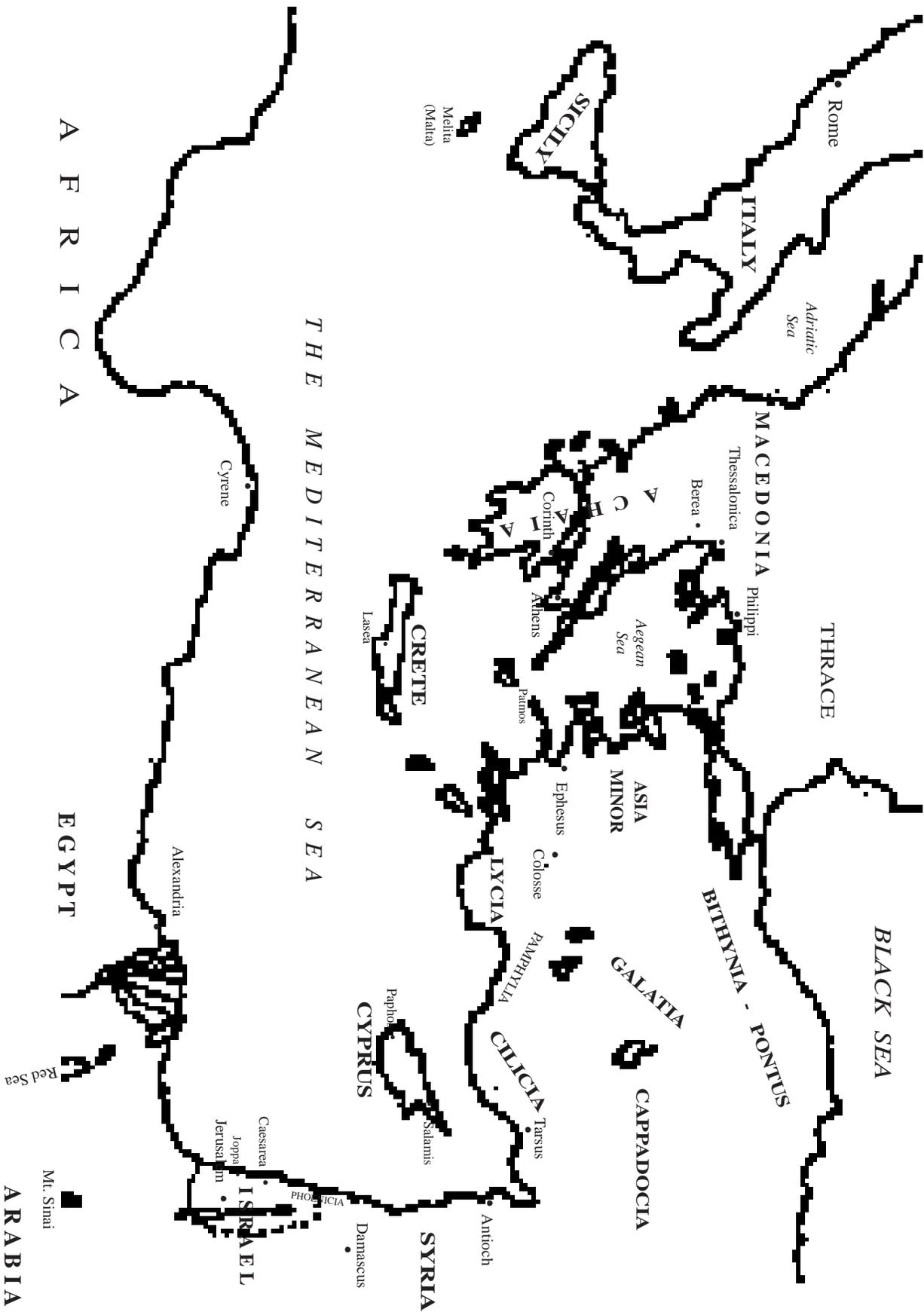
- God promised Abram and his descendants an inheritance—the land of Canaan.
- Abram had to leave his father's house to receive this inheritance.
- In his lifetime, Abram did not receive one square foot of the inheritance.
- God showed Abram that his descendants first had to be in a strange land for 400 years (Egypt).
- They would be made slaves. Afterwards, God would judge Egypt and give Israel all their wealth.
- A famine forced Israel into Egypt. Joseph was chosen by God to preserve his brethren in Egypt.
- What was their attitude toward Joseph their deliverer? They envied and betrayed him.
- Joseph was only recognized and accepted by his brethren *the second time* they faced him.
- When the time came for the Israelites to receive their inheritance, God raised up Moses.
- What was the attitude of Israel toward the man God chose to lead them into their inheritance?
 - Who made you a ruler over us? (Whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them...)
 - Israel refused Moses, refused the Christ who gave him the Law, and refused the Law itself.
 - Instead they set up and worshipped a golden calf, rejecting Moses and God.
 - Therefore, God “gave them up” to worship the stars and Molech. Israel loved idols (Ezk. 20).
 - This Moses whom Israel refused—God would raise up a Prophet just like him—the Messiah.
 - Anyone who would not hear this Prophet would be destroyed. (That Prophet is Jesus Christ.)
- Israel had the tabernacle of Moses, yet they worshipped other gods at the same time.
- They saw God's glory from the tabernacle, yet coexisted with the heathen until David's time.
- David worshipped God without a temple. (The building of a temple was David's idea, not God's.)
- David desired to build a temple, but God was in no hurry to have a temple. Solomon later built it.
- God is not interested in a physical temple as much as He wants to dwell in a clean living temple.
- Israel is stiffnecked, uncircumcised in heart and ears. They have *always* resisted the Holy Ghost. Israel has *always* rejected the true message and the true messengers, loving ritual more than reality.
- Is it any wonder that Israel rejected Christ when He came to bring them into the fullness of their spiritual inheritance? Israel had rejected every prophet, the Law, the true meaning of the temple and circumcision, Moses, and the pre-incarnate Christ who gave the Law. Staying true to their reputation, Israel now betrayed and murdered the One of whom all the prophets have spoken.

Importance of Geography

The first seven chapters of Acts take place around Jerusalem. After Stephen's martyrdom (about three-and-a-half years after Pentecost), there arose a great persecution. In chapter eight, the church at Jerusalem was scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria (8:1). Then the Gospel started to spread to many other countries around the world. At this point it would be good to pause a few moments and acquaint ourselves with the Mediterranean world. It is advantageous to have a picture in our minds of where these cities and regions were situated. In this way, we will appreciate the narrative more. Locate the following places on your map across the page:

- ACHAIA - Macedonia and Achaia generally mean all of Greece. Achaia was southern Greece. Corinth was the capital of Achaia. Athens was 50 miles east of Corinth.
- Alexandria - (Egypt). Eloquent Apollos was from Alexandria (18:24). In this city, the Greek version of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) was translated in the third century before Christ.
- Antioch - (Syria). This was the home base of Paul and the Gentile Church. Believers were first called Christians in Antioch (11:26). Before that, they were all called “disciples.”
- ARABIA - South of Israel. Paul came here for three years after his conversion (Gal.1:17).
- ASIA, ASIA MINOR - Not the continent, but the area of western Turkey. Paul did much work in Asia. The “seven churches of Asia” in Revelation were in the *province* of Asia, the southern part of Asia Minor. The seven churches were all within a hundred mile radius of each other.
- Athens - the intellectual center of Greece. Only 50 miles east of Corinth, Paul had little fruit here.
- Berea - close to Thessalonica in Macedonia. The Bereans “searched the scriptures daily” (17:11).
- Caesarea - The Gentiles in Cornelius' house first had the Gospel preached to them (Acts 10-11) It was also a Roman military base where Paul was kept in custody two years (23:23-27:1)
- CILICIA - a province in which was the city of Tarsus, Paul's hometown.
- Colosse - only 11 miles from Laodicea. The Colossian epistle was sent here, and read elsewhere.
- Corinth - one of Paul's most fruitful stops on his missionary journeys, the capital of Achaia. He may have had ten percent of the city turn to Christ during his ministry there (50,000 converts).
- CRETE - Island where Titus was stationed. Paul's epistle to Titus was directed to the Cretians.
- CYPRUS - Birthplace of Barnabas. Salamis and Paphos were cities visited by Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. Barnabas later returned to Cyprus after splitting up with Paul.
- Damascus, Syria - 143 miles from Jerusalem, Paul was converted on the outskirts of the city.
- Ephesus - where Paul stayed three years and all “Asia” heard the Word of God (19:10, 20:31). Timothy also was based in Ephesus when Paul wrote his two personal letters to him there.
- GALATIA - Lystra, Derbe, Iconium, Phrygia were cities of Galatia. Timothy was from here (16:1).
- Gaza, Azotus - where Philip was transported by the Spirit after baptizing the Ethiopian (map p.6)
- Jerusalem - the holy city, the capital of Judaism, and the place where Christianity started.
- Joppa - where Peter had a vision, showing that God had unreservedly accepted the Gentiles.
- Malta (Melita) - island where Paul spent the winter after being shipwrecked en route to Rome.
- Patmos - an island about 35 miles off the coast of Asia Minor near Ephesus, only 8 miles in length and about 4 miles wide. John was banished here in 95 A.D. and received the Revelation.
- Philippi - in Macedonia, where Paul established the Philippian church, and wrote II Corinthians.
- Rome - capital of the empire. Paul was under house arrest here for two years. While here, he wrote four epistles—Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon (62 A.D. Spring); and Philipians that Fall.
- Tarsus - in Cilicia. Paul's hometown.
- Thessalonica - in Macedonia, where Paul established the church, and wrote two inspired epistles.

THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD OF NEW TESTAMENT TIMES



Chapter Eight

PERSECUTION SPREADS THE GOSPEL

Luke is a historian. He is chronological in his presentation of the Acts of the Apostles. About three-and-a-half years had passed since the Day of Pentecost. The first seven chapters focused upon the fire that started in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost and over time had increased in intensity. After Stephen's martyrdom, a great persecution was unleashed against the Church in Jerusalem. It was headed by none other than youthful, unconverted Paul. Paul was tremendously wholehearted for the Lord, but his zeal was not channeled in the right direction. Sincerity is just not enough. Paul was sincerely headed in the wrong direction. He needed his eyes opened and his soul converted.

8:1 *“And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. The result of the persecution against the Church in Jerusalem was a furtherance of the Gospel. Now the good news was going throughout all Judaea and Samaria. This was fulfilling the words of Jesus: “Ye shall be witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Ac.1:8).*

8:2 *“And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.”* When someone is very godly, there is a great love and God-given respect for that person. Stephen had died as a perfect lamb, and all the Church made a great lamentation over him.

Paul the Persecutor

8:3 *“As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.”* Some historians estimate that Paul persecuted up to 10,000 believers. He “beat in every synagogue” those who believed in Jesus (22:19). To the Jews, Paul was esteemed a great hero who defended the faith. He thought he was doing the right thing as he attempted to obey Deuteronomy 13:1-18. Anyone who could perform miracles and then point people to a god other than the God of Israel was to be stoned. Thus, Paul justified himself in his mind that he was doing right. However, there was something in his heart that told him otherwise. He had been “kicking against the pricks,” which is another way of saying that he had been going against Holy Ghost conviction. For example, Stephen's message had just smitten him.

Later in life he testified: “If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ” (Gal.1:10). In times past in the Jew's religion he had “beyond measure persecuted the church of God and wasted it” (Gal.1:13). The Jews loved him for his enthusiasm against the Christian movement. He had profited in the Jews' religion above many his own age in his own nation, being more exceeding jealous of the traditions of his fathers (Gal.1:14). His friends and peers honored him, and in a very real sense he was seeking to please men. Paul was the scholar of scholars in the Jewish religion. Virtually he had memorized both the Hebrew and Greek versions of the Old Testament, and could quote much of it verbatim. Yet there was a veil over his heart in the reading of the Scriptures for he still did not know the Author. After he met Christ on the Damascus road, scales fell from his eyes. Paul was to become the supreme interpreter of the new covenant and the greatest defender of the faith.

Gospel Preached Only to the Jews

8:4 “*Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.*” Persecution was good for the Church. It scattered the disciples from their little nest in Jerusalem and they went to many other places preaching the Word in the Jewish synagogues. Even so, they were not preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. Acts 11:19 makes this very clear:

“Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice [Phoenicia], and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.” Here we see a major problem in the Jewish mind and heart. Still it had not dawned upon the apostles that the Gospel was just as much for the Gentiles as it was for the Jews. Thus, they were only preaching in the Jewish synagogues. God had to remove their biased feelings and false notions that the Gospel was only for the Jews and the Gentile proselytes who attended their synagogues. It was not until Peter had his vision several years later (10:1—11:18) that Peter and the apostles understood that God had *unreservedly* accepted the uncircumcised Gentiles.

Philip's Revival in Samaria

8:5-8 “*Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. 6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. 8 And there was great joy in that city.*”

Now the fire was sweeping across the Judean borders into Samaria. Philip preached a Gospel with signs following. The supernatural held the people in suspense. Miracles and healings opened their hearts, creating faith in them to receive the message of salvation. The paralyzed walked and the lame were healed. Unclean spirits crying with a loud voice came out of many that were possessed with them. This suggests that many were freed from spiritual bondages such as lust, greed, hate, witchcraft, and mental disorders.

The people “heard and saw” the miracles which Philip did. It was not hearsay or rumor. They *saw* the miracles with their own eyes, and *heard* them with their own ears. Many of the people experienced a miracle in their own lives. Psychology can never touch any of these problems—nor can logic, philosophies, learning, and degrees. Only the power of God can bring true deliverance.

There was such joy in that city. So often when you go to visit someone in the hospital it is difficult to find a place to park your car. Hospitals are filled to capacity with patients who have serious needs. Can you imagine the joy that overwhelmed this city when Philip came with a Gospel that not only brought salvation, but healing to their minds and bodies!

The Philip mentioned in these passages is *not* Philip the Apostle. This is the Philip of Acts 6:3-5, one of the seven deacons who were “men of good repute, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.” When the persecution scattered the disciples from Jerusalem, Philip, who had faithfully waited on tables, began functioning as a mighty evangelist. Later in the narrative, we see that he made his residence in Caesarea in Samaria. Luke describes him as “Philip the evangelist.” He had four daughters who were zealous for the things of God and possessed the spirit of prophecy (Ac. 21:8-9).

Conversion of Simon the Sorcerer

In verses 9-25, we have the account of Simon the sorcerer. When there is a move of God, the Gospel net is thrown out into the sea of humanity. When the net is drawn in again, it has every kind of person, the good and the bad. This truth is brought out by Christ in Matthew 13:47-50. When we preach the Good News, the net brings in all kinds of people. Some are good, and some are not. Some people come to Christ because they are intrigued by the miracles or other phenomena, but their hearts are filled with many other motives. Simon the sorcerer represents such people.

8:9-13 *“But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.”*

Why is Satan able to get a stronghold in certain men and women? It is because they have a heart like Simon the sorcerer. Satan thrives in hearts that are compatible to his. Simon had a lust for power, control, and preeminence. He would employ any means to draw attention to himself. Simon boasted of his supernatural powers and used witchcraft to sway the people.

Simon looked on with wonder as Philip demonstrated the power of God, knowing that Philip had something greater. As the multitudes were healed and saved, Simon himself *believed* and was baptized, but his heart was driven with other ambitions. He coveted power and was jealous of the apostles' spiritual authority. Some people become Christians for all the wrong reasons.

The Holy Ghost Had Not Yet Fallen Upon the Samaritans

8:14-17 *“Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.”*

Verses 14-17 clearly show us that salvation and the baptism of the Holy Ghost are two separate experiences. This is a very important theological issue. The new birth and the baptism in the Holy Ghost are two separate experiences. It is taught in many denominational churches that a believer automatically has the baptism in the Holy Spirit when he is saved. However, this is not what the Scriptures teach! These newborn believers in Samaria had already accepted Christ and been baptized in water. Many had been healed and delivered of bondages. Still they had not received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had not yet fallen upon any of them. Philip did not seem to have the ability to lead his new converts into the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Peter and John came from Jerusalem to lay hands upon them to receive this second blessing. *Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.”*

Simon Covets Spiritual Power

8:18-19 “*And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, 19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.*” Simon saw tremendous power manifested when Peter and John laid their hands on people to receive the Holy Spirit. These were powerful baptisms and he wanted that power. Simon was already known for having spiritual power in Samaria, but his power came from the wrong kingdom. Now he offers the apostles money for this power.

Simon is Rebuked

8:20 “*But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.*” Peter never used the gifts of God to gain money for himself because he was very pure in his heart with respect to money (cf. Acts 3:6, 1 Pet.1:18-19). He did not believe in selling the gifts of God. Verses 21-23 reveal the heart of Simon the sorcerer.

8:21-23 “*Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. 22 “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. 23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.”* Simon had responded to the Gospel message and was baptized, yet his heart had other motives. He had not made a break from his former life. He coveted spiritual power and was filled with bitterness because the people were now following God and the apostles, and not himself. Simon recognized that the apostles had greater power than he possessed, and he wanted it. Thus, he was “in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.” Peter exhorted, “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness.”

8:24 “*Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.*” Simon feared God's wrath, at least for the moment, and he urged Peter to pray that God would spare him. We hope Simon allowed God to change his heart. The Scriptures do not tell us anything further about him but I believe the message is loud and clear to each and every one of us. Unless Simon allowed God to cleanse him of his old life and desires, *the old life would have drawn him back* into the doom of perdition. The same truth applies to us, too.

Summary of Simon the Sorcerer:

- He deceived the people with sorcery, boasting of his own greatness and supernatural powers.
- He wanted power and control over people, and he wanted to draw attention to himself.
- During Philip's revival, Simon believed the message and submitted to water baptism.
- He envied the power that Philip and the apostles possessed and wanted it, offering them money.
- He was bitter because he had lost his spiritual prestige; the people were turning to God, not him.
- He represents people who come to Christ with all kinds of strange motives still in their hearts.
Simon came to Christ for what he could get for *himself*.
- Many people who come to Christ want to continue doing what they were doing in the world.
They think that they can continue it in Christ's name (movie stars, rock singers, psychics, etc.)
- Unless people like Simon allow God to cleanse their hearts, *they will go back into the world*.
There must be a clear-cut break from the past life or we will go back to the world and be worse.
- When we preach we are throwing out a net; the Gospel net brings in the good and the bad.

In verses 22-23, Peter confronted Simon, dividing soul and spirit by the Word of God as he exposed the wicked intentions of his heart. Peter said, “You are full of bitterness and you are bound with sin.” This was said to a man who had accepted Christ and submitted to water baptism. Simon was “in the gall of bitterness” because he had lost prestige in the city. He was bound by “iniquity” and needed a deep work of redemption and deliverance in his life.

Simon did not complain and say: “Peter, you are judging me...you need more love.” Peter was trying to separate this man from his iniquity so that he could truly find life. This is true love. As ministers, we need to have a sword in our mouth. Sometimes a surgeon has to cut away something cancerous in order to save a person's life. If a cancer is going to destroy, we have to cut away that area so that the rest of the body can live. Therefore, we need the skill of knowing how to use the Word of God. Peter laid it out plain and clear to Simon. According to verse 24, Simon received a holy fear.

It might be good to note that four years earlier, John wanted to call down fire from heaven and destroy these Samaritans because they did not receive Jesus (Lk. 9:54-56). Now he is laying hands on them to receive the Holy Spirit. Certainly a changed mind changes our whole attitude toward people, and toward life. The Lord wants to transform each one of us by renewing our minds. Now Philip is directed *by an angel* to go south unto Gaza. (see map, p.6).

Philip Meets the Ethiopian Eunuch

8:25,26 “*And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans. And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.*” While Philip was in the middle of revival in Samaria, he was told to leave and go into a desert place. God sometimes requires that of us. We might have to leave a place of revival atmosphere to go into a place that is dry, and yet God has a purpose.

8:27-29 “*And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read [Isaiah] the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.*”

This Ethiopian was a proselyte (a Gentile converted to the Jewish faith). He was returning to Ethiopia after coming to Jerusalem to worship. Verse 26 says *an angel* sent Philip to Gaza, but in verse 29 when he came there, the *Spirit* directed him. God has many ways to direct us.

“Do You Understand What You Are Reading?”

8:30-31 “*And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet [Isaiah], and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? 31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.*”

What a question—“Understandest thou what thou readest?” The Ethiopian's response was: “How can I except some *man* should guide me?” In this passage we see the importance of teachers. Often God speaks through human instruments. Unless we have the humility to hear God speaking through *men*, we will miss God and what He is trying to say to us.

Importance of Hearing God Through Men

Sometimes you hear an immature believer say something like this: “I am led by the Spirit. I don't need any man to teach me. All I need is God and the Bible.” This reflects an independent and unteachable spirit. There are several fallacies with this mentality. Here are several:

- If you do not need anyone to teach you, then you should not try to teach anyone else either because they can learn from God by themselves too, and they do not need anyone to teach them.
- The Bible you read was written *by men*. Every time you read the Bible you are believing that God used men to give you an infallible message from God. We are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. And what is the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets?—it is the Scriptures they wrote. Our lives and our faith is built upon the Scriptures given to us by men—*by human agency*.
- God has set in the body firstly apostles, secondarily prophets, and thirdly teachers to instruct the members (1 Cor.12:28). Even the Ethiopian said, “How can I hope to understand the Scriptures unless some *man* should guide me” (cf. Acts 9:6, 10:3-6). Remember, a teacher sent from God provides *a tremendous shortcut* into learning the ways of the Lord. He is there to show you in a short time those truths that would take you a whole life time to find on your own.

We will learn ten times as much, and ten times faster if we can hear God speaking to us through others. Our attitudes toward man reflect our attitudes toward God. God said to Ezekiel, “They will not hearken to thee because they will not hearken unto me” (Ezk. 3:7). If we cannot hear God speaking to us through man, we will not hear God when He speaks directly to us. We have no way of knowing how submitted we are to an invisible God except through the visible object lessons He sets in front of us in everyday life. When we cannot hear God speaking through a human agent—a husband, a teacher, a pastor, a law officer, a boss, or through all the other symbols of authority, neither will we discern God's voice if He speaks directly to us.

Philip Reveals Christ From Isaiah 53

8:32-35 *“The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.”*

The Ethiopian was reading from passages in Isaiah 53:7-8. (In those days there were no chapter and verse divisions in the Scriptures.) Philip makes it very clear that these verses are referring to Jesus Christ. The Ethiopian asked, “Of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself, or of some other man. Then Philip opened his mouth and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him *Jesus*.” I believe that we can begin at almost any Scripture and reveal the Lord Jesus Christ, but it is very clear that these passages are referring to Jesus and are speaking in particular of His meekness.

The Meekness of Christ

“He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth.” In a capsule, here is the very heart of the Gospel and the very heart of Christ. It is meekness. Meekness is a holy acceptance of our circumstances. Jesus allowed people to shear Him with their tongues and actions, yet He did not retaliate. We are also called to be lambs in whose mouths is no vengeance. Ask God for holy dumbness—the ability to stop striving...and talking. Are we ever going to stop defending, explaining, justifying, and retaliating? Are we going to continue to demand vindication? Our mental, emotional, and spiritual health depends upon meekness—upon holy acceptance of our circumstances. Many believers never learn this lesson and *refuse to accept* injustices. Instead, they spend their whole lives fighting and in bitterness.

Can we accept what God has provided, or is there anger against God? Can we be satisfied with having good food, warm clothes, and our health? (cf. 1 Tim. 6:8). Must we have a multitude of “things” to be happy? A real Christian *learns* to be content in every state (Phil. 4:11). Contentment must be *learned* through difficulties. Suppose you were imprisoned in Siberia for twenty years, being deprived of warmth, necessary food, friendship, and good health. After your release, you would be happy just to be warm, well fed, and in soundness of mind and body. Suffering and deprivation bring men and women to this blessed state. David was *reduced* to one thing in life—he wanted the presence of God (Psa. 27:4). This is where *fullness of joy* is found (Psa.16:11).

The Ethiopian Converted and Baptized

8:36-38 *“And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.”*

Baptized Immediately

The Gospel message is very simple—it is believing in Jesus Christ with our whole heart. Jesus is deity in the flesh. God became a man and paid for our debt of sin upon the cross. It takes a revelation from God and an impartation of God's faith to believe this. After confessing faith in Christ, a person should then be baptized in water. The early Church did not require months of training before baptizing a new convert. The Ethiopian was baptized *immediately*. Water baptism is taken lightly today, but in the early Church it was very important. Water baptism by immersion breaks many bondages. If you have not been immersed, you should go to your pastor very soon and be baptized.

Defying All Natural Laws

8:39-40 *“And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.”* Philip was picked up by the Spirit and placed in Azotus, a town 20 miles north (see map, p.6). In revival, God defies all natural laws. The miracles in Acts resulted from a light outpouring of the *early rain*. Everything will be intensified at the end of the Church Age when the latter rain comes for God will do all of these miracles again but in greater measure. This supernatural act had a tremendous impact on the eunuch who saw Philip vanish. Ethiopian tradition claims him as his country's first evangelist.

Chapter Nine

PAUL'S CONVERSION

Chapters 9, 22 and 26 all record the account of Paul's conversion. (Chapters 22 and 26 were personal testimonies of Paul.) The year is approximately A.D. 34, about four years after the Day of Pentecost. The newborn Church was undergoing persecution, and unconverted Paul was the man leading the crusade against the new Christian faith.

The account of Paul's conversion on the Damascus road is not just a nice Bible story in history. What happened that day affected you and me... it affected the destiny of the world. God was laying His hand upon a special man, and God was going to give this man special secrets to tell us that would affect our eternity. This is the reason these Scriptures are so important, and also fascinating.

Paul the Persecutor

9:1-2 *“And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. Paul secured written permission from the council in Jerusalem to travel to distant cities. He was authorized to bind as criminals and bring back for trial anyone who trusted in the name of Jesus. From Damascus he was going to haul believers 140 miles to Jerusalem for trial.*

It is obvious that Paul had no peace in his heart. Anyone who is “breathing out threatenings and slaughter” has no peace. He was a very rough character, even binding the women and dragging them to prison too. After his conversion he called himself “the chiefest of sinners” and “less than the least of all saints.” He had no false humility when he said this of himself. Here is what Scripture says of Paul before his conversion:

- Acts 8:3 - “made havoc of the church.”
- Galatians 1:13 - “beyond measure persecuted the Church of God and wasted it.”
- 1 Timothy 1:13 - “a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious.”
- Acts 22:19 - “beat in every synagogue them that believed.” (500 synagogues in Jeru. alone).
- Acts 9:13 - did “much evil ... to thy saints at Jerusalem.”
- Acts 22:4 - “persecuted this way unto the death, delivering into prison men and women.”
- Acts 26:9-10 - did “many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.”
- Acts 26:10 - “many of the saints [he] shut up in prison.”
- Acts 26:10 - “when they were put to death, I gave my [vote] against them.”
- Acts 26:11 - “I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme.”
- Acts 26:11 - “being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto foreign cities.”

This is the same man who said he was “blameless” concerning the law, yet there was murder in his heart. In his own strength he observed every sabbath and attended every feast day. Paradoxically, legalists are the greatest breakers of the law because they violate the most important law—the law of love. This circumcised Pharisee of Pharisees was very *uncircumcised* in his heart and soul.

Why Are You Persecuting Me?

9:3-4 “*And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*” Jesus did not say to Paul, “Why are you persecuting my people?” but “why are you persecuting Me?” The Church is intricately part of Him, bone of His bones and flesh of His flesh. Therefore, anything that injures His body, injures Him.

We are called “the apple of His eye.” This expression is found five times in Scripture (Deut. 32:10, Psa.17:8, Prov. 7:2, Lam. 2:18, Zech. 2:8). “He that toucheth you touched the apple of his eye.” The eye is the most sensitive part of the body. It is very precious and protected. Anything that harms God's children harms God. This is the reason Christ said to Paul, “Why are you doing this to *me*?”

Paul was sincere in his actions against the Church for he believed he was defending the faith of the fathers. Sincerity is not enough. He was sincerely wrong and he was destroying the work of the Lord because of it. His *mind* needed to be changed and his conscience needed to be reeducated and renewed. He had tried to serve God but not according to right knowledge (Rom.10:1-3).

Paul's Two Questions – The Two Most Important Questions in Life

9:5-6 “*And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. [i.e. The Lord had been trying to speak to him and he was going against conviction]. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.*” Contained in these verses are the two most important questions in life.

- 1.) “Who are you, Lord?”
- 2.) “What wilt thou have me to do?”

The first question involves our relationship with God—“Who are you, Lord?” Our knowledge of God must be ongoing. It must expand and grow after our new birth. Twenty-eight years later, Paul continued to cry out, “That I might know him” (Phil. 3:10). He wanted the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. Thus, we must never think that we know it all (1 Cor. 8:2). The second question concerns our call or mission in life—“What do you want me to do?” Our knowledge of His plan for our lives must also grow and have a further unfolding. God will not show us more about His plan for our lives until we have first paid attention to what He has already shown us.

The Need For Others

Paul asked, “*What wilt thou have me to do?*” Christ could have explained more to Paul, but did not. Instead, he told him: “Go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.” The Lord had prepared a human instrument in the city (Ananias) who would give Paul further instructions. Right from the beginning, God wanted Paul to know that he had to be able to hear from God through other people. We are inter-dependent upon one another to hear from God. No one person will ever have the whole picture. We must always remember that we are only *part* of a body, and only *part* of the answer. We are not *the* answer, but part of the answer to the world's needs.

Paul is Stunned by the Light

9:7-8 “*And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.*” When we are born again, we are like helpless infants who have to be taken by the hand and led by others. We don't know anything about spiritual things.

9:9 “*And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.*” Paul was stunned by the light of revelation. Not only was he temporarily blinded by the light, he sat almost in shock for three days and nights as he realized that all of his life's endeavors were in opposition to the God he wanted to please. Nothing ever really changes in our life until our *mind* is changed.

God Speaks to Ananias About Paul

9:10-14 “*And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.*” Ananias was a very devout man (cf. 22:12). When God spoke to Ananias about Paul, Ananias replied to the Lord as a man would speak to a friend. “Lord, I have heard so much about this man and all the evil he has done to your people at Jerusalem. Do you really want me to go visit him? Is it safe? I am not sure I know what is going on.” Actually, he was just like us; he wanted more reassurance first.

Paul's Threefold Call

9:15 “*But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.*” God assured Ananias that Paul was a special man, “a chosen vessel.” Actually, Paul had a triple call. As a vessel, he was to carry and pour out the Gospel message to the Gentiles, to kings and dignitaries, and to the nation of Israel. In every city where Paul preached, he first entered the Jewish synagogues and offered the Good News “to the Jew first.” Then he went to the Gentiles. Later in life, he had the opportunity to testify to the whole nation of Israel. After his rejection in Jerusalem, he had numerous open doors to testify before kings and rulers, even as high up as Caesar.

His Sufferings Foretold

9:16 “*For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.*” We are vessels, created to contain something and to have it poured out. To be a source of life to others there is a high cost involved—“I will show how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.” In Acts alone Paul had 25 major trials. Paul had a capacity to accept abuse—the violence he had taken out on others would now be turned upon him. When others treated him harshly he felt that he had it coming to him. He accepted it. Paul said he was a *debtor* to all men. He owed everything to the Lord and to the Church he had so persecuted.

Ananias Ministers to Paul

9:17-19 *“And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.”* Ananias ministered to Paul in four ways:

- He laid his hands on him and healed him of his blindness. Scales fell from his eyes.
- He gave him prophetic direction, revealing his call to the Gentiles, kings, and Israel.
- He baptized him in water.
- He laid his hands upon him to be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Immediately Paul Preaches Christ

9:20-22 *“And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is [the] very Christ.”* The Jews were dumfounded. The very man who came to Damascus to imprison Christians was now himself propagating the Christian message.

Gap of Three Years Between Verse 22 and 23

Between verses 22 and 23 is a gap of three years. Paul stayed only “certain days” in Damascus after his conversion. He did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did he go to the twelve apostles to be trained. Instead he went south into the Arabian desert for *three years* where Christ taught him the Gospel. See Galatians 1:11-24. After three years in Arabia, (after many days were fulfilled, 9:23), Paul returned to Damascus, but because of an assassination plot, he was let out of the city over the wall in a basket. Then, he came to Jerusalem where he was introduced to Peter for the first time.

9:23-25 *“And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.”* The escape from Damascus is also recorded in II Corinthians 11:32-33: *“In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.”* Now it is A.D. 37.

Paul Comes to Jerusalem—His First Visit Since Conversion

9:26-28 *“And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.”*

When Paul first came to Jerusalem he tried to associate himself with the other believers, but they were afraid of him. The brethren did not believe that Paul was truly converted and undoubtedly thought he had a scheme. Remember, Jerusalem was the place where “Saul of Tarsus” had done the most damage to the Church. He had “beaten in every synagogue” them that believed on Jesus Christ. Barnabas received Paul with all confidence and introduced him to the apostles and brethren, explaining that Paul had indeed met Christ in Damascus, and had preached boldly there.

Paul Only Sees Peter, Not the Eleven

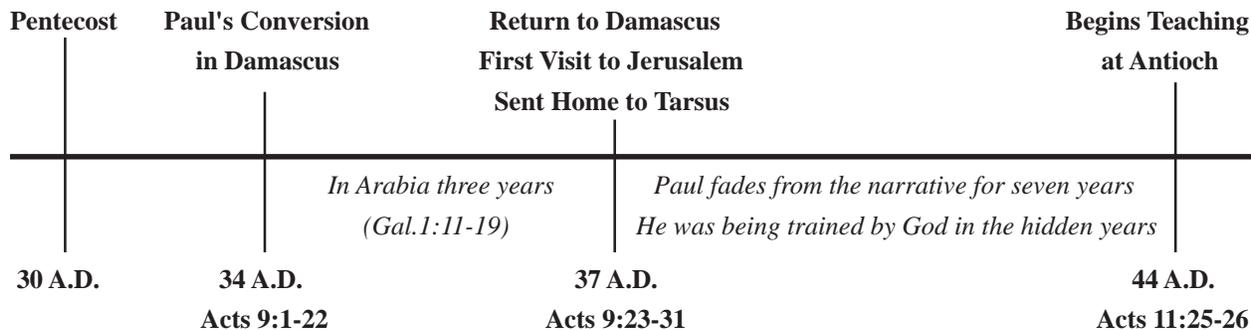
In his Galatian epistle, Paul makes it clear that during this visit to Jerusalem he had not been introduced to the twelve apostles, but only to Peter (Gal.1:18-19). There were other apostles besides the twelve. For example, Barnabas was an apostle. Paul conversed with Peter for fifteen days, and “went in and out” among the other believers in Jerusalem. Also, God warned him that Jerusalem would not receive his message, instructing him to go the Gentiles (cf. Acts 22:17-21).

His Return to Tarsus

9:29-31 *“And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus. Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.”*

Paul began to proclaim boldly the Gospel of Jesus Christ and “disputed” with some of the Grecian Jews. The disputing nature was something he learned in the rabbinical schools. Many of the Jews were enraged against Paul and sought to murder him. When the brethren were aware of the attempt on his life, they sent him to Caesarea and from there back home to Tarsus (See map, p. 59). Nothing is heard of Paul's life for the next six or seven years. The next time he is mentioned again is when Barnabas went to Tarsus in diligent search of him in Acts 11:25-26. After Paul left Jerusalem, all the churches in Palestine had rest, “walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.” The persecution that had been headed by Paul had virtually come to an end. The Church now owned Paul as a Christian, and all of Israel had a reprieve from the persecution of the Jews.

Summary



Paul fades from the narrative from 9:31 to 11:25, a period of about seven years. During this time God was preparing Paul for his ministry to the Gentiles. Meanwhile, God was dealing with Peter and the apostles about accepting the uncircumcised Gentiles (Acts 10:1 - 11:22).

Peter Evangelizes Palestine

9:32-35 *“And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda. And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy. And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately. And all that dwelt at Lydda and [Sharon] saw him, and turned to the Lord.”* Because of a notable miracle, a whole region turned to the Lord. Sharon was a coastal plain between Joppa and Mount Carmel. The plains of Sharon were about 50 miles in length going north and south along the Mediterranean Sea, and 10 miles in width. It included towns such as Joppa, Lydda, and Caesarea. (See map, p.6).

The Word of Command

We should also notice the special authority the apostles demonstrated. The word of command was in their mouths. They did not just pray—“Lord, please heal this man,” but commanded, “Rise up and walk in the name of Jesus.” (cf. 14:9-10). The apostles were in such close communion with the Holy Spirit that they could issue such commands. They had extraordinary authority, but we believe this same power is going to return again to the Church in these last days.

Tabitha Raised From the Dead

9:36-43 *“Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord. And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.”*

The resurrection power that Peter demonstrated was extraordinary, but that same faith still lives and operates today. Smith Wigglesworth, a modern day apostle to Africa, raised the dead 25 times. Just before his death in January, 1946, he said the world would see a revival that was far greater than anything he had ever experienced. If he raised the dead 25 times, what power must be coming!

Blockages in Peter and the Apostles

Peter was the instrument God used to open the door of the Church to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost. In Chapter Ten, he will also be used to open the door of faith to the Gentile world. But before God could use him to open the door to the Gentiles, he and his fellow-apostles needed to have some of their theology changed. There were serious blockages in their minds. Prejudice and wrong thinking were hindering the growth of the Church. The apostles had raised the dead and healed whole cities, yet their natural minds were limiting the moving of the Spirit (Isa. 55:8-9). *After their minds were changed*, many more multitudes were going to be added to the Church.

Chapter Ten

THE DOOR OF FAITH OPENED TO THE GENTILES

Perhaps ten years have passed since Pentecost. The year is approximately 40 A.D. The Gospel fire has spread from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. It has reached Cyprus, Phoenicia, and Antioch (cf. 11:19). See your map, page 59. Foreign-born Jews who found Christ on the day of Pentecost carried the Good News back to their native lands. Yet the Gospel was not being preached on any large scale to the Gentiles, except to those Gentiles who attended the Jewish synagogues. The apostles still were not clear that the Gospel was for the uncircumcised as well as the circumcised. The mentality of the Jewish world was this—in order to be saved a person had to be Jewish or converted to Judaism. In the Jewish mind, a Gentile had to be circumcised and observe all the Jewish customs if he ever hoped to find eternal life. In Chapter Ten, God wanted to erase this notion. Therefore, He was going to visit Peter in a vision and show him that the Gentiles were no longer to be considered “common or unclean.” God was going to reveal to Peter and the apostles that He had unreservedly accepted the Gentiles. He did so by baptizing them in the Holy Ghost, even though they were uncircumcised and unacquainted with all the rituals of Judaism. The episode started in the house of Cornelius in Caesarea.

Cornelius

10:1-2 *“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.”* Caesarea was a Roman military base and Cornelius was a centurion who was based there with the Italian Regiment. He had a knowledge of God, evidenced by his diligent prayer life and generous giving to the poor; yet he had not come to the knowledge of Christ. This man was living up to all the light he had, therefore, God was going to give him more light. God looks into the hearts of all men. When He sees a heart that longs for the truth (Christ is the Truth), God will visit that person and bring him the Gospel light.

Accumulated Prayers

10:3-4 *“He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.”*

This is a beautiful verse. Our prayers accumulate. It is like filling a large barrel (a little at a time) each time we pray. When it reaches the top, the Lord moves. Perhaps there is an enormous mountain in your life. Maybe it is a heavy bondage or physical problem. Maybe it is a bondage in your son or daughter, or spouse. For a moment I want you to think of a set of balances. There may be a heavy bondage on one side of the scales, and you are on the light side. Each time you pray, a little more weight is added on your side of the balances. Maybe it is only the weight of a paperclip and you cannot see or feel any difference whatsoever after you have prayed. But as you continue to pray and not faint, there comes a day when the balances tip in your favor. There will come a time when you have the ascendancy over your problem and you will have your answer. Our prayers accumulate—do not give up. Cornelius prayed daily for years, but at this moment in time, the Lord visited him.

Peter Sent For

10:5-6 *“And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner; whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.”* Peter had “tarried many days in Joppa” with Simon (9:43). In these passages we see again that God uses human agency to speak to us. The angel of the Lord could have explained the Gospel to Cornelius, but instead he is told to look for a man named Peter.

10:7-9 *“And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa. On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour.”* The sixth hour is noon. As the men were approaching Joppa in search of Peter, a tremendous hunger came upon Peter as he was about to go to prayer. The hunger Peter felt was a divine hunger. This hunger depicted the tremendous craving God had for the Gentiles to become His people.

God was preparing the *people* to receive the message.

God was preparing the *messenger* to speak. Now God is going to visit the messenger, Peter.

The Heavenly Vision - What God Has Cleansed Should be Accepted

10:10-16 *“And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.”*

At first Peter did not understand the meaning of the vision. He was very hungry. Then he saw food—every kind of fowl and beast. The Jews were very selective about which animals they ate. The Lord said, “Rise Peter, kill and eat.” Peter's first reaction was to resist, saying: “Lord, I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.” God replied: “What God has cleansed, do not call common.” Of course, the interpretation of the vision applied to the Gentiles—God has accepted and cleansed the Gentiles, and therefore the Jews should not call them “common and unclean.”

Arrival of the Men Cornelius Sent

10:17-22 *“Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.”*

Peter Goes to the House of Cornelius

10:23-26 *“Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends. And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.”* When Peter arrived at Caesarea, Cornelius fell down at the feet of Peter to worship him. Peter refused worship. There is only One Person in the whole universe who is worthy of worship and that is the Lord Himself. There is no creature in heaven or earth who should be worshipped. None of the apostles or angels ever received worship (cf. Acts 14:11-15, Rev. 22:8-9). Jesus did receive worship during His ministry, but He is the Lamb who is worshipped in heaven. He is God.

Still Standoffish Ten Years After Pentecost

10:27-29 *“And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?”* This was ten years after Pentecost. The Jews still would not associate with the Gentiles. Peter told Cornelius, “Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.” Here, Peter is beginning to understand what the Lord was saying to him. “God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.” After ten years, Peter is getting the message.

Cornelius Explains Why He Sent For Peter

10:30-33 *“And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.”* This is the kind of audience that you want—people who are ready to hear all that the Lord wants to say through you. They were there waiting with prepared and excited hearts to hear God's message. Cornelius had all of his family and friends gathered together to listen to God's messenger. God was very hungry for these people.

Peter Preaches to the Uncircumcised Gentiles - v34-43

10:34-35 *“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.”* Finally Peter understands—“God is no respecter of persons.” That is an amazing thing for a Jew to say. The Jews were brought up not to associate with the uncircumcised Gentiles. They would not eat with them and would carefully wash their hands if they ever came in contact with one (11:3).

Peter Opens the Door of Faith to the Gentiles

10:36-43 *“The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of [the living] and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.”*

Summary of Peter's Message:

- God sent a message of peace to Israel. It was proclaimed by Jesus Christ who is Lord of all.
- That message of good news by Christ began in Galilee, after the ministry of John the Baptist.
- God had anointed Jesus of Nazareth with power to heal all that were oppressed of the devil.
- We, His apostles, were with Him and witnessed *everything* He did in Israel, and Jerusalem.
- Israel rejected this divine Man who did good everywhere, slaying him upon a cross.
- God raised him from the dead three days later. He showed himself alive to special eyewitnesses.
- This resurrected Lord commanded us to preach that he is the Judge of the living and of the dead.
- Anyone who believes in him shall receive forgiveness of sins.

The Gentiles Are Baptized in the Holy Ghost

10:44-46 *“While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God.”*

Six Jewish brethren had accompanied Peter from Joppa to Caesarea (10:23, 10:45, 11:12). When the Holy Ghost fell upon the uncircumcised Gentiles, the six brethren who came with Peter were utterly *astonished*. God had poured out His Spirit upon people who were not circumcised, just as He had upon the Jews on the day of Pentecost. God had accepted people who were not observing *any* of the Jewish laws or customs, and the Jewish brethren stood there in amazement.

How do we know for sure that they received the gift of the Holy Ghost? “For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God” (10:46). Once again we see that the initial evidence of being baptized in the Holy Ghost is speaking in other tongues.

Then answered Peter, 10:47-48 *“Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.”* Peter said to the six brethren, “If God has indicated His acceptance of the Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, how can we forbid them from being baptized in water. Then he commanded that the new Gentile converts be baptized in water.

Chapter Eleven

THE UNCIRCUMCISED GENTILES ARE ACCEPTED

Peter rejoiced that God had visited the Gentiles, but now he was in trouble with his peers back home in Jerusalem. They were filled with prejudice and bias against the Gentiles, just as he had been before the vision of Chapter Ten. Peter tarried “certain days” in Caesarea at the insistence of the newly born Gentile converts. Now he was returning home to Jerusalem to face his brethren, and he had a lot of explaining to do!

Peter's Brethren Contend With Him

11:1-3 *“And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.”* The brethren were quite upset with Peter for associating with the uncircumcised Gentiles and eating with them. You can imagine all the dialogue that went on among the brethren, for they felt that Peter was being disloyal to the faith, letting down the standards, and compromising.

This reminds me of a situation that occurred several years ago during the Charismatic movement. A pastor gave an invitation for everyone who wanted to be baptized in the Holy Ghost to come up to the altar for prayer. A number of those who responded to the altar call were women who were wearing a lot of makeup. As they were kneeling at the altar and crying out to God for the baptism in the Holy Spirit, the pastor was making his way to these ladies to ask them to first go to the rest room to remove all their makeup. After all, he reasoned, God could never fill an unclean vessel! They were so worldly, you know. Then to his amazement, before he could reach them, God was already filling them with His Spirit. He was wondering how he was going to explain this to all the elders. Anyway, it changed some of their theology.

Peter Explains His Vision and How God Visited Cornelius and the Gentiles v4-17

11:4-13 *“But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it [in] order unto them, saying, I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven. And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me. And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house. And he showed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter;”*

11:14-17 *“Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?”*

The Turning Point

11:18 *“When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”* This was the dawning of a new revelation to the apostles and brethren. Verse 18 is a turning point in Church history. Here the hearts of the Church fathers were changed. Finally they had come to realize that God had accepted all men, whether circumcised or not. God's acceptance of the Gentiles was evidenced by the fact that He had given them the Holy Spirit, just as He had the 120 on the day of Pentecost. Moreover, these Gentiles were not circumcised or observing any of the Jewish rituals. From this point onward, the Gospel fire began to spread with fervor throughout the world. In addition to this, Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, was beginning to emerge from obscurity. Also, the church of Antioch which was destined to become the Gentile mission base, was rising to prominence. Let's review what has happened in chapters ten and eleven:

- The Gospel was being preached only to the Jewish world and to Gentile proselytes (cf. 11:19).
- The Jews would not associate with Gentiles or eat with them (10:28, 11:2-3).
- There were many walls in their minds (prejudice, traditions, pride) that hindered them.
- The apostles and brethren believed that a person had to be circumcised and Judaized to be saved.
- Peter's vision showed that God had cleansed what formerly had been “common and unclean.”
- Peter and his six brethren were “astonished” when God gave the Spirit to the uncircumcised.
- God clearly revealed that he had unreservedly accepted the uncircumcised Gentiles.
- When the brethren in Jerusalem heard this they said, *“Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”* To them, it was a new revelation.
- The Great Commission to “preach the gospel to *every creature*” (Mk.16:15); to teach all nations [every ethnic group] (Mt. 28:19-20) was finally being understood. Even though Christ had given them this charge ten years earlier, now they were hearing it with an illumined heart and mind.
- Now the Gospel fire was going to spread with rapidity.
- Peter could not strengthen his [Gentile] brethren until he had a new conversion in his soul.
- Our whole attitude toward people and toward life itself is changed *when our minds are changed.*

The Rise of the Church of Antioch

11:19-22 *“Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as [Phoenicia], and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.”* Here we see the rise of the Church of Antioch, Syria. Barnabas became an integral part of this church. Antioch became the home base of the Gentile Church, as well as the home base of the Apostle Paul. From this point Antioch begins to take the lead in the Acts.

Character of Barnabas

Luke records (in verses 19-22) that Antioch was experiencing revival and that “a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.” Then the brethren at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch to help establish them in the faith.

11:23 “Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.” “Cleaving unto the Lord” is a quote from Deuteronomy and Joshua (cf. Deut. 4:4, 10:20, 11:22, 13:4, 30:20, Josh. 22:5, 23:8). This is our salvation—cleaving and clinging to the Lord. We must hold onto Him, for He is our only hope. Now we have a description of Barnabas and his character.

11:24-25 “For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul.” In the original Greek, it says that he “diligently” sought for Paul. Barnabas was the man who first introduced Paul to the brethren in Jerusalem when he was first converted. Barnabas played an important role in helping Paul to get started in his ministry. Later, Barnabas disappeared from the narrative after he and Paul split up. After the separation there must have been a sadness in the heart of Barnabas for the rest of his life, as he was deflected from the course that God had chosen for him. This is the reason we must never leave a place angry or offended (Isa.52:12). Anyway, he traveled to Tarsus looking for Paul.

Paul Comes Out of Obscurity

11:26 “And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” Barnabas found Paul in Tarsus and brought him to Antioch. The Antioch church was becoming a very powerful and influential church. The revival fire that burned there had come from the fire that started in Jerusalem. Antioch would become Paul's home base. It is now 44 A.D., and Paul had faded from the scene for about seven years. Now he is coming into view again and beginning his ministry as a teacher. Later he would blossom into an apostle. It was in Antioch, Syria that the believers were first called *Christians*. Before this they were known as “disciples.”

Famine is Foretold by Agabus the Prophet

11:27-28 “And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.” Claudius was the Roman emperor from 41 to 54 A.D. This dearth (or famine) extended from A.D. 45 to 48. The prediction of the famine by Agabus probably came to pass within that year.

11:29-30 “Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.” In the early Church, they really helped one another. Aid was sent from Antioch to Jerusalem by the hands of Barnabas and Paul. This was Paul's second visit to Jerusalem since his conversion more than ten years earlier, but Paul was no longer a welcomed man in Jerusalem. In Acts 12:25, Barnabas and Paul returned from Jerusalem. In chapter twelve, Luke backtracks and *inserts* several events which took place in 44 A.D., about a year *before* the famine began.

Summary:

- Paul had gone home to Tarsus in 37 A.D. (Acts 9:30-31).
- The Scriptures are silent regarding this seven year phase of Paul's life.
- This truth teaches us that our lives are often *hidden* while God is preparing us.
- Meanwhile, the Church in Antioch was thriving and growing rapidly.
- Barnabas was sent there by the brethren in Jerusalem to help establish the Antioch believers.
- While there, Barnabas felt a tremendous burden to go to Tarsus to bring Paul to Antioch.
- Then Paul came with Barnabas to Antioch (44 A.D.) and taught “much people” for a whole year.
- Paul started his ministry as a teacher. Later he bloomed into a prophet (13:1) and then an apostle.
- During that year of teaching, Agabus, a prophet from Jerusalem, foretold a coming famine.
- The famine came soon after. It started in A.D. 45 and lasted to 48.
- Barnabas and Paul brought aid from Antioch to Jerusalem, probably in A.D. 45.

Luke then *digresses* from his narrative to describe the state of the Church at Jerusalem immediately before and after the death of Herod Agrippa (12:1-24). Then he resumes the narrative which he had interrupted, and tells us how Barnabas and Paul returned to Antioch, after fulfilling their mission to Jerusalem (12:25). The events of Acts 12:1-24 happened in A.D. 44. This is a date that is established in secular history. The events of chapter twelve included the martyrdom of James, Peter's escape, and Herod's death. There is no evidence of famine in Jerusalem during the events of chapter 12.

Chapter Twelve

JAMES KILLED / PETER DELIVERED / HEROD SLAIN

The State of the Church at Jerusalem (44 A.D.)

In the first 24 verses of this chapter, Luke digresses from his narrative on the famine. He is going back in time (about one year) to speak briefly on the state of the Church in Jerusalem immediately before and after the death of Herod. At that time, Herod had James the brother of John put to death. When he saw that this action pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to apprehend Peter. This is usually the chief motivation of a politician—to win the favor of the people. Later that year, Herod himself was struck by the Lord and died. The time of his death is an established date in secular history. Herod's death was in 44 A.D. He was 54 years old.

12:1-4 *“Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain [ones] of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.”* Easter is a Greek word for “Passover.” Therefore, the time is April, A.D. 44.

This is Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great who tried to kill the infant Jesus. Herod was made king over territories north-east of Palestine in 37 A.D. When Herod the tetrarch was deposed of his rulership of Galilee and Peraea in A.D. 39, these were given to Herod Agrippa I. Later, when Claudius Caesar became emperor in 41, he further expanded Agrippa's kingdom by giving him Judea and Samaria. Therefore, Herod Agrippa ruled virtually all of Palestine, and more.

The Herod's were very wicked. Herod the Great killed all the innocent children when Jesus was born. Herod Antipas had John the Baptist beheaded. Now Herod Agrippa was responsible for the murder of James, the brother of John. This was in 44 A.D., fourteen years after Pentecost. James was the first of the twelve apostles to give his life for Christ. The other James mentioned in Acts is the Lord's brother, the presiding elder of the Jerusalem Church, and also the writer of the Epistle of James. When Herod saw that the slaying of James pleased the Jews, he also arrested Peter.

Peter is Delivered From Prison and Death

12:5-11 *“Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.*

When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.”

Again we see in these passages that God defies all natural laws in times of revival. The chains fell off Peter's hands, the guards did not see him, and the locked iron gate opened of its own accord. Intercession was made around the clock for Peter's release. Now he comes to the house of John Mark where many were gathered together praying. I think this is an interesting comment about Peter coming to the home of John Mark, because in the future John Mark would become an intimate disciple of Peter. He also became Peter's interpreter in Rome. And twenty-one years later, John Mark would write the Gospel of Mark, a masterpiece which he created from a series of Peter's sermons.

Peter Comes to the Home of John Mark

12:12-17 “And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go show these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.”

The early Church believed in united, earnest prayer. They did not think it was enough to present their case *once* to God, but they did it again and again until the answer came. God never said to His people, “Seek my face in vain” (Isa. 45:19). Daniel prayed three full weeks before he received his request. When Rhoda came to the gate and recognized Peter's voice, out of sheer joy she ran to the prayer group to tell them that Peter had come. Their reply to her was very human—“Thou art mad.” Sometimes the thing we most earnestly wish for is the thing we are the most backward to believe God for. Finally when they went to the gate, to their astonishment Peter was there. He wanted them to go and tell the other apostles and James that God had delivered him. Peter himself departed from that area for a season because it was too dangerous to dwell in Jerusalem at that time. Even though God had rescued Peter, still he had to remove himself from that danger zone for a time.

Peter's Guards Are Put to Death

12:18-19 “Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. 19 And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and there abode.” There are many double negatives in Acts. There was “no small stir” among the soldiers. As a matter of fact, there was a *big stir* among them because they knew their lives would be exchanged for Peter's. Herod had these men put to death because Peter had escaped.

Some double negatives in Acts:

- 12:18 - “no small stir” i. e. a big commotion
- 15:2 - “no small dissension” i. e. a tremendous debate
- 19:23 - “no small stir” i. e. a great disturbance
- 19:24 - “no small gain” i. e. a very significant gain
- 20:12 - “not a little comforted” - i. e. were greatly comforted
- 21:39 - “no mean city” i. e. a very well known city
- 27:20 - “no small tempest” i. e. a very great tempest
- 28:2 - “no little kindness” i. e. extravagant kindness

Herod is Slain by An Angel of the Lord

12:20-23 *“And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king’s chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king’s country. And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. [Of course, Herod was soaking it all in.] And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.”*

God's account and man's account of an incident are quite different. In secular history, Josephus described Herod as being seized suddenly with excruciating pains in the abdomen. Five days later he died in agony. That is man's account. In God's record, it says “an angel of the Lord smote him because he gave not God the glory.” God was very angry with this wicked man. Not only was he making himself a god, he was also responsible for murdering James and attempting to execute Peter. Thus, God smote him in anger. The Book of Acts has a number of themes, and one of the strong themes is the peril of exalting one's self and drawing men to self instead of turning them to God. Consider these five:

- 5:36 - *Theudas*. “Boasting himself to be somebody...to whom a number of men...joined themselves.”
- 5:37 - *Judas of Galilee*. “Drew away much people after him...as many as obeyed him...dispersed.”
- 8:9.10 - *Simon*. “Giving out that himself was some great one...to whom they all gave heed.”
- 12:22 - *Herod*. “It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.” And he loved it.
- 20:30 - *Ministers*. “Of your own selves shall men arise...to draw away disciples after *them*.”

Barnabas and Paul Return to Antioch From Jerusalem

12:24-25 *“But the word of God grew and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.”* The word of God grew and multiplied in Jerusalem and Palestine, especially after the removal of Herod Agrippa. Verses 1-24 was an update on what had happened in Jerusalem and Israel the year before (44 A.D.). Verse 25 resumes the narrative. Barnabas and Paul returned from Jerusalem after delivering gifts and offerings from the church of Antioch because of the famine which started in A.D. 45. They brought John Mark with them from Jerusalem, probably at the suggestion of Barnabas because John was a cousin of Barnabas.

Chapter Thirteen/Fourteen

PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

(13:1 - 14:28)

It is now around 48 A.D. Fourteen years have passed since Paul's conversion. After being three years in the Arabian desert, seven years back home in Tarsus, and another four years functioning in the Church of Antioch, he is now ready to be launched into his life's work. It is one thing to be *called*, but quite another thing to be *chosen*. Then we must be *faithful* (cf. Rev.17:14). After we are called of God, then we must be trained in order to be prepared for our calling. We can never be installed into a position of authority until we have become *qualified* for that position. This is where many Christians fail. They receive a call from God to do a specific task. Then the training and proving period begins, and often this is very difficult. Here is where many give up. Many are called but few are chosen. Actually, our earthly task is fitting us for our heavenly calling. Paul had passed through fourteen years of training. He was not only called of God to be that special messenger to the Gentiles, now he was being chosen and set on his course. Remember the three phases:

- Called - on the Damascus Road (34 A.D.) Acts 9:3-16
- Chosen - after fourteen years of training (48 A.D.). Acts 13:2
- Faithful - declared near the end of his life (68 A.D.) "I have finished my course" (2 Tim. 4:7).

Paul is a Prophet and Teacher

13:1 "*Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.*" Paul had started as a teacher and now was a "prophet and a teacher." His ministry is becoming mightier all of the time. In Antioch there were many prophets and teachers that were being raised up in this large church. These two ministries of prophet and teacher will be very prominent in the last days. If you are a teacher, ask God to give you a prophetic anointing so that as you teach you will be pinpointing many issues in the lives of your students.

Paul Begins His Life's Work

13:2 "*As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.*" Divine guidance comes through a relationship of love—as we "minister to the Lord." The Holy Spirit speaks while we are ministering to Him. The church in Antioch was very spiritual; they not only emphasized evangelism, but also relationship.

The Holy Ghost told them to send Paul and Barnabas, but He did not tell them to take John Mark. John Mark was very young and the pressure was probably too much. Thus, he left them in the middle of the journey. This episode later became a wedge between Paul and Barnabas.

13:3-4 "*And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.*" It was the Holy Ghost *in the brethren* that sent them out. Remember, God uses people.

PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

13:1—14:28



A picture is worth a thousand words. Seeing this journey on a map makes these truths more vivid.

- 13:4 Launching from Antioch, Syria (48 A.D.)
- 13:4 Unto Seleucia, the seaport for Antioch. Antioch was 16 miles inland.
- 13:5 To Salamis, Cyprus (Here they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.)
- 13:6 To Paphos, Cyprus (Encountering Elymas the Sorcerer, Paul smote him with blindness.)
- 13:13 To Perga in Pamphylia (This is the place where John Mark deserted them.)
- 13:14 To Antioch in Pisidia (Paul preaches. When the Gentiles responded, the Jews were jealous.)
- 13:51 To Iconium (They stayed here a long time; God performed many signs and wonders.)
- 14:6 To Lystra / Derbe (A cripple was healed at Lystra. Paul was worshipped, then stoned.)
- 14:20 To Derbe (They “taught many” here.)

Then they retraced their steps

- 14:21 Back to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch in Pisidia (After confirming and exhorting the new believers, they ordained leaders in each newly founded church, v22-23.)
- 14:24 Throughout Pisidia to Pamphylia
- 14:25 To Perga again (Here they preached the Word)
- 14:25 To Attalia
- 14:26 Returning home to Antioch, Syria (49 A.D.)
- 14:27 Rehearsing all that God had done, how God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.
- 14:28 Then they rested a long time, perhaps a year or two.

At Salamis, Cyprus—They Preach the Word of God

13:5 “*And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John [as their attendant].*” The three men reached Salamis, a city on the Island of Cyprus, the birthplace of Barnabas. They first preached in a place relatively close to Antioch. When revival hits, do not go great distances away to light another fire or your first one will go out. Go to places near to you, and keep plenty of wood burning at home. Keep your fires close together so that each one helps the other. In Salamis they preached the message of the new covenant in the synagogues. From Salamis they traveled the length of the Island of Cyprus until they came to Paphos in the western extremity. Here they encountered a sorcerer, a false prophet named Barjesus (Elymas).

At Paphos—They Encounter Elymas the Sorcerer

13:6-12 “*And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus: Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, And said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.*”

Sergius Paulus was the proconsul (or governor). A city or country will be opened for the Gospel if the heart of the ruler is open. Therefore, we must pray to find favor in the eyes of the officials. Watch for key people. If you are sent of God, He will give you favor with these key men. Strategic centers and key people are the means by which God propagates the Gospel. Therefore, concentrate in prayer on the leaders of the country to which you are called. In this episode we see the tremendous apostolic power that is coming upon Paul. He had the authority to smite men with blindness. This act of power convinced the governor and it inspired *holy fear* in all those who observed. Paul's authority was given him to edify (or build up), not to destroy (2 Cor.13:10).

We Are Vessels

At Paul's conversion God said Paul was “a chosen vessel.” A vessel has one main use—to hold or contain something. We are created with a void or hollow. What we choose to fill our vessel with determines whether we are a good or bad vessel. In 13:9,10, Paul was *filled* with the Holy Ghost and was able to tell Elymas what he was filled with—“*O full of all subtilty and mischief.*” Consider the different elements that filled the men and women in the Book of Acts: (See 2 Tim. 2:20-22).

- 2:2 “*filled* with the Holy Ghost”
- 5:3 “Why hath Satan *filled* thine heart?”
- 5:17 “*filled* with indignation.”
- 6:3 “*full* of the Holy Ghost and wisdom”
- 6:5 “*full* of faith and of the Holy Ghost”
- 6:8 “*full* of faith and power”
- 9:36 “this woman was *full* of good works”
- 13:10 “*full* of subtilty and all mischief
- 13:45 “*Filled* with envy”
- 13:52 “The disciples were *filled* with joy.”
- 19:28 “they were *full* of wrath”
- 19:29 “The...city was *filled* with confusion.”

Paul Emerges As the Leader

13:13 *“Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.”* It is no longer “Barnabas and Saul” as it was stated at their commissioning. Now it is “Paul and his company.” Barnabas is probably recognizing that Paul is surpassing him in power and authority, and quite possibly there was an element of jealousy growing in Barnabas. Jealousy is a problem that is always associated with being number one. If our motives are pure and we only desire God to be lifted up, why should we care who has the greater ministry? Unfortunately there will be a deterioration between Paul and Barnabas on this trip.

John Mark Leaves Them in Perga

The fact that John Mark had deserted them in the middle of their journey added to the problem. You will notice that Mark did not return to Antioch, but went back home to Jerusalem. He was probably too young and inexperienced and the pressure was too much. When Barnabas wanted to take John Mark again on a second trip, it led to a heated argument that caused Barnabas to separate himself from Paul and return home to Cyprus. Some theologians believe that John Mark was the first to write his Gospel, but this is very unlikely since he was so young and immature at this time.

“If ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.”

13:14-15 *“But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.”* Paul and Barnabas (minus John Mark) have now come to Antioch in Pisidia. There were 15 Antiochs in the Roman empire at that time. In the Jewish synagogues it was customary to invite competent guests to speak. The Jewish synagogues had many Gentile converts in them, especially in the synagogues outside of Palestine. Often the Gentile proselytes responded better to Paul's preaching than did the Jews. When the brethren were invited to speak, Paul used the opportunity to preach Christ. First, he gave a brief history of Israel. Then he climaxed the message by introducing a Messiah who had been foretold by all the prophets. This Messiah was crucified and resurrected, offering “justification from all things” which the old covenant was unable to cleanse.

Paul Preaches in Antioch in Pisidia – v16-41

13:16-21 *“Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience. The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it. 18 And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness. And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of [Canaan], he divided their land to them by lot. And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of [Kish], a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years.”*

Paul is giving a summary of Israel's history leading up to the coming of Christ. He is taking his audience from Egypt, through the wilderness, across Jordan into Canaan where the land was divided by lot. Then came the rule of the judges, then the kings. As he is preaching, he is bringing out hidden truths. For example, he said Saul reigned 40 years, a fact not recorded in the Old Testament.

God's Testimony of David

13:22 *“And when [God] had removed [Saul], he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.”* This verse shows us the reason God chooses a man. God chooses a man whose heart is set on accomplishing all of His will. The Lord removed Saul because he did not have such a heart. The Apostle Paul, under divine inspiration, is blending *parts* of three Old Testament verses together as he quotes God's testimony of David:

- Psalm 89:20 - “I have found David...” (Spoken to Samuel - Psalm 89:19)
- 1 Samuel 13:14 - “a man after his own heart...”
- 1 Samuel 2:35 - “that shall do according to that which is in mine heart.”

Paul was a master craftsman in his use of the Sword of the Word. From his youth, Paul had memorized both the Hebrew and Greek versions of the Scriptures. He knew both by heart and could quote them verbatim. In his epistles and in his sermons in the synagogues, most of his quotes from the Old Testament were from the Greek version (the Septuagint). This would be only logical since the majority of his listeners were Greek-speaking and were better acquainted with the Greek version of the Bible more than Hebrew. Only occasionally does he quote from the Hebrew text, but virtually all of his quotes are from memory.

Of David's Seed God Has Raised Up a Promised Savior—Jesus

13:23-25 *“O this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus: When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not he. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose.”*

Jesus, the seed of David, is the promised Savior. When John introduced Him he deflected all glory and all attention away from himself. He always pointed to Christ which is the hallmark of someone who is true. Of John it says that he “fulfilled his course.” This cannot be said of every believer. It is so important to fulfill our course or task in life. Many believers go to their graves with unfulfilled calls and unfulfilled promises. Let us not be slack but diligent to fulfill our ministry (cf. Col. 4:17).

13:26 *“Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.”* [i. e. this message is to Jew and Gentile alike].

Spiritual Blindness

13:27-28 *“For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain.”* Spiritual blindness is terrible. It is the result of a heart that has been hardened by pride and sin. What a horrible delusion when people read the Scriptures about God, talk about God, pray to God, and then murder Him when He visits. This is precisely what Israel did when God became a man. Before his conversion, Paul's mind was blinded. There was a veil over his understanding when he read the Old Testament, but then when he met Christ the veil was taken away (cf. 2 Cor. 3:13-17).

13:29-31 *“And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre. But God raised him from the dead: And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people.”* The cornerstone of the Gospel is the truth of the resurrection. After the resurrection Jesus was “seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem.” *Seen many days* refers to those forty days in which the resurrected Christ revealed Himself to his apostles and followers. These witnesses were all Galileans, but Paul was not one of them. Paul had a personal visitation from the resurrected Christ on the Damascus road four years later in A.D. 34.

The Resurrection Foretold by the Prophets

13:32-37 *“And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee [Psalm 2:7]. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore he saith also in another psalm [Psalm 16:10], Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell [asleep], and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption; But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.”*

“The sure mercies of David” involves an everlasting covenant that God made with David. In this covenant God promised to watch over all of David's children (therefore, his inheritance), and to establish his throne. See Isaiah 55:3, 2 Samuel 7:15-16, 1 Chronicles 17:11-14, and Psalm 89:27-37. Paul applies this truth to David's greatest Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. God would protect David's seed and his throne. Therefore, He would resurrect David's greatest Son to sit upon the throne. In Isaiah 55:3, God promises to establish this same *covenant of mercy* with us as well. He will watch over our children in our absence, and will continue to do so when we have passed from this earth.

The Death and Resurrection of Christ Offers the Blessing of Forgiveness

13:38-39 *“Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: 39 And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.”* Through the death and resurrection of Christ the Messiah, our debt has been paid. God died for us! Everyone who believes in Him can be justified and cleared from all sins and trespasses. The old covenant could never offer this blessing. The blood of animals could never take away sin and it could never deal with the corrupt nature of sin or remove guilt. There was always guilt (cf. Heb.10:2,3), but the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin and also from *a defiled conscience* (Heb. 9:14, 10:22).

The Warning Not to Despise This Message

13:40-41 *“Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken in the prophets; [Hab.1:5] Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.”* Here Paul warns the audience of the consequences of rejecting this message of pardon. To despise this message means we will “perish.” Paul is quoting Habakkuk 1:5 from the Septuagint (or Greek) version. He usually quotes from the Greek version and this explains why it differs a little from the way we read it in our Bible.

The Gentiles Readily Accept the Message

13:42 “*And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath.*” There were many Gentile proselytes in the synagogue. In all of these synagogues where Paul preached, the Gentiles generally were far more receptive to the message than were the Jews. In this case, the leaders of the synagogue would regret giving Paul the opportunity to preach because of the favorable response from the Gentiles.

The Jews Are Vexed With Jealousy

13:43-45 “*Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. 44 And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. 45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.*” The Jews considered themselves God's chosen people, and they did not want to share this position with any rival. When they saw the Gentiles wholeheartedly responding to the message, the Jews felt like they were being displaced. (Remember, God's acceptance of others is not His rejection of us!) Jealousy and envy never trouble a man who has pure motives. When our motive is to exalt the Lord and not ourselves, we will never have jealousy. If *we* are trying to be number one, we will have no end of jealousy and envy. Are you troubled with jealousy? Check out your motives! Jealousy is always connected to motives.

Here is the end result of envy and jealousy—it is wickedness. “*They were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.*” A man who smokes a pipe or drinks occasionally will make it to heaven a lot easier than the man who is infected with jealousy. Jealousy and envy poison the whole person. Think of King Saul, for example.

The Gospel always went to the Jews first. When Paul entered a new city, he *always* headed for the synagogue and presented the Gospel to them first. If they rejected the message, he then felt free to preach to the Gentiles outside of the *synagogues*. Thus, we see the start of *churches*.

To the Jew First, And Also to the Gentile

13:46 “*Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.*” God sends no one to hell; people send themselves to hell and “*judge themselves unworthy of everlasting life.*” The Lord desires everyone to be saved. He wants all to come to repentance (1 Tim. 2:4, 2 Pet. 3:9), but when men and women refuse God's gracious offer of pardon, they have elected not to go to heaven.

13:47 “*For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.*” Here Paul is quoting Isaiah 49:6. This verse is prophetic of Christ being a light to the Gentiles, yet Paul applies this same verse to himself. At times God will quicken verses to us as well which actually belong to Christ. That is because Christ “*divides the spoil with the strong*” (Isa. 53:12), with his overcomers. He shares His ministry with the saints. Not only are the heathen His inheritance, the heathen become *our* inheritance also as we walk with God (Psa. 2:8). We are co-laborers with the Lord (1 Cor. 3:9). We work *together* in His harvest field. Some plant, others water, but it is God who gives the increase.

13: 48-49 “*And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.*” The fire was spreading all around that region. Everyone who was going to say yes to Christ, did so. Saturation point had been reached. “As many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” God knows who is going to accept or reject Him. Now the apostles could move on to another ripe field ... after a little friendly persuasion.

The Fruit of Jealousy

13:50-52 “*But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.*”

Jealousy caused the Jews to stir up notable men and women in the city who raised persecution against the apostles and expelled them from their area. Jealousy aroused all manner of evil in them—blasphemy, opposition, hatred, twisting of the truth, and persecution. Our flesh is no different than theirs. Unless our motives are corrected and unless jealousy is cleansed, all of these things could devour our lives too. We could find ourselves fighting against the purposes of God as did the Jews.

Avoiding a Persecution Complex

What was the response of the apostles to persecution and rejection? This last verse of the chapter shows how they conquered a persecution complex—they were filled with joy and the Holy Ghost. This is the divine antidote for all self-pity, discouragement and persecution complexes. All of these maladies are remedied by keeping our vessels full of the Holy Ghost and joy. We keep our channels clear and unblocked by forgiving others and maintaining a rejoicing, thankful spirit.

Chapter Fourteen

THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY CONTINUES

Thus far, Paul and Barnabas have visited Salamis and Paphos, cities of Cyprus. Then they came to Perga where John Mark left them. This incident added stress to the brethren because Mark must have complained about the pressure on a number of occasions. Now the two apostles had to carry all the baggage themselves, cook their own meals, and were cumbered with other mundane affairs.

Upon leaving Perga they came to Antioch in Pisidia where they had great success but were forced to leave because of persecution. After the apostles published the Word throughout the region, Satan was strong enough to get Paul and Barnabas out of the country. It is important to realize that our work has to be established on Christ the solid Rock, not on the missionaries or the mission stations. If the work in Antioch of Pisidia had been founded on Paul or Barnabas, it would have fallen when they left. But since it was founded on Christ, it could go on because Christ cannot be shaken. The brethren refused to be discouraged after being ejected from Antioch, and were able to surmount discouragement because of God's joy in them. Actually, the rejection only encouraged them to go to the next city. Now the apostles are coming to Iconium and they will abide there *a long time*.

At Iconium

14:1-2 *“And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.”* Once again, we see that the Jews were enraged with jealousy. Jealousy is as cruel as the grave (Song 8:6). Anyone who has this spirit cannot rest. The Jews “evil affected” the minds of Paul's listeners. The tongue of a person with jealousy has more poison than the Aids virus. The peculiar thing about revival is the fact that revivals are usually opposed most by those inside the house of faith, not those from the outside. It was the unbelieving Jews, not the Gentiles, who rejected them. Our greatest troubles often come from those who should have been the first to believe.

14:3 *“Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.* Because “a great multitude both the Jews and Greeks believed,” (v1) the apostles stayed in Iconium a long time and this became another fruitful field. Back home in Antioch, Syria the saints were praying earnestly.

14:4 *“But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.”* The Gospel always brings “division.” Doctrine divides—it is supposed to. It divides: soul from spirit, the holy from the profane, the clean from the unclean, truth from error, and the sheep from goats (Lk.12:51-53, Ezk. 44:23). Paul and Barnabas stayed in Iconium “a long time” speaking boldly, and the Lord confirmed His Word with signs and wonders. As God was moving, Satan also began to move. Then the brethren fled to two nearby cities—Lystra and Derbe.

At Lystra and Derbe

14:5-7 *“And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: And there they preached the gospel.”* This time they did not wait to be expelled. Sometimes when you get wind of trouble it is an indication that it is time to leave. When they left, the church remained for it was founded on Christ. At Lystra / Derbe was a 15 year-old named Timothy who would join them three years later (16:1-2).

The Cripple Healed

14:8-10 *“And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother’s womb, who never had walked: The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.”* This is important. Paul perceived that he had faith to be healed. Faith is purely divine; it is one hundred percent supernatural. If God does not give it, we cannot have it or muster it up, nor can it be blown up like a tire. God planted faith in this man as Paul preached, and Paul perceived that the man had divine faith as he commanded, “Stand upright on thy feet.”

It is important to have discernment in these matters. One time an evangelist lifted a man out of his seat and instantly he was healed. In the next service he tried the same thing, but it turned out to be a serious mistake. The evangelist pulled a lady out of her seat expecting her to be made whole, but she collapsed. It was quite a pathetic scene. She did not have faith to be healed and the Holy Spirit knew that. Therefore, in cases like this you must discern who has or does not have divine faith.

The People Want to Worship the Apostles

14:11-18 *“And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.”*

After the apostles had performed this notable miracle, the people wanted to make them gods and tried to worship them. The apostles urged them not to attribute anything divine to them, saying that they were ordinary men just like everyone else. This is the attitude we must have if God is going to use us to perform mighty miracles. Only men and women who are false receive worship. None of the apostles ever accepted worship. God is the only one in the universe who should be worshipped.

False Religions—Because God Smote Man With Blindness

Paul and Barnabas told them to “turn from these vanities unto the living God.” In centuries past, God allowed all nations to walk in their own ways (v16). He gave them over to delusions and false religions because they had utterly rejected Him. From the beginning, mankind has wandered from God. Even when man has knowledge of God, he wants to go his own way. The problem, therefore, is not ignorance but *willful rebellion*.

“When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened...Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness...unto vile affections...unto a reprobate mind” (See Romans 1:21-32). God said in Isaiah 66:3-4: “...They have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. I also will choose their delusions...” False religions result from pride and a rejection of God. When man brings God down, God brings man down, and He smites men with blindness and gives them over to strange spirits. Paul told the people to turn from these vanities and return to the living God. With all their pleading, they barely restrained the people from offering sacrifices unto them.

From Hero to Zero

14:19-20 *“And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.”* Man is fickle. At first the people in Lystra wanted to worship the apostles but now they are stoning them. We should never live off the praises of people. People's emotions and opinions are as changeable as the weather. Live on God's approbation. He never changes.

The Apostles Retrace Their Steps / Confirm the Believers

14:21-22 “*And when they had preached the gospel to that city [Derbe], and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*” Now the apostles are going to go back to all the cities where they have preached. From Derbe they are returning to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch of Pisidia. As ministers, we have to confirm and reaffirm people all the time. Unless people *continue* on in the faith they will go back.

Through Much Tribulation We Enter the Kingdom

Another secret of success in Paul's churches was the fact that he did not hide from them the truth about persecution. There is a ridiculous Gospel being preached today that says if you walk with God, you can be a millionaire. Paul taught, “Through much tribulation we enter the kingdom of God” (cf. 1 Thes. 3:4; 2 Tim. 3:12). If people want to have an easy life down here, they will not have much reward up there. The early Church knew they would have to pay a high price. Be honest and tell people the cost. Do not tell them that all their problems will disappear and they will live an easy life. If people accept Christ on false premises, when trouble comes they will be disillusioned and fall. Their latter state will be worse than their first. A gospel that preaches a life exempt from trouble is not the true Gospel. It is “another gospel...another spirit...another Jesus” (2 Cor.11:4). The problem with the Church in America is that they talk about walking with God but know very little of what that means. There is a price to pay to be a real Christian. Either we are all out for God or we will end up being all for ourselves.

Elders Ordained in Every Church

14:23 “*And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.*” This verse shows us the need for designated leadership in every church. Every Church needs elders and one senior elder (pastor). There cannot be two heads in a church or there will be conflict and confusion. Even the Jewish synagogues had a “*chief ruler*” who governed God's house, and then other rulers (cf. Acts 18:8, 18:17).

The Return Home—A Fulfilled Mission

14:24-26 “*And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia: And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.*” The apostles continued to retrace their steps, going from Antioch of Pisidia to Perga in Pamphylia, to the seaport at Attalia. From there they sailed home to Antioch, Syria. This is the end of the first missionary journey of Paul and the Scripture says they “fulfilled” the work.

A Long Rest

14:27-28 “*And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode long time with the disciples.*” Upon returning home, Paul and Barnabas gave a marvelous report to the church of all that God accomplished on their trip. Then they rested up “a long time.” It was another year or two before they attempted their next journey.

Chapter Fifteen

THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

The date is 50 or 51 A.D. A year or more has lapsed since the first missionary journey. The Gospel is beginning to spread throughout the Gentile world, but now a serious problem confronts the Church. There were certain Jewish believers in Judaea who felt that the Gentiles had to be circumcised and observe all the Jewish customs in order to be saved. These were hard-line traditionalists who did not want to make a break with the past religion. They believed in Christ, but they also wanted to continue to offer sacrifices in the temple, observe feast days, and keep the rite of circumcision. Not only this—they insisted that the Gentiles also had to perform all of these duties in order to find eternal life. In fact, these “Judaizers” were starting to infiltrate the Gentile churches to impose these rituals upon them. The twelve apostles in Jerusalem did not require any such thing from the Gentiles. They had been clear on this issue since Peter's vision in chapter ten, since God had visited Cornelius' house eleven years earlier (A.D. 40).

When the Judaizers from Judaea traveled north to Antioch and taught such things, Paul and Barnabas had great disputations with them. In order to settle their differences, all parties involved decided to go to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the twelve apostles and the elders. This conference is better known as “The Jerusalem Council.”

Their Contention - “Christ is not Enough—Gentiles Must Also Be Judaized”

15:1 *“And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.”* These men were not authorized by the twelve apostles to go out and teach these things. They taught that the Gentiles could not go to heaven because they were out of covenant—they were not circumcised. In other words they were saying that belief in Christ was not enough, but that they had to be thoroughly *Judaized* before they could go to heaven. In the future these Judaizers would be a constant menace to *all* of Paul's churches. This is what Paul's Epistle to the Galatians is all about.

Determination to Go to Jerusalem to Settle the Difference

15:2 *“When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.”* These were very heated debates. They had “no small dissension and disputation” with them. Now they are heading for Jerusalem to talk to the twelve apostles and elders about the matter. Up to this time, Paul had never met the twelve, except Peter.

15:3-4 *“And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through [Phoenicia] and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.”* This is Paul's third visit to Jerusalem since his conversion. It has now been 17 years since his conversion, and 14 years since he saw Peter (Gal.1:15-19). Now Paul is going to meet the twelve apostles for the first time. Galatians 2:1-10 is a reference to this Council where the apostles gave to Paul “the right hand of fellowship” (Gal. 2:9).

The Purpose for the Council Meeting

15:5-6 *“But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.”* The issue being raised was not supported by all the Jewish Christians, but only by a certain sect of the Pharisees. Therefore, in this meeting the twelve apostles and elders wanted to clearly define for all time which commandments God required (or did not require) of the new Gentile believers. Once a determination was made, they delivered an official statement to the whole Church. This situation is so important. We have to understand what constitutes the Gospel. What does God require and what does He not require? These Judaizers were adding man-made laws to the Gospel and it was bringing people into bondage.

Three main reasonings will stand out in the Council meeting:

- 1.) **15:7-11 Peter** - God gave the Gentiles the Holy Spirit. (They were not even circumcised.)
It is “tempting God” to insinuate that He made a mistake in doing so.
God made no difference between Jews and Gentiles.
He purified the hearts of all of us by faith.
Why then should we put a yoke [of ordinances] upon the neck of these new disciples which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear?
We believe that all of us (Jew and Gentile alike) are saved by grace, not laws.
- 2.) **15:12 - Paul / Barnabas** - God has confirmed our message to the Gentiles time after time by granting tremendous miracles and wonders. (And the Gentiles were not circumcised or keeping the Jewish rituals.)
- 3.) **15:13-21 James** - The Old Testament prophets had proclaimed that God would visit the Gentiles and have a people for His name among them. It is obvious that God is accepting them. This is the work of God. Therefore, let us not trouble them with ordinances. Yet they should absolutely abstain from four things: All moral impurity, idols, the drinking of blood, and eating meat from animals that died of themselves.

Peter Speaks v7-11

15:7 *“And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.”* After both sides had been heard, then Peter stood up to speak. Peter had been the first one to preach to the Gentiles. Thus, he makes reference to the sermon he preached at the house of Cornelius eleven years earlier (Acts 10:1 - 11:18). God had chosen Peter to be the one who initially opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. However, his primary ministry was not to the Gentiles but to the Jews. It was Paul who became the chief apostle to the Gentiles. The Lord selects certain people to accomplish certain things.

15:8-9 *“And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.”* The Gentiles at Cornelius' house were not circumcised or observing the Jewish rituals. Yet God gave them the Spirit because their hearts believed and received His message (10:44-48). The heart which accepts God's message is saved by faith. Faith, therefore, is *a relationship, a condition of heart.*

The Numerous Old Testament Ordinances Were a Grievous Yoke

15:10-11 *“Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.”* The Judaizers were indeed “tempting God.” They were calling God into question and insinuating that He did not know what He was doing when He gave the Holy Spirit to the uncircumcised Gentiles. To people whom God had already accepted in their uncircumcised condition, the Judaizers were trying to impose numerous Levitical ordinances. Peter calls those ordinances “a yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear.” Peter said it is by grace through faith that both Jew and Gentile are saved, not by rituals and circumcision.

Paul and Barnabas Speak v12

15:12 *“Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.”* There must have been many attending this Council. The “multitude kept silent” as Paul and Barnabas testified. They reasoned: “To prove that God is accepting the Gentiles just as they are, look at all of the signs and wonders God is doing among the uncircumcised. Look at the witness of the Holy Spirit as He is moving among these people who have not been Judaized in any way.” Now James, the Lord's brother and head of the Jerusalem church speaks.

James Speaks v13-21

15:13-18 *“And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon [Peter] hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name [a reference to the episode at Cornelius' house.] And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things [a quote from Amos 9:11-12]. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.”*

The bringing in of the Gentiles is very Scriptural. This is the reasoning of James. He sites several passages from Amos (9:11-12) to confirm this. “After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: 17 That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.”

What Does the Tabernacle of David Signify?

King David had set up a small tabernacle on Zion's hill and placed within it the ark of the covenant. Normally the ark should have been put in the holy of holies in the tabernacle of Moses in Gibeon, a small town seven miles northwest of Jerusalem. In actual fact, David's tabernacle speaks of an open veil. *Everyone* who had clean hands and a pure heart could ascend the holy hill of Zion and stand before the ark, the holy of holies (Psa.15:1-5, 24:3-5). Under the age of the Law, only one man, the high priest, could go within the veil, and that was only once a year. But for 45 years during the age of the Law, David had opened the veil for *everyone* who qualified to approach. Therefore, in actual fact, David's Tabernacle represented and foreshadowed the coming Church Age.

Signification of David's Tabernacle

When Solomon's temple was built, the ark was taken from David's tabernacle and placed in the holy of holies of the new temple. Back to normal routine, only the high priest could enter within the veil once a year. The tabernacle of David, in a very real sense, had fallen down. It was dis-banded after Solomon's temple was completed. The tabernacle of David symbolized the coming Church Age. It had no veil. It represented a time when *all men* with clean hands and a pure heart could come into God's presence into the holy of holies. Amos prophesied that the tabernacle of David would be raised up again and all men (which included the Gentiles) would seek the Lord. When Christ died, the veil in the temple was rent signifying that the way into the holy of holies was opened (Heb. 9:8, 10:19-22). James applies the verses in Amos to the new covenant and God's acceptance of the Gentiles. God had cleansed and accepted the Gentiles and now they could approach a holy God in the holy of holies. Many other verses confirm God's acceptance of the Gentiles. Malachi 1:11 is one of many.

Malachi 1:11 “For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts.” Around the world there was going to be a sweet smelling sacrifice of worship and adoration offered up by the Gentiles, an offering made acceptable by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom.15:16).

James was the presiding judge and elder of the church in Jerusalem and of this Council. He now gives his determination and issues this sentence:

James Gives His Opinion

15:19-21 “*Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses [his writings in the Law] of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.*”

James did not want the young Gentile converts to be “troubled” in any way—not perplexed, disquieted, or discouraged with any matters of doubtful disputation. He wanted no unnecessary burdens (i. e. circumcision, customs) placed upon them. He recommended that they observe four necessary things. Of all the Levitical laws enumerated by Moses, James and the Council determined that only four basic laws should be imposed upon the Gentiles. They were to abstain from:

- Fornication – (Lev.18:6-24). Every kind of immorality—adultery, homosexuality, incest.
- Pollutions of Idols – (Lev.17:7). Idolatry of any kind, and things offered to idols.
- Things Strangled – (Lev.17:15). It is not sanitary to eat meat of animals that die of themselves.
- Drinking Blood – (Lev.17:11-14). Life is in the blood. Blood drinkers have a ferocious nature.

The Matter is Settled – A Letter of Conciliation is Sent to Gentile Churches v22-29

15:22-23 “*Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chiefmen among the brethren: And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:”*

Contents of the Conciliatory Letter

15:23-29 “...*The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain [ones] which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.*”

“These Men Do Not Represent Us”

This letter was sent to all the Gentile churches where the Judaizers had propagated their “cause.” The apostles made it very clear that the Judaizers who had gone out from Jerusalem had not been authorized in any way to teach circumcision and ritualism in any of the Gentile churches. James is making apology for these self-proclaimed teachers who had “troubled them with words” and “subverted their souls.” The Judaizers represent people in the Church today who refuse to make a break from their past life and who want to voice their unredeemed opinions and pet doctrines to others. The letter brought great rejoicing and *encouragement* to all the churches that received it (v31).

The Privilege of Suffering for Christ

Paul and Barnabas were “*men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (v26). Often you are putting your life in jeopardy on the mission field, yet it is a great privilege to do so for Christ. There are wild beasts, poisonous insects, foul water, different food, overbearing heat, and many other perils. Besides the sacrifice of time, your travel expense to go to the field is usually quite high. All of these, and more, are part of your gift to the people.

Cooperation with the Holy Spirit

“*For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things*” (v28). The Holy Spirit can decide something, but nothing is accomplished until we cooperate with Him. We must not argue with the Spirit of God. He directs and we should go along with Him. The two must go together—it seemed good to the Holy Ghost...*and to us*. After the brethren had ascertained the mind of the Lord during the Council, then they had a consensus.

The Brethren Return to Antioch / Accompanied by Silas

15:30-34 “*So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation. And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren [to return] unto the apostles. Notwithstanding, it pleased Silas to abide there still.*” After the Council, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch. Accompanying them were Silas and Judas (v22) who were prominent men from Jerusalem, but God was detaining Silas there.

Peter's Brief Visit to Antioch

After Paul and company had returned to Antioch, Peter himself came up to visit the church shortly thereafter (cf. Gal. 2:11-14). He was enjoying the fellowship with the Gentiles there in Antioch and was eating with them. Suddenly he learned that other brethren from Jerusalem were coming and he withdrew himself from the Gentiles. He was afraid certain ones would be upset with him for eating with the Gentiles, but his behavior affected the other Jewish brethren who were with him. Even Barnabas was “carried away with their dissimulation [hypocrisy]” (Gal. 2:13-14). Paul rebuked Peter in front of them all for living two lives. Peter's actions were causing him to make a denial of all he had said at the Jerusalem Council. Also, Paul's relationship with Barnabas was continuing to deteriorate. Barnabas felt the sting of Paul's rebuke as he admonished Peter in front of them all.

The Rift Between Paul and Barnabas

15:35-41 *“Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.”*

The Greatest Problem on the Mission Field, in Life—Human Relationships

The greatest problem on the mission field is not the heat, living conditions, the natives, or evil spirits. No! The greatest problem is the missionary himself. His greatest problem is getting along with others. In fact, that is the greatest problem anywhere! What was about to happen between Paul and Barnabas is actually a tragedy. It is tragic when those who preach the message of reconciliation cannot get along with one another.

Surveys show that most people who go to the mission field return home after their first term there. When research was made to understand why there were so many dropouts, the findings revealed that they could not get along with fellow workers. When further investigation was made, it was discovered that the person with whom they could not get along reminded them of someone in their family. The message is clear—unless we learn to overcome at home we will not be able to cope with others in life. If a girl has always fought with her brother or father, she will do the same with the man she marries. The same rule applies to everyone. Being born again and filled with the Spirit does not mean that the roots of these problems are all eradicated. The removal of these conflicts requires a deep working of God in our lives—*an inner crucifixion of self-will*, and it takes time and wisdom.

In 15:36, Paul wanted to go and revisit all the churches he and Barnabas had founded. This was a desire, no doubt, of the Holy Spirit. They were about to start their second missionary journey together. Then an old sore spot came up. Barnabas was “*determined*” to take John Mark, who had deserted them on the first trip. Barnabas had made up his mind—“We are taking Mark.”

Barnabas Offended

Barnabas was not going to give up on this issue. He wanted his cousin John Mark to accompany them again. Paul was reluctant to take Mark along because he had left them in the middle of the last trip. Paul was a very dominant personality too and was not going to give in either. The contention became so sharp between them (Prov.13:10) that Barnabas took up an offense against Paul and left him. He took Mark and sailed home to Cyprus. This was almost like a divorce. God had joined these two men to work together. Now one has left the other and chosen another course in life. It is a dangerous thing to depart from a place in anger or “offended,” especially when God has placed you there. You never really get over it. I cannot overemphasize this! Isaiah 52:12 tells us when to leave. Both men should have fallen on their faces and pleaded with God to spare their relationship.

Paul was probably not easy to get along with, but Barnabas was offended. He had failed to receive the grace of God. When he left, he must have felt sadness for the rest of his life because he was leaving the course God had chosen for him. From this point on, Barnabas totally fades out of the narrative, but Paul continued in the center of what God was doing. He remained in the center of the fire. Barnabas should have been on the next missionary journey. He should have been the co-founder of the churches at Philippi, Berea, Thessalonica, and Corinth. His name should have been mentioned numerous other times in the Word of God. Instead, he vanishes almost into oblivion. From this point on it is “Paul and Silas” instead of Paul and Barnabas. Barnabas was forfeiting his crown (Rev. 3:11). He was called, chosen, but not entirely faithful. Let's summarize his life.

Summary of the Life of Barnabas:

- 4:36 - The first mention of Barnabas, a Levite from Cyprus. He was an encourager, a consoler.
- 9:27 - He introduced the recently converted Paul to the wary disciples in Jerusalem.
- 11:22,23 - He was sent by the brethren from Jerusalem to strengthen the church in Antioch.
- 11:24 -He is described as “a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and faith.”
- 11:25 - Barnabas brought Paul to Antioch from Tarsus and helped him get started in the ministry.
- 11:30 -From Antioch, he and Paul delivered aid to the Jerusalem church, and returned (12:25).
- 12:25 - Barnabas brought Mark from Jerusalem back to Antioch (12:12). Mark lived in Jerusalem.
- 13:2 - He was put on the same course with Paul (by the Holy Spirit) for apostolic work.
- 13:4-14:28 They worked together as a team on their first missionary journey, founding churches at Antioch of Pisidia, Lycaonia, Derbe, and Lystra, and elsewhere.
- 15:2-35 - He defended the Gospel against legalism with Paul at the Jerusalem Council.
- 15:36-39 - He broke away from Paul over the matter of John Mark. Barnabas returned to Cyprus with Mark, and disappears entirely from the narrative.

Barnabas was not as stable as we might think. In the episode with John Mark, he should have been flexible, but was unbending. Yet in the matter at Antioch when he should have been unbending, he was weak and compromising. When Peter withdrew from the Gentiles, he was “carried away with their dissimulation” (Gal. 2:11-14). In this case Barnabas should have been firm, but when he should have been flexible about Mark, he was obstinate. That is usually the way it works. Barnabas lost a lot when he took offense over John Mark and left. Offenses often are because of the way *another person* was treated. Because of Mark, Barnabas would no longer be a major figure in Scripture after this, but it is important to note that John Mark would later have a comeback. Let us not take up offenses for a third party. God will give you grace for *your own* offenses, but not someone else's. Do not fail to receive the grace of God as did Barnabas.

Closing Comments on Barnabas

15:39-40 “... So Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.” Paul did not depart from Barnabas, it was Barnabas who departed from Paul. Paul did not leave the course God had set him on, but Barnabas did. He left the path and chose another course. The Book of Acts is a focus on the *center* of what God was doing, and Barnabas left the center of the fire to work on the sidelines.

There is almost a sense of envy in Barnabas—“I am just as great an apostle as you are, and I will prove it.” Barnabas did not stop to consult the godly brethren at Antioch. He left Antioch in a huff and took John Mark along with him to Cyprus. The Lord had purposely detained Silas in Antioch, and when Paul selected Silas as the replacement of Barnabas, he had the recommendation and blessing of the brethren. In a very real sense, Silas claimed the crown of Barnabas. Barnabas failed because of offenses he would not surmount, and God had to replace him. Read Revelation 3:11. From henceforth, it is “Paul and Silas” instead of “Paul and Barnabas.” It is such an honor to have your name recorded in Scripture. Barnabas surrendered this privilege because of offenses. This should be an awesome warning to us not to fail to receive the grace of God when offenses come (Heb.12:15). Never leave a place in anger. Always be sure God is sending you out before you go.

Barnabas went back home to Cyprus, but there must have been sadness in his heart. He had left his course and charted out another one on his own. It is so important what our motive is when we start a work for God. Is it started out of the motive of envy? Are we trying to prove something—are we trying to prove that we are just as good as someone else, or that we can do it better than others? Let us make sure that we are on God's course, not our own, or our fruit will not be good. In Genesis 30:1-5, Rachel produced Dan because of envy, but the fruit was terrible. The *motive* for the birth of anything is most important!

Summary of John Mark:

- He is mentioned by name ten times in Scripture. (Either as Mark, John Mark, John, or Marcus.)
- Mark was the “cousin” of Barnabas (Col. 4:10). (The Greek word *anepsios* is “cousin”).
- He is first mentioned in Acts 12:12. He came from a devout home in Jerusalem.
- Peter came to Mark's mother's house after being freed supernaturally from prison (12:12).
- He accompanied Barnabas and Paul from Jerusalem to Antioch in 45 A.D. (12:25).
- Mark became the “attendant” of Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey (13:5).
- John Mark left them soon after the journey started (13:13). 48 A.D.
- He did not return to Antioch to face the people there. He returned to *Jerusalem*, to his mother.
- His leaving Barnabas and Paul was serious. His commitment was shallow at this time.
The brethren had to be cumbered and distracted from spiritual ministry to do his duties.
Mark should have had eternal fruit on this trip. Instead, he deserted the apostles.
His name should have been written in the Word of God over and over, but he lost that privilege.
- Later, Barnabas left Paul over the issue of Mark, and took Mark to Cyprus (15:39).
- John Mark was replaced by Timothy, who always remained faithful to Paul (Acts 16:2).
- Mark recovered. We hear of him 14 years later. Paul calls him a “fellowlaborer” (Philemon 1:24).
- Paul says, “He is profitable for me in the ministry.” (2 Tim. 4:11).
- Mark became a disciple and interpreter of Peter (1 Pet. 5:13). Peter calls him “Marcus my son.”
- Mark collected Peter's sermons and created the Gospel of Mark (65 A.D.). His end was good.

Chapters Sixteen/Seventeen/Eighteen

PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

15:40 - 18:22



- 15:40 - The journey started after Silas joined Paul, two verses before Chapter 16. (51 A.D.).
- 15:41 - From Antioch, they visited churches in Syria and Cilicia en route to Derbe and Lystra.
- 16:1 - At Derbe / Lystra, young Timothy joined them. He was only around 18 years old.
- 16:6 - Throughout Phrygia and *Galatia*, new churches were started. Paul revisited them in 18:23. God forbade them to preach in Asia Minor at this time.
- 16:7 - At Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit again did not allow them.
- 16:8-10 - Bypassing Mysia, they came to Troas. Paul was directed in a vision to go to Macedonia. At Troas Luke joined them. Henceforth he included himself in the narrative (“we” “us”).
- 16:11 - Departing from Troas, they headed for Samothracia (Island), the next day to Neapolis.
- At Macedonia, they started churches at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea.*
- 16:12-40 - At Philippi.
- 17:1 - From Philippi to Amphipolis and Apollonia. Then to Thessalonica.
- 17:1-9 - At Thessalonica they stayed three sabbath days, then went on to Berea.
- 17:10-13 - At Berea. Then he headed south for Athens.
- At Achaia, Paul preaches at Athens, then founded the Church at Corinth.*
- 17:15-34 - At Athens, he preached on Mars Hill but had little fruit. Then he went on to Corinth.
- 18:1-17 - At Corinth, Paul stayed 18 months. While here, he wrote I-II Thessalonians.
- 18:18-21 - Then he began to head home (to Antioch, Syria), but briefly visited Ephesus en route.
- 18:21-22 - From Ephesus he went to Caesarea, (probably on to Jerusalem), then home to Antioch.

Confirming the Churches in Syria / Cilicia

Acts 15:36-39 records the separation of Barnabas from Paul. In verse 40, Paul chose Silas and together they started out on the second missionary journey. They went through Syria and Cilicia “confirming the churches.” It is so important to stay in contact with new converts. They need to be confirmed—encouraged, reassured, exhorted, and directed. Paul and Silas are moving north through Syria, and then west through Cilicia. Tarsus was the main city of Cilicia. Although the Scriptures do not specifically say so, the brethren probably passed through Tarsus. Now they are coming to Derbe and Lystra where Paul had established churches on his first journey. Here, Timothy will join them. The year is 51 A.D. and this journey will last until June of 54 A.D.

At Derbe / Lystra - Timothy Joins Them

16:1-2 *“Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.”*

This is the first mention of Timothy in Scripture. Acts 20:4 implies he was from Derbe. If you really want to know what a person is like, ask those who know them best. Timothy was “well reported of by the brethren.” He had a very good reputation at a young age. It is estimated that Timothy was only about 18 years old. He had probably been touched by revival fire two or three years before when Paul and Barnabas first visited the Lystra / Derbe area. At only 15 or 16, Timothy was yielding his heart completely to Christ. The life of Timothy should encourage and challenge our young people.

In spite of health problems—infirmities, stomach disorders, and anxiety spells, Timothy was always loyal to Paul (1 Tim. 5:23, 2 Tim.1:7, 1 Cor.16:10, Phil. 2:19-22). Anxieties are often associated with traumas from ones' childhood. In actual fact, Timothy was taking the place of John Mark, who had not been faithful to “endure hardness as a good soldier.” Timothy was a man Paul could trust. Paul said of Timothy: “I have no man likeminded who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own [interests], not the things which are Jesus Christ's” (Phil. 2:20-21). His name (Timothy, Timotheus) is found twenty-four times in Scripture. Timothy became like a son to Paul. Most of Paul's last words are recorded in two personal letters to Timothy (67-68 A.D.). Timothy was 35 years old then, and Paul told him not to let any man despise his youth. I suppose 35 is *young*.

Timothy is Circumcised

16:3 *“Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek.”* Why did Paul think it was good to have Timothy circumcised? He fully understood that it was not necessary for salvation! He knew that “circumcision or uncircumcision” had no effect whatsoever on one's spiritual life (Gal. 5:6, 6:15). He did it only to accommodate the Jews in that area who knew that Timothy's father was a Greek (though his mother was Jewish). He did it for wider acceptance among the Jews (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19-23). For the sake of the Jews who had not yet come to the light, Paul did not want to offend them needlessly. Paul never went around teaching the Jews not to circumcise. In the case of Titus, another spiritual son who was a Gentile, Paul did not have him circumcised (Gal. 2:3).

Written Down Guidelines

Acts 16:4-5 *“And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.”* Paul had a copy of the letter of James which contained the determinations that were made recently at the Council of Jerusalem (15:23-29). They were giving the churches certain guidelines and doctrines. It is good to give our converts good doctrines in writing. However, it is so important that we do not add any *unnecessary* commandments and stipulations. If the rulebook of the founder is wrong, it will bring the people into bondage and limit the work of the Holy Spirit.

William Booth was the founder of the Salvation Army. That organization drafted a handbook so that they could set up a standardized outpost anywhere in the world. Their book of rules denies the baptism in the Holy Spirit and communion, and it is still the same today as it was in the time of Booth. Decrees like these limit what God can do in a denomination or organization for they are going to form and govern them. Our statutes must be right or we will hold people short of God's mark. Paul gave them good guidelines, and *“so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.”*

Starting of New Churches in Phrygia and Galatia

After visiting and confirming the established churches, they began to look for new areas. From Lystra/Iconium, the brethren headed north and west into Phrygia and Galatia (16:6). Although the narrative does not give any specifics, they started new churches here, notably the Galatian churches. Three years later, Paul revisited Galatia and Phrygia as he started his third journey, *“strengthening all the disciples”* (18:23). Undoubtedly he revisited Antioch in Pisidia. As they moved west and north into the province of Asia, the Holy Spirit forbade them to minister in Asia at this time. They endeavored to go further north into Bithynia, but again the Holy Spirit would not allow them. Continuing straight through Mysia, they came to the coast at Troas. Then God spoke.

Guidance While in Motion

16:6-10 “Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.”

After visiting the established churches, Paul and Silas did not sit still and wait for the Lord to tell them exactly where to go next. They had a conviction to move in a northwestern direction, and they trusted God to confirm or deny that direction. This is what we call *“guidance in motion.”* Sometimes people sit and wait for the Lord to tell them exactly what to do, but they might end up sitting in their rocking chairs until they die. According to the law of physics it is easier to guide an object that is in motion than one that is sitting still. The disciples kept moving on, trusting God to direct them as they were moving, and surely He did.

After visiting Galatia and Phrygia, the apostles traveled west into Asia Minor. God had not given them specific direction, but they continued to move west by a conviction in their hearts. When the Holy Spirit clearly told them not to preach in Asia Minor, they persisted traveling west and north into Mysia. At Mysia they endeavored to go north into Bithynia, but the Holy Spirit would not allow them. Therefore, they went straight through Mysia to the coast and came to Troas. Then the Lord gave them specific directions—proceed west into Macedonia. Here we see two negatives, then a positive. God said *no* as they headed into Asia Minor, and then he said *no* when they tried to go to Bithynia. As they continued west, God said *yes*. “Continue to go west to Macedonia.”

Luke Joins the Team

16:9-10 “*And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.*” At Troas, Paul had a vision of a man in Macedonia pleading with him to come over to Macedonia to help them. Luke has now joined the team at Troas. From henceforth he will include himself inconspicuously in the narrative. “Immediately *we* endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had call *us* to preach the gospel unto them.” The “we” and “us” portions of Acts include: 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; and 27:1–28:16. The Spirit had guided the apostles to Troas to find Luke. However, we must emphasize that they were guided there while they were moving without *specific* instructions. So far on this journey, Paul and Silas have picked up Timothy in Derbe, and Luke in Troas. Now these four will proceed together to Macedonia.

En Route to Macedonia - Into Philippi

16:11-12 “*Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.*” Following your map on page 103, the brethren departed from Troas to the Island of Samothracia. The next day they came to Neapolis, and then to Philippi.

Philippi was a major city in that part of Macedonia. (Macedonia is essentially the area of northern Greece, and Achaia is southern Greece.) Philippi was a Roman “colony” which meant that the people were exempted from certain taxes, and had the rights of Roman citizens. Paul himself was a Roman citizen which insured him special protection by the Roman government. Paul and his team remained in Philippi “many days” (cf. 16:18), and during this time the church of Philippi was formed.

Lydia—First Recorded Convert of Europe

16:13-14 “*And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken [by] Paul.*” This is a beautiful truth here. Our hearts do not open to God by themselves. God has to draw us to Himself and open our hearts unto Him. As God draws us and we listen to God as Lydia, God opens our hearts even more to Him. On the other hand, when people repeatedly harden and close their hearts to God, eventually He will harden their hearts as He did Pharaoh's.

Sometimes hearts are closed to the Gospel. We waste our time arguing with such people. To some it is given to know the truth, and to others it is not given. When God opens a heart there is fruitful ground to sow the seed of the Word. How can we sow the seed if the heart has not been opened? Teach your younger pastors not to waste time on those who have not been touched by God in their hearts. We should understand that we are not going to win everyone. Be led by the Spirit when you witness and try to be sensitive to know which hearts have been opened by God.

The Beginning of the Church in Philippi

16:15 *“And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.”* Luke is one of them. The narrator now includes himself. The church began with one household.

When you are on the mission field, often you have to stay in motels and sometimes people open their homes to you. It is not easy to accept hospitality and it is especially difficult for the wife to go into a house where she is not in charge. Be understanding on this matter.

The Damsel With the Spirit of Divination

16:16-18 *“And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.”*

The spirit of divination in this girl knew Paul. This spirit can tell where a lost child can be found or even foretell the future. People have a tremendous interest in supernatural or psychic things. The men who used her made a lot of profit from her services. When she saw Paul, she started following him around, saying: “These men are servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation.” How would you like to have publicity like that?—Having a demon announcing your presence and saying that you can show the way to salvation? What was really happening here?

Evil Spirits Want to be Saved

The evil spirit in the girl was telling the other evil spirits that Paul could “show unto us” the way of salvation. This means evil spirits wanted to be saved. Many demons and evil spirits love to hear the Gospel. There was a girl in Germany who had demons coming to her every night wanting to know how to get saved. The pastors instructed her to tell the demons that there is no salvation for them. “Christ did not become an angel. He became a man and died only for man, not for angels or spirits” (cf. Heb. 2:16). After she told them that, they did not come back anymore.

This evil spirit plagued Paul. She followed him for “many days.” You would think that an evil spirit would have stayed as far away from Paul as possible. Paul permitted it a long time until he was vexed. This illustrates the patience he had. Finally he turned upon the girl with deliberation and said; “I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” Paul was very slow to use the power of God. The result of this demonstration of power angered her masters, and ended with Paul and Silas being beaten and put into prison. Miracles do not always cause people to love you.

When a nation is ripe for judgment, God breaks down the walls and hordes of evil spirits come rushing in. When God determined to judge Germany during the time of Hitler, swarms of demons filled the country. Many spirits are coming into America, and spiritism is on the rise. It is getting into the churches too. Certain kinds of music open the gates of hell and invite many evil spirits to come into the services. Therefore, pastors must ask God for discernment. They must know who people are. One church was being controlled by *the spirit of divination*, and the one whom the pastor went to for comfort and thought was his most spiritual member, was the trouble-maker.

Miracles Brought Persecution

16:19-24 *“And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.”*

Meekness / Sacrifice of Praise – Release Power

16:25-26 *“And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. 26 And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one’s bands were loosed.”* The second missionary journey was proving to be every bit as strenuous as the first one. Would John Mark have been ready for such pressure if he had come?

How did Paul and Silas respond to these injustices? They had been humiliated, beaten without a fair trial, and placed in the deepest prison. The whole city was against them. “Many stripes were laid upon them” and their reputation had been ruined. For the good they had done, they were rewarded evil. Yet we cannot detect any anger, bitterness, or self-pity. Neither of these men were quitters. Instead they were full of the Holy Ghost and joy. At midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises to God. This response defied the fallen nature *and Satan* and released the power of God. In their release, God also released all of the other prisoners. Their blessing spilled over to everyone else.

Power is not released until someone suffers. This is the reason there is so little power in the Church today. When Christ suffered—*“the just for the unjust,”* God’s power was released (1 Pet. 3:18). If we want to bring deliverance and life to our generation, we must be willing to suffer injustices.

Many Christians refuse to accept injustices of any kind. If a spouse has been unfaithful, many will not bear the injustice of it but seek to retaliate by divorce. While the one is liable for adultery, the other is liable for a hardened heart of unforgiveness, bitterness, and hatred. Meekness is “a holy acceptance of our circumstances.” It means we bear the injustice, by grace. Then, as we offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving, God moves by His mighty power. This is the way Job defeated Satan in his trial. When he lost everything, he fell down in worship instead of rising up in anger. Job accepted his “unfair” circumstances and offered the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Paul and Silas kept their own spirit free and then released all of the other prisoners when they offered the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving in the middle of their unjust circumstances. This is not a nice theory. It really works! If you want to save your marriage, you will have to offer the sacrifice of meekness.

Conversion of the Prison Keeper

16:27-34 *“And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.”*

The prison guards needed Christ as much as the prisoners. The inmates stood in awe as the place was shaken and the doors were jolted open. Even the shackles that bound them fell off, yet no one moved. They were held spellbound by God's power. The prisoners knew that Paul and Silas had heaven's favor and would not stir unless Paul and Silas did. The prison keeper, fearing that the prisoners had escaped, was about to take his life, but Paul cried out with a loud voice, “Do thyself no harm.”

Do Thyself No Harm

“Do thyself no harm.” The real harm in life comes from what people *do to themselves*. Men and women do wrong to themselves and ruin themselves by their sins and by wrong responses to life's difficulties. If we do not hurt ourselves, then no one else can really hurt us either. If we live right, everything plotted against us will ultimately turn to our benefit. Brother, sister, “do thyself no harm.” When we harden our hearts we are destroying ourselves and we are committing spiritual suicide. No one else is doing it to us (though we may claim they are), but in actual fact we are doing it to ourselves. The ten trials Israel faced in the wilderness did not harm them! Their *response* to the trials is what harmed them. Those trials were ordained of God to bless them and prepare them for Canaan.

What Must I Do to be Saved?

Paul assured the prison keeper that “all are here.” The warden, having been smitten with divine conviction, came trembling and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Paul was the theologian of the New Testament, yet he merely answered: “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” Paul was a real salesman. He did not want just the warden to be saved but all of his contacts as well. *33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. 34 And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.”*

Paul and Silas went to the house of the warden and the whole family became Christians. There was a baptismal service at 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning. The early Church baptized new believers immediately upon conversion. Remember, Philip baptized the Ethiopian immediately (Acts 8:36-39).

Lydia and her house have been saved and baptized. All the inmates of a whole prison have been smitten with divine power and awe, and now the warden and his family have been saved and baptized. We can be sure that the warden became a chaplain to these men. Thus, we see the power of God visiting the city of Philippi, and we see the start of the church at Philippi. Yet Paul was not finished, for he had reserved some choice words for the magistrates of the city.

Paul Protects the Reputation of the Gospel

16:35-39 *“And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go. And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace. But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out. And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans. And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city.”*

Look at the character of Paul. He did not want the Gospel to be put in disrepute. Paul wanted the magistrates to come and openly confess that they were wrong and that he had done nothing for which to be imprisoned. Actually, Paul had the authority to demand this. Paul was a Roman citizen whom they had beaten and imprisoned without a trial. Of course, the magistrates were unaware that Paul was a Roman citizen. Otherwise, they would never have dared to touch him.

A Roman citizen had special rights, including a fair trial. Anyone who beat or punished him without a trial could be in jeopardy of death. Roman citizens could also appeal to the Emperor within certain limits. The magistrates were very afraid of Paul now and were very apologetic. He was requesting a public apology, and he could have pressed charges. Paul used his Roman citizenship on a number of occasions for protection, even as we might have to use our passports. In Romans 13:1-7, Paul taught the Church to respect government and said that all authorities are “ordained of God.” He calls those who enforce the law the “ministers of God.” Actually, the heathenistic Roman government often protected him from the vicious Bible-quoting Jews.

Privileges of a Roman Citizen:

- It made you equal with the inhabitants of Rome.
- It exempted you from shameful punishments such as scourging or crucifixion (16:37-38, 22:25).
- It entitled you to a fair hearing. People could be put to death for punishing you without a fair trial. (25:16). Thus, we see the fear of those who disobeyed unwittingly (22:29, 16:37-39).
- It gave a person the right to appeal to Caesar within limits (25:11).

Paul knew his rights as a Roman citizen and he used them.

How Did People Obtain Roman Citizenship?

- Emperors granted citizenship to whole provinces or cities (i. e. Philippi, Antioch of Pisidia).
- It could be granted to individuals for services rendered to the state or to the imperial family.
- It could be purchased for a large sum of money (cf. 22:28) as did the chief captain (or tribune).
- A person received it by birth, being freeborn (i. e. born of a father who was a citizen).

Paul's father was probably a Roman citizen and Paul automatically assumed the same rights.

16:40 *“And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.”* After leaving the prison, Paul and his company visited the newly founded church. They came to Lydia's house where other believers were gathered together. The apostles exhorted and comforted them and then departed for Thessalonica, passing first through Amphipolis and Apollonia.

CLOSEUP OF MACEDONIA / ACHAIA



Corinth was the capital of Achaia (Southern Greece). It was one of the main seaports of its day. Geographically, Corinth was strategically located on a narrow strip of land that connected the north and south of Greece. All traffic between the two had to come through Corinth. Furthermore, all of the sea traffic from Rome to Asia would channel through the straits to Corinth. It was not only a straighter course, but a safer one. The sea along the southern coast (Pelopeneus) was treacherous.

Once the ships arrived at Corinth they were unladed, then the cargo was hauled to other ships on the other side of the strip. The prominent position that Corinth had commercially not only brought wealth and opportunists, it also produced a licentious life-style that even appalled the pagan world. Corinth was a populous city with much history, yet with all the data that could be collected concerning this place, nothing could be more exciting than the account given in the book of Acts and the Corinthian epistles. The Lord said, "I have much people in this city" (Acts 18:10).

Chapter Seventeen

THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY CONTINUES

Starting of the Thessalonian Church

17:1-3 *“Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures. Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.”*

Paul's “manner” was to first go to the synagogue and reason with them from the Scriptures. He has now learned the art of “reasoning” rather than “disputing.” Paul is proving from the Scriptures that the Messiah had to suffer and die and then rise from the dead. The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ is the Gospel in a capsule. But surely his preaching entailed much more than the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. We have to look at his two epistles to the Thessalonians to consider all that he actually preached there. Paul was only in Thessalonica three sabbath days. He was there less than a month. Yet he started a church in that short space of time, and he had “*a great multitude*” of believers. Then the jealous Jews attacked him.

17:4 *“And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.”* The response to Paul's preaching was great. Many devout Greeks and a number of prominent women joined Paul and adhered to his message. But the Bible-quoting Jews who should have been the first to receive the revival were vexed with jealousy instead. As we have said before, the ones closest to the truth were the greatest opponents of the new move of God. It always happens this way and history bears this out repeatedly.

Jealousy Attacks Paul

17:5-7 *“But the Jews which believed not, [filled with jealousy], took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.”*

Jealousy is more cruel than the grave (Song 8:6) and will murder any rival if necessary. The Jews were supposed to be the spiritual leaders of the world, but when the Jews saw the Gentiles responding to the Holy Spirit they were furious. They did not want to share spiritual rulership with anyone. Thus, they hated Paul and his message and stirred up the whole city against him.

Jason was one of the Thessalonians who embraced Paul's Gospel. When there was a hint of trouble against Paul and the brethren he sheltered them. When the mob rushed into the home of Jason and did not find Paul and Silas, they dragged Jason and several other brethren to the city officials. They complained: “These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; whom Jason has welcomed into his house.” Their complaints were political in nature.

Political Complaints

17:7-9 “... And these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. And when they had taken [bail] of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.” The complaints of the Jews were political in nature. They accused Paul and Silas of causing unrest and starting riots all over the world. (An accuser is guilty of the very thing of which he accuses others.) Furthermore, they said that Paul was promoting another King, one Jesus, who would take the place of King Caesar. Of course, the Jews did not care one bit about Caesar or any of his decrees.

After Jason and another brother posted bond, the officials let them go. Jason and his friends are to be commended here. For their willingness to protect Paul and Silas, they became targets of the wrath of the Adversary. Probably Jason suffered property damage when the mob attacked his home, and he probably paid a very high fine to the city. Now Paul and company will depart immediately under the cover of night, and go to Berea (17:10).

Paul Stays in Contact With His New Converts

Paul had started a large church in Thessalonica in less than one month, but he had to leave immediately. From here, he went to Berea, then Athens, and then on to Corinth. While in Athens, he had a tremendous burden for the new Thessalonian believers. Therefore, he sent his son Timothy back to Thessalonica to know their state:

I Thessalonians 3:1-7 - “Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith: That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know. [Paul did not preach a prosperity gospel.] For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain. But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you: Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith.”

Paul quickly checked on these converts, sending Timothy unto them because he did not want them to be tempted by Satan and give up. After sending Timothy from Athens, Paul went on to Corinth. While in Corinth, Timothy returned from Thessalonica with a good report. Then Paul wrote his two epistles to the Thessalonians from Corinth. First Thessalonians was his first inspired letter.

At Berea

17:10-12 “And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.

Open-mindedness of the Bereans

“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.” This is such a beautiful verse and also a beautiful quality to possess.

The people in Berea received the Word with openness of mind. They searched the Scriptures daily to see whether those truths preached by Paul were true or not true. We should teach our converts to seek the Lord and to get into the Word of God on their own. Our spiritual children should not be overly dependent upon us for all their answers. Isaiah 54:13 promises: “All thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children.” This is something to covenant with God for—that God Himself would teach our children. Actually, they are God's children, not ours. Paul was not afraid to have the Bereans searching the Scriptures. This is what makes them strong, although we must help them at first.

Jealousy Causes More Trouble for Paul

17:13-14 *“But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people. And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.”* Here we see the problem of jealousy again and the power of the tongue to stir up trouble. The jealous Jews heard that Paul was preaching in Berea. Therefore, they came from Thessalonica and “evil affected” the minds of the people against Paul (cf. 14:12). Jealousy is God's curse to the backslider. This spirit vexes those who know the truth but will not walk in it. It is a judgment (Rom. 10:19-21). Soon after this Paul wrote to the Thessalonians and said the Jews “please not God, and are contrary to all men” (see 1 Thes. 2:14-15).

Immediately the brethren sent Paul to the sea where he sailed to Athens. Meanwhile, Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea to help establish the new believers. Paul was the main target of Satan. He had to escape, but Silas and Timothy were able to stay in Berea. Here is one advantage of having companions when you travel. Sometimes your companion is better accepted and it is more preferable for him to preach than yourself. Have the grace to sit down and let another preach.

On to Athens

17:15-16 *“And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed. Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was [provoked within] him when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.”* While Silas and Timothy were still in Berea, Paul was escorted by the brethren unto Athens. Paul then sent word to Silas and Timothy to come to Athens immediately. His message, no doubt, was carried by the same men who had accompanied Paul to Athens. Acts does not record Silas and Timothy's coming to Athens, but First Thessalonians strongly implies that they did come and that Timothy was dispatched from Athens to check on the new converts in Thessalonica (1 Thes. 3:1-6). Timothy then returned to give a report to Paul who had gone on to Corinth (Acts 18:5). It was from Corinth at this time that Paul wrote his first epistle to the Thessalonians.

Little Results in Athens

Athens was an intellectual center of the world at that time, yet Paul was to have very little fruit here. Paul taught us that “the world by wisdom knew not God” (1 Cor.1:21). Greek philosophy is very devilish. Virtually all of the notable Greek philosophers were homosexuals. Demons attack your mind when you read Greek literature. Many of the Greek gods are dressed like women.

Paul First Goes to the Synagogue

17:17 *“Therefore [reasoned] he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.”* Paul, as his custom was, first entered into a Jewish synagogue and presented Christ to them. The narrative does not record whether Paul had any favorable acceptance from the Jews in the synagogue. The city as a whole does not appear to give any significant response to the Lord. In most cities Luke records that “many turned to the Lord” or that “a multitude of Greeks” believed and consorted with Paul. It was not so in Athens. Athens was the city where the human mind was exalted, but the human mind is at enmity with God (Rom. 8:7). Natural man and his mind will not receive the things of the Spirit for they are foolishness unto him.

The Epicureans and Stoics Encounter Paul

17:18 *“Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoics, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.”*

Neither the Epicureans nor Stoics believed in a personal God, life after death, accountability to a holy God, or eternal judgment. Thus, Paul's teaching of the resurrection and the day of judgment was strange and unpalatable to them. Many of the Greek philosophers were homosexuals with perverted views of life and morality. Therefore, we should never delve into Greek philosophy. Why should we fill our minds with the distorted thoughts of demons?

Philosophers Invite Paul to Speak on Mars Hill

17:19-21 *“And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus [Mars Hill], saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)”*

Paul accepted the invitation to speak on Mars Hill, but he had little response. Intellectualism is surely a dead end. Either God gives a person the spirit of repentance, or He does not. If God does not strike through the mental blindness of an intellectual, all of our reasonings and explanations will be to no avail. Repentance is a gift of God. It is an anointing that softens a hardened heart and changes the clouded mind. Unless this anointing touches a person, and unless His divine light shines into a darkened soul we could labor in vain for months. The Athenians had an appetite to hear some new idea or theory, but very few wanted to hear the true message—the message of *true wisdom*.

Paul's Sermon on Mars Hill in Athens - v22-31

As Paul addressed his audience on the summit of Mars Hill, many objects of art, temples, statues, and altars stood round about on every side. These were devoted to the worship of other gods, and all of them were the works of men's hands. The city itself was crowded with idols. In his approach to win them to Christ, Paul used great prudence. He was careful not to insult any of their gods or objects of worship.

Paul was not introducing a new deity. Instead he was making known the one God whom they themselves were *ignorantly* endeavoring to worship. Paul was seeking to gently draw his hearers away from polytheism (the worship of other gods) by pointing them to the one true God who made the heavens and the earth. They understood that the other gods were formed with their own hands.

Paul Commends Them For Being Religiously Disposed

17:22 “*Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are [very religious].*” Paul is saying: “I see that in every way you are very religious” or “I bear witness to your carefulness in religion.” *Superstitious* could be more accurately rendered “*religious*.” Paul tells them that they are more religiously disposed than others.

Paul Finds a Good Starting Point

17:23 “*For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions [or objects of worship], I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.*” Paul had commended his hearers for being wholehearted in their search for God. Now he uses an inscription he saw on one of their altars as a starting point to begin his message. The manner in which we introduce our subject matter is very important. He quoted something that was inscribed on one of their own altars. It said—“To the Unknown God.” This inscription revealed both their *desire* to worship but also their *ignorance* in worshipping. It is also an acknowledgment that there is a God. Paul said: “I would like to define more clearly this God after whom you are groping.”

God Made Everything—What Can We Add to Him?

17:24-25 “*God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped [or served] with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.*” Paul is making his point gently. God made the universe. How can He be contained in temples, or confined to statues made with men's hands? He gave us our very breath! How can we add anything to the Creator of the universe? Can we bring God down to our level? Paul is saying all this with great tact.

The Creator Controls Time, History, Boundary, and Destiny

17:26 “*And hath made of one [Adam] all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined [their preappointed times and the boundaries of their habitations.]*” God is not nebulous but a Person who possesses all wisdom. He made all the nations from one man, Adam. When He created man, He had already determined times, eras, and the boundaries of the nations.

God Wants Man to Seek Him and Find Him—We Are His Children

17:27-28 *“That they should seek [God], if haply they might [grope or reach out] after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us; For [by] him we live, and move, and [are]; as certain [ones] also of your own poets have said, 'For we are also his offspring'.”*

Paul continues to describe “the unknown God” to the Athenians. God is a Person. He is not an “idea” or something nebulous, mystical, or vague. God is a Person. He created the universe and possesses all power and wisdom. Out of one man (Adam) sprang all the peoples of the world. God predetermined the times, history, and even the boundaries of the nations. Yet this same God wants us to seek Him, and find Him. God is very personal and desires to be known and understood (cf. Jer. 9:24).

To gain a further rapport with his audience, Paul now quotes from the poets of Athens. “Your own poets have said, 'We are also his offspring'.” To say that we are God's offspring means that He is our Father. We came from Him and we are made like Him. Therefore, we resemble Him because we are made in His image and likeness. He desires man to seek Him and find Him because we came out from Him and we are His offspring. (See Luke 3:38 where Adam is said to be *the son of God*.)

God Cannot be Fashioned With Silver or Gold

17:29 *“Forasmuch then as we are the offspring [or race] of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.”* If God made us, and if we descended from God, then He is much greater than we are. We cannot liken Him to gold, silver, stone, or anything we can make with our hands. (See Exodus 20:4, Deut. 4:15-18).

The Command to Turn From the Ignorance of Idolatry Unto the True God

17:30 *“And the times of this ignorance God [overlooked]; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.”* God did not restrain the Gentiles from these idolatries by sending prophets to warn them as he did to Israel. He let them alone and allowed them to go their own ways (14:16), but now God is offering salvation to all men. He commands all men everywhere to repent. It is such a blessing when God chastens men and does not allow them to go their own ways. If God allows people to go their own ways and does not correct them anymore, it means that He has given up on them. Whom the Lord loves He chastens and rebukes (Rev. 3:19).

Proof of the Coming Resurrection and Judgment—God Raised Jesus From the Dead

17:31 *“Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”* There is a day of judgment coming; everyone will give an account of himself to God. The Man appointed to be the Judge is the Lord Jesus Christ. The proof of the resurrection and coming judgment is the fact that Jesus Himself was raised from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus is the evidence and the assurance God has given to all men that there will be a resurrection and a day of reckoning (cf. Acts 24:15, 26:8).

Only a Few Believe the Message

17:32-34 “And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.” Paul had scanty results from his mission in Athens. There is no record of his founding a church here. Nevertheless, there were several who “clave” to Paul and believed. Dionysius the Areopagite was one of them. The Areopagus was not only a name for Mars Hill, it was also the name of an honorable council which met on Mars Hill. Dionysius was one of the members of this Athenian supreme court. Thus, Paul had a notable convert here.

Athens was the city of the human mind. It was supposed to be a centre of wisdom and learning, yet it rejected the heavenly wisdom. The natural, human mind will always go against God. Let us compare Athens' response to the Gospel with the other cities in Acts.

In Jerusalem:

2:41 - “Three thousand” were converted on the day of Pentecost.

2:47 - “The Lord added to the church daily...”

4:4 - “The number of the men was about five thousand” after the lame man was healed.

5:14 - “And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.”

5:16 - “...A multitude out of the cities...were healed every one.”

6:7 - “The number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly.”

A great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.”

8:5-8 - In the city of Samaria...“many...were healed.”

8:25 - In Samaria... They “...preached the Gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.”

9:35 - In Lydda and Sharon...“all that dwelt at Lydda and Sharon...turned to the Lord.”

9:42 - In Joppa.... “Many believed in the Lord.”

10:27 - In Caesarea...at the house of Cornelius...“many were come together” to hear Peter.

11:20,21 - In Antioch, Syria...“a great number believed and turned to the Lord.”

11:24 - In Antioch, Syria...“much people was added to the Lord.”

11:26 - In Antioch, Syria...Paul...“taught much people.”

13:43 - In Antioch of Pisidia...“Many Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas.”

14:1 - In Iconium...“a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.”

14:21 - In Derbe...They “taught many.”

16:5 - In Derbe, Lystra, Iconium...“the churches...increased in number daily.”

16:26 - In Philippi at the prison...“everyone's bands were loosed.” Paul stayed many days.

17:4 - In Thessalonica...“the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few”

17:12 - In Berea...“many of them believed.”

18:8 - In Corinth...“many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized.” (cf. 18:10)

19:10 - In Asia Minor...“all which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus...”

19:18 - In Ephesus...“many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds.”

19:19 - In Ephesus...“many which used [magical] arts...brought their books...and burned them.”

21:20 - In Jerusalem...“many thousands of Jews...which believe.”

Chapter Eighteen

THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY CONTINUES

Paul Comes to Corinth v1-18

Upon leaving Athens, Paul turned west and traveled fifty miles to Corinth. Athens and Corinth were actually in sight of each other on a clear day. Corinth was a city of debauchery, yet it proved to be one of the most fruitful of all Paul's stops. Some scholars estimate that ten percent of the city came to Christ—about 50,000 converts. Much of the population were slaves. It was a drunken city with countless nightclubs and taverns. Obviously, it was very corrupt.

Corinth was the capital of Achaia (southern Greece) and was one of the main seaports of its day. Geographically the city was strategically located on a narrow strip of land that connected the north and south of Greece (see page 111). All traffic between the north and south had to come through Corinth. Furthermore, all of the sea traffic from Rome to Asia Minor going east and west would channel through the straits to Corinth. It was not only a straighter course, but a safer one. The sea along the southern coast was treacherous. Once the ships arrived at Corinth, they were unloaded and the cargo was hauled to other ships on the other side of the strip.

The prominent position that Corinth had in commerce not only brought wealth and many opportunists, but also a licentious life-style that was appalling, even to the pagan world. Many theaters in the Roman Empire featured a drunken Corinthian who would stagger on to the stage. To be called a Corinthian was an insult. One of the main centers of religion was a temple erected to Aphrodite, the goddess of fleshly love. The huge temple in Corinth had a thousand temple prostitutes. Sexual perversion of every kind was rampant. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, all of the cardinal sins of the city are enumerated by Paul.

Corinth - A Fruitful Field

In Acts 18:10, God told Paul: "I have much people in this city." Therefore, Paul remained here for a year-and-a-half, a period longer than any of his previous stops. Paul always stationed himself in strategic areas. It would have been a waste for the great theologian to be isolated in some little village for eighteen months while the traffic of the world was flowing through a major city like Corinth. When Paul started this church, Gallio was the Roman governor of Achaia (18:12). According to secular history, Gallio was resident in Corinth for two years (approximately 52-54 A.D.)

Paul had just come from Athens, the intellectual center of the world. Athens had the biggest libraries, famous philosophers, a very active social life, and all of the worldly wise men. Corinth was quite the opposite. It was a city of disrepute. Yet Paul had a tremendous response in Corinth and almost none in Athens. Paul presented the same Gospel to both cities. One was a fruitful field, and the other was not. God knows which places are fertile and which ones are barren. Paul did not stay long in Athens because they did not receive his message. Therefore, he went to people who would. During his eighteen months here, he wrote I-II Thessalonians. After he left Corinth, he wrote I-II Corinthians to the church in this city. Several years later when he came back for a third visit, he wrote Galatians and Romans. In all, *six inspired epistles* were written to or from Corinth.

Paul Comes to Corinth in 52 A.D.

Paul started his second missionary journey in A.D. 51. After launching from Antioch, he and Silas visited or started churches in Syria, Cilicia, and Galatia. In 52 they traveled to Troas, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and now Corinth. Paul and his company stayed here eighteen months.

Paul Meets Aquila and Priscilla

18:1-3 *“After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.”*

When Paul arrived in Corinth, it was probably mid to late summer, A.D. 52. Soon afterwards, he met Aquila and Priscilla, a lovely Jewish couple who had been expelled from Rome. The Roman emperor Claudius (41-54 A.D.) had banished all Jews from Rome that same year. There was a general dislike and suspicion of the Jews among the heathen. The historian Suetonius says Claudius drove the Jews from Rome because they were incessantly raising tumults. We have already seen the riots the Jews started when Christianity was introduced in their communities. There is reason to believe that the same outbreaks happened in the capital itself. Christianity must have been known in Rome since the return of the Italian Jews from Pentecost (Acts 2).

Paul - A Tentmaker

A question has been raised as to whether Aquila and Priscilla were already Christians when they met Paul. Though it is certainly possible that they may have been converted at Rome, it seems more likely that this was not the case. They are simply classed with the other Jews who were expelled by Claudius. We are told that the reason Paul came and attached himself to them was not because they had a common faith, but because they had a common trade. If they had not been converted before this, their joining together in tent-making soon resulted in the conversion of Aquila and his wife. We do know that eighteen months later when Paul left Corinth, Aquila and Priscilla were able to instruct others in the ways of the faith (18:18,26).

Tentmaking was Paul's trade and was most likely the trade of his father. Every Jewish boy was taught a trade by his father. There was a proverb in the Hebrew culture which said: “He that teaches not his son a trade is as though he taught him to be a thief.” Tarsus was known for its Cilician cloth, a dark coarse material made of goats hair which was used for tentmaking, among other purposes.

Paul Worked Willingly With His Hands

The first thing Paul did when he came to Corinth was go to work in the secular world. He met Aquila and started working with him in the making of tents. They worked during the weekdays, and on the sabbath days Paul taught in the synagogues. While he “laboured, working with his own hands” among the Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:12), in his heart he was praying continually with thanksgiving on behalf of the Thessalonians. He says so himself in the letters which he dictated in the intervals of his labor (1 Thes.1:2, 2:13; 2 Thes.1:11).

Secular Work

Even the Apostle Paul worked with his hands. While it is advantageous for most ministers to give themselves full-time to the work of spiritual ministry, there may be *seasons* when it is necessary to work in the secular world. Paul did!

One man in India was told by the Lord to leave his secular work to go into the ministry, but his heart resisted that command. When God asked him why he would not obey, the man poured out his heart to the Lord and said: “I have seen what has happened to ministers who have left their secular employment to go into the ministry. They are dressed in rags, they live in poverty, and their families are destitute.” The Lord replied: “But I did not tell them to leave their occupations—they did this of their own accord.” We should remember this little story. When God tells us to leave our secular employment, He will supply our needs. Until then, if He has not told us to leave, we must stay on our jobs. Otherwise, we will suffer and so also will our families.

It is not unspiritual to work in the secular world. Many qualities that are necessary for reigning with Christ are developed while being in the secular field—patience, wisdom, meekness, longsuffering, and the ability to get along with others. Also, there will be many opportunities to minister spiritual life unto those around us. If we fail in the natural, we will not succeed in the spiritual. Stay on your job until you know beyond a doubt that God is telling you to leave. We must not leave by our own doing or we might bring unnecessary poverty upon ourselves.

Paul Preaches On the Sabbaths

18:4 “*And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.*” It might be good to note again that instead of disputing, he “reasoned and persuaded.” The return of Silas and Timothy from Macedonia seemed to further strengthen Paul as he preached.

They Opposed Themselves

18:5-6 “*And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.*” Those who reject God's message destroy themselves. They are fighting against themselves and their own best interests. It is man who harms himself.

13:46 “Judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life”

18:6 “Opposed themselves” A man's blood is upon his own head.

19:9 “Hardened” themselves

16:28 “Do thyself no harm” Solomon said: “Why should you destroy thyself?” (Eccl. 7:16)

We determine our own destiny. Someone else does not do it for us. The people opposed themselves, hardened themselves, and judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life. We are the only one who can really harm ourselves. It is not the devil, offenders, or anything else. We are the ones ultimately who destroy ourselves by wrong responses to life's difficulties. There will be no pointing of the finger at the judgment seat. Abigail was married to a fool, yet she had a beautiful countenance and possessed good understanding (1 Sam. 25:2-3). Abigail did not say, “My life is ruined because of my husband.” She did not use her husband for an excuse to go her own way as some spouses do.

18:6 *And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.*” Paul’s manner was to go first to the synagogues in every place he traveled. Once again, the Jews in general rejected his message. The Jews in Corinth “blasphemed!” Hereupon, Paul declared himself discharged from them, and left them to perish in their unbelief. As a faithful watchman, Paul had declared all of God’s message (Eze. 3:17-21). He had thrown out the lifeline but they refused to lay hold of it. Paul said, “My hands are clean from your blood.” On the day of judgment, no one could say that he did not give them fair warning. May we also have clean hands and not dilute God’s message. Now he was going outside the synagogue to preach to the Gentiles.

Paul Enters the House of Justus

18:7 *“And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man’s house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.”* [Titus] Justus was an honest Gentile who adhered to Paul’s preaching. When Christian preaching divided the synagogue, Paul was invited by Justus to preach in his house that stood beside the synagogue. Justus is thought by some scholars to be the “Gaius” of Corinth (cf. 1 Cor. 1:14, Rom. 16:23). Paul’s very first converts in Corinth were the household of Stephanas (1 Cor. 16:15, 1:14-16).

The Chief Ruler of the Synagogue Believes

18:8 *“And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.”* What an encouragement it must have been for Paul to see the chief ruler become a believer. This was a real indictment against the Jews! Crispus was not only a ruler but “the chief ruler” of the synagogue, and he had accepted Christ. Crispus stood out among them. He excelled the others in his knowledge of the Scriptures and in his zeal for their religion and now he was a Christian. The Jews were left inexcusable.

Only One Head in a Church

There were a number of rulers in a synagogue, but only one *chief ruler*. There has to be *one* head pastor in the local church. Leadership must have a singular head, with others who help. Two heads always results in a monster. Every church must have a senior pastor, and others who help (assistant pastor, elders, deacons, etc.) Dual, equal leadership is not Scriptural.

God Tells Paul—“I Have Much People in This City”

18:9-11 *“Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”* God knows where the fruitful vineyards are as well as the barren ones. Surely the Lord knows the hearts of all men. He knows who will accept or reject Him. Paul stayed in Corinth for eighteen months and he had as many as 50,000 converts. When Paul left, he had a thriving church there. Later he wrote two inspired epistles to them (I-II Corinthians), and visited the city two more times.

Barnabas should have been on this trip with Paul. What an honor it is to have your name in the Word of God. The narrative should have said “Paul and Barnabas” instead of Paul and Silas. Barnabas lost so much of his crown by leaving Paul and charting out his own course.

Paul Brought Before Gallio, Governor of Achaia

18:12-17 *“And when Gallio was the [proconsul or governor] of Achaia, the Jews made [a united attack] against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. And he drave them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things.”*

Gallio was the brother of the famous philosopher Seneca. He was the governor of Achaia (Greece) between the years of 52 and 54 A.D. Gallio was known as a man of integrity, honesty, and an amiable temper. He did not allow himself, like Pilate, to be coerced into injustice by the clamor of the Jews. Thus, it was divine providence that sent Gallio at this time to manage the affairs of Achaia. Gallio knew the limits of his office and felt he had no time to waste on the religious technicalities of the Jews. Had it been a case in which the Roman law had been violated, then it would have been reasonable and right that the matter should have been fully investigated. However, since it was a question of the Jewish law, he utterly refused to hear the case. He would not meddle with trifling quarrels which were beyond his jurisdiction, so he hastily ejected them from the court.

The Governor's Forbearance to Paul Brings Trouble to His Accusers

The Greeks and other bystanders were waiting, eager to hear the verdict and wanting to learn something of the new governor's character. They probably viewed Gallio's forbearance of Paul as a proof that their own religious liberties would be respected under his new administration. Then they vented their wrath on the hated Jews who had complained about Paul, beating the chief ruler of the synagogue in the presence of the governor. Gallio made no response as the people inflicted punishment on the Jews and their synagogue ruler. His indifference was making a public statement: “I am allowing Paul to have his religious convictions.” Although Gallio was a kindly man with an even temper, he never became a Christian, which tells us that human goodness does not save us.

Paul's accusers were themselves brought to disgrace. Gallio obtained a high popularity rating among the Greeks, and Paul was enabled to pursue his labors in safety. Had Paul been driven away from Corinth, the whole Christian community might have been put in jeopardy. Instead, the result of the storm was to give shelter to the infant Church, with opportunity for safe and continued growth. Paul's credibility rose with the disgrace of his opponents. His most imminent peril was now turned providentially into safety and honor. It happened even as the Lord had promised Paul, “I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; for I have much people in this city” (18:9-10).

The Thessalonian Epistles - Written While Paul Resided in Corinth

Shortly after Paul came to Corinth, Silas and Timothy arrived also, having returned from Macedonia (see Acts 18:5). While still at Athens, Paul had sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to revisit and establish the newly founded church there. The good news he brought back to Paul caused the Apostle to write to these beloved converts. As we have already mentioned, this letter he sent to them is the first of his Epistles that have been preserved to us.

Dates For the Thessalonian Epistles

Paul had come to Corinth perhaps in the mid or late summer of 52 A.D. and not long after, Silas and Timothy came (18:5). Timothy had just returned from Thessalonica. Therefore, it was probably in the fall of 52 A.D. that Paul wrote his first Epistle to the Thessalonians. Several months later in early 53, he wrote his second Epistle. Paul must have been under much pressure there in Corinth because he told the Thessalonians in his second letter: “Pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith” (2 Thes. 3:1-2). Observe the strong expressions Paul uses of his own state of mind during his stay at Corinth (1 Cor. 2:3).

Paul Leaves Corinth

18:18 *“And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.”* After the episode at Gallio's judgment seat, Paul stayed in Corinth “a good while” and then began to head home to Antioch, Syria. The Apostle took his leave of the brethren solemnly, with much affection, and undoubtedly with many words of exhortation and prayers. Certainly he would commend them for what was good, reprove them for what was otherwise, and give them necessary cautions against the wiles of the false apostles. When he left, Aquila and Priscilla accompanied him. Together they came first to Cenchrea, a city near Corinth. Cenchrea was the port where those that went to sea from Corinth boarded ship. (See p.111).

A Vow is Taken

While they were in Cenchrea, one of them had his head shorn. It does not specify whether it was Aquila or Paul. It was probably Paul, since he had determined to visit Jerusalem on his way home to Antioch, Syria. Obviously the Gospel did not require any such custom. Probably Paul was seeking wider acceptance from the Jews in Jerusalem. He said, ...“Unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law” (1 Cor. 9:20, cf. Acts 21:20-26).

To Ephesus

18:19-22 *“And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus. And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch.”*

Upon leaving Cenchrea, they sailed directly east to Ephesus, a journey of three or four days when the winds were favorable. Corinth was the capital of Greece (Achaia), and Ephesus was the capital of Asia Minor. Both were prominent cities, and no voyage across the Aegean Sea was made more frequently than the one between Corinth and Ephesus. Paul entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews, who favorably received him and wanted him to stay longer. These were more noble than the Jews in Corinth and in most other places.

Paul's Stay in Ephesus is Short

Paul felt a strong desire to visit Jerusalem. Therefore, he would not tarry long in Ephesus if he were to attend the upcoming feast in Jerusalem. Presumably, that feast was the Passover, the most prominent of all feasts. If it was the Passover, Paul's visit in Ephesus must have been in late March, as Passover was in April. Paul promised the Jewish brethren in Ephesus that he would return if the Lord willed. Meanwhile, he left Aquila and Priscilla there to sow the Gospel seed, and also to prepare the way for his return. Paul did return to Ephesus on his third missionary journey and he remained there for several years. Now, Paul heads for Jerusalem.

On to Jerusalem, Back Home to Antioch

Paul had a tremendous burden for his beloved Jerusalem (Rom. 9:1-5, 10:1). He also had a sense of unfinished business in Jerusalem and wanted to be there during the feast. At the time of the feasts, Jews from all over the world made their rendezvous there. Perhaps he was hoping to make new contacts during his visit. Certainly, Paul would reacquaint himself with old friends and fellow apostles. Perhaps he felt a special obligation to the Church in Jerusalem—the Church he once persecuted.

He sailed from Ephesus and landed at Caesarea, which was the main seaport for Palestine. From here he would travel by land to Jerusalem. Scripture has little to say of this visit. All it says is that he “went up, and saluted the church.” The Church plainly meant the Church at Jerusalem. Paul's visit to Jerusalem would have been his *fourth* since conversion. Now the great Apostle will return to Antioch, Syria. Thus, the second missionary journey is concluded (18:22). In verse 23, after spending some time resting in Antioch, he will begin his third missionary endeavor.

Approximate Dates at Corinth:

52 A.D. - Mid to late summer: Paul arrives in Corinth.

52 A.D. - The fall: Paul writes his first Epistle to the Thessalonians.

53 A.D. - Early in the year: Paul writes his second Epistle to the Thessalonians

54 A.D. - February or March: Paul leaves Corinth for Ephesus, Jerusalem, and home to Antioch.

Paul had resided in Corinth for at least 18 months.

54 A.D. - April: Paul is at Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.

54 A.D. - May: Paul returns home to Antioch.

54 A.D. - Autumn: Later that year, he started his third missionary journey after a good rest.

One other note of interest. When Paul first came to Corinth, he went to work in the secular field. He started making tents with Aquila. There are times when we have to preach and work at the same time, and this is difficult. For this reason we need to have a stack of good sermons to fall back on. When you go on a mission trip there is no time to study; you must be able to rely on the messages you have preached in the past. Therefore, make good notes of all your sermons and keep copies of them. God will quicken them, and apply them to your new audiences. When revival comes, doors come open and all barriers are broken down. You will be surprised at the places God sends you. You will find every door open and you will be preaching in the most extraordinary places. Get ready!

Paul's Strategy for Evangelism

Before we go into Paul's third missionary journey, it would be good to pause for a few moments to consider Paul's stratagem for propagating the Gospel. Here are some of his keys:

- Paul was called and commissioned by God, not himself.
- He prepared himself and knew the Word of God.
- He waited for God's time.
- He always traveled with a partner ... Barnabas, Silas, Luke.
- He often had younger men along to train ... a Timothy or Titus.
- He concentrated on the main provinces.
- And focused on their main cities, or capitals.
- He sought the blessing of the magistrates of the territory, that they would favor the Gospel.
- First he went to the household of faith (synagogue). Paul submitted to the rulers, staying seated until he was invited to speak (13:14,15). Paul presented his Gospel and new message first to the believing world. If the house of faith rejected him, he went to the outsiders (the Gentiles).
- He established churches. If you have a big crusade and bring people to Christ, your fruit will not remain if you do not gather the people into churches. The people will go back into the world.
- Self-governing churches were established. Paul took his hands off those churches once they were established. They were not directed and controlled from a headquarters.
- He found key people in the new churches and made them elders and leaders.
- Paul did not build big buildings; Churches were started in homes or rented buildings. He deposited and invested his truths into lives. He did not expend time and energy in buildings.
- He trained the local people and let them evangelize their own nation. Paul concentrated on strategic places and made them centers or hubs, then the people evangelized their own region. He did not spread himself thin by trying to go into every tiny village. He stayed in the big cities. Paul majored on the fruitful fields (Corinth), but departed from the unfruitful (Athens).
- The churches were founded upon Christ, not Paul's personality. Therefore, when he left, the church still stood. Paul had the supernatural at work, performing miracles, signs, and wonders.
- Converts were baptized immediately, filled with the Holy Spirit, and were taught well.
- Paul did not preach customs or politics, but he did leave good guidelines (16:4).
- He imparted an eternal vision—having a better resurrection, winning Christ, and not coming short of the prize of the high calling. (We could lose our crown if we do not fulfill our course). Paul taught his converts that “through much tribulation we enter the kingdom.” Trials purify us and prepare us for our heavenly position. If we want an easy life here, our reward will be small.
- Paul stayed in contact with his new converts, writing letters and revisiting them. Otherwise, he would have labored in vain.

PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

18:23 – 21:17



18:23 - Paul departed from Antioch in the autumn of A.D. 54, after resting several months.

18:23 - He went to Galatia and Phrygia - "strengthening all disciples" en route to Ephesus.

19:1-20 At Ephesus, Paul spent two years and three months teaching and preaching (v8,10).

19:21 - Leaving Ephesus, he revisited Macedonia and Achaia (Corinth). His second time in Corinth.

19:22 – 20:1 - Then he returned to Ephesus (Asia) for a "season."

Here, Paul wrote an epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 5:9), an epistle now lost.

The Corinthians replied, asking him questions, especially about marriage (1 Cor. 7:1).

Paul answers from Ephesus with another epistle—*First Corinthians*. Spring 57 A.D.

Soon after, the uproar over the goddess Diana occurred (Acts 19:23-41).

20:1 - He left Ephesus in the early summer of 57 A.D. shortly after the tumult over Diana.

Paul stopped briefly at Troas (2 Cor.2:12,13) but hastened on to Macedonia to meet Titus.

Paul wanted to know from Titus how the Corinthians had responded to his first Epistle.

Titus met Paul and gave him a favorable report of Corinth (2 Cor. 7:6-8).

20:1 - While at Macedonia (Philippi), Paul wrote *Second Corinthians* in the Fall of 57 A.D.

20:2-3 - From Macedonia Paul came to Greece (Corinth), visits Corinth a third time, stays 3 months.

20:3 - While in Corinth three months, Paul wrote *Galatians* (Dec. 57) and *Romans* (58 spring).

20:3-6 - From Corinth, Paul went back through Macedonia (Philippi) to Troas.

20:6-12 - At Troas...they stayed seven days. Paul preached all Sunday night. Resurrects Eutychus.

20:13-15 From Troas he went to Miletus (going through Assos, Mitylene, Samos, Trogylium).

20:15-38 At Miletus, Paul gave his farewell address to the elders and leaders of the Ephesian church.

21:1-7 - From Miletus he went to Tyre (going through Coos, Rhodes, Patara, under Cyprus, to Tyre).

21:7-17 - From Tyre (stopping at Ptolemais, Caesarea) Paul finally arrived in Jerusalem (spring, 58)

PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

18:23—21:17

18:23 *“And after he had spent time some there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.”* When you travel there is no time to study. In Antioch, Paul got fresh revelation and illumination and met with God. There are times when you have to get away from ministry and have a complete rest. After being rejuvenated during the summer of A.D. 54, Paul started his third missionary journey that fall, from Antioch.

Revisits Galatia and Phrygia

“He departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.” Paul revisited the churches he had started on his second missionary journey (16:6) and “confirmed” the believers (15:36, 41). We have to stay in contact with our people to encourage them, otherwise we could lose them. Three years later (Dec. 57 A.D.), the Galatian churches were corrupted by the Judaizers from Jerusalem, and Paul had to write his Epistle to the Galatians to get them back on track. For now, when Paul left them, the Galatians were “running well” (cf. Gal. 5:7).

Meanwhile, Apollos Comes to Ephesus

18:24-28 *“And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.”*

Paul was revisiting Phrygia and Galatia. Soon he would make his way to Ephesus. Aquila and Priscilla were already in Ephesus, having been stationed there by Paul in the spring (cf. 18:18-21). Meanwhile, an eloquent man named Apollos visited Ephesus. The fact that he came from Alexandria, Egypt is significant. There were great theological schools in Alexandria, out of which came some notable teachers of Church history such as Clement and Origen.

Apollos was “mighty in the scriptures” and yet there were certain things lacking in his theology. When someone lacked knowledge in the Early Church, the Church leaders did something about it. We have to make sure that those whom we raise up can rightly divide the word of truth before we let them teach. Aquila and Priscilla did not let Apollos go on without correcting his doctrine.

Apollos only knew about “John's baptism,” a baptism before the cross that looked forward to the coming Christ. Those who were baptized before the cross needed to be rebaptized after the cross. No one could be baptized into Christ's death, burial and resurrection *before* the cross. A prominent teaching in the New Testament is the necessity of water baptism after our new birth. From Ephesus, Apollos went to Achaia (Corinth) where he “helped them much through grace.” Apollos had been recommended to Corinth by the brethren in Ephesus. Recommendations are important. We should only recommend good men whom we know well. Apollos was to become an integral part of Corinth (1 Cor. 3:5-7). Certainly, God sent other ministries into the churches Paul started. This is needed for balance and diversity. However, Paul made sure they had the same vision and doctrine.

Chapter Nineteen

PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Paul Comes to Ephesus

19:1 *“And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the [upper inland regions] came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples.”* Having visited the churches of Galatia and Phrygia, Paul continued his westward direction to Ephesus, taking the higher-lying and more direct route, not the regular trade route on the lower level down the Lycus and Maeander valleys. By the time he reached Ephesus, Apollos had crossed the Aegean to Corinth. Shortly after his arrival in Ephesus, Paul met a dozen men (“certain disciples”) whose knowledge of Christianity was defective in a number of major areas. Perceiving their need, he asked them several questions.

Have You Received the Holy Ghost Since You Believed?

19:2 *“He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?”* This is a very Scriptural question. Paul asked—“Have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed?” If people automatically receive the baptism in the Holy Ghost at new birth, why would Paul have asked such a question? Obviously, the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a separate experience from new birth. That these men were Christians certainly is inferred by Luke since he calls them “disciples,” a term he uses uniquely of believers. Paul’s question, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed?” strongly implies that he regarded them as true believers in Christ, and yet they had not been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Paul also learned that they needed to be rebaptized in water.

“And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.” Some translations add the word “given,” which might show the real intention of their answer. The tenor of their words may have been something like this: “We have not even heard whether the Holy Ghost has been given.” Since they had been baptized with John’s baptism, conceivably they knew that John had spoken of a coming baptism in the Holy Spirit. Yet these men, twenty-five years after Pentecost still did not know that the Holy Spirit was given. Paul was seeking to strengthen all disciples everywhere. Therefore when he learned that they were completely ignorant about the baptism in the Holy Spirit, he proceeded to ask them about their baptism in water. This shows the importance the early Church and the apostles placed on water baptism.

Paul Enquires About Their Water Baptism - Then Rebaptizes Them

19:3-5 *“And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John’s baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”*

Paul asked, “Unto what were ye baptized?” They answered, “Unto John’s baptism.” *John’s baptism* was a baptism proclaimed and administered by John the Baptist before the cross, before Pentecost. This baptism looked ahead to the coming Christ, but it was not possible to be baptized into the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ before the cross. Thus, people baptized before the cross, or those baptized with John’s baptism were *rebaptized* after the cross in the name of Jesus Christ.

Paul had these brethren *rebaptized* who had only known John's baptism. Clearly, Paul rebaptized. In this case they needed to be rebaptized because John's baptism was in an old dispensation before the cross. For our time, we ought only to rebaptize those who were sprinkled and those who were baptized before they were converted. Ministers should have their wives fully versed in doctrine, too. Wives should study and thoroughly understand *all* the doctrines. Together, a husband and wife can be a strong tower. Sooner or later your church will be tested on doctrine. Therefore, both spouses should be well prepared to stand together in the coming storms.

We should rebaptize:

- Only if the person has only been sprinkled.
 - Only if the person was not born again when they were first baptized.
- They should be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...in Jesus' Name, but we should not rebaptize just to satisfy a favorite formula.

Importance of Water Baptism in Acts:

- 2:38 “Repent and be baptized *every one of you*...”
- 2:41 “They that gladly received his word were baptized...”
- 8:12 At Samaria - “They were baptized, both men and women.”
- 8:13 “Simon himself believed...and...was baptized.”
- 8:36 The Ethiopian asked...“What doth hinder me from being baptized?” (v38)
- 9:18 Paul—“Forthwith...arose, and was baptized.”
- 10:48 Peter—“Commaned them [Cornelius and friends] to be baptized in the name of the Lord.”
- 16:15 Lydia and family—“She was baptized, and her household.”
- 16:33 The Philippian jailor and family ... “was baptized, he and all his.”
- 18:8 “Many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.”
- 19:5 The brethren who only knew John's baptism...“were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

The Brethren Receive the Holy Spirit

19:6-7 “*And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. 7 And all the men were about twelve.*” Not only did Paul have these brethren rebaptized in water, he also laid his hands upon them to receive the Holy Spirit. How do we know they were filled with the Spirit?— “They spake with tongues.” Here again is the initial evidence of being baptized in the Holy Ghost. It is evidenced by speaking with other tongues.

New Birth and Being Baptized in the Spirit Are Two Separate Experiences:

- 1:5 “You shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.” They were already saved.
- 1:8 “Ye shall receive power, after the Holy Ghost is come upon you.” They were already saved.
- 2:4 - The disciples spoke in tongues at Pentecost but were already devout born-again believers.
- 2:38 - “Repent, be baptized ... and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”
- 8:14-19 The Holy Ghost had not yet come upon the new believers. Philip did not seem to be able to lead them into the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Peter and John came and laid hands upon the new Samaritan believers, and they were baptized with the Holy Spirit.
- 9:17 - Paul, *after conversion*, had hands laid on him to receive the Holy Ghost.
- 19:2,6 - The twelve brethren, (disciples) had hands laid on them to receive the Holy Spirit.

Paul Meets Resistance in the Synagogue - Withdraws to a Lecture Hall

19:8-9 “*And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, [reasoning] and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when [some] were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he [withdrew] from them, and separated the disciples, [reasoning] daily in the school of one Tyrannus.*”

The usual pattern of events started to take their course. For three months Paul reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue, but at last, certain ones were “*hardened.*” They opposed Paul vehemently so that he abandoned the synagogue, having separated the believers from there, and he used the lecture-hall of a notable teacher named Tyrannus as his headquarters.

A hardened heart—this is the whole problem with man. When men and women harden their hearts they are no longer able to listen, nor are they able to think or act objectively. Instead, they become evil. Divorce is always because of a hardened heart (cf. Mt.19:8, Mk.10:4-5). Hardness of heart destroys discernment and the ability to hearken. Hardness of heart and *rebellion* go hand in hand.

- Exodus 7:14 Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and could not hear (7:22 8:19 8:32 9:34 9:35). (A hardened heart is because of *pride* - a proud heart with plenty of fight...cf. Ex. 8:15).
- 2 Kings 17:14 Israel...“hardened their necks like their fathers...and did not believe.”
- 2 Chronicles 36:13 - “Zedekiah...hardened his heart from turning unto the Lord...rebelled.”
- Nehemiah 9:16,17 - “Our fathers...dealt proudly, hardened their necks...hearkened not.” — v29
- Job 9:4 “Who hath hardened himself against him and prospered?”
- Jeremiah 7:26 - “Hearkened not, but hardened their neck...more than the fathers.”
- Jeremiah 19:15 “Hardened their necks that they might not hear my words.”

It is a wicked thing to harden the heart. A hardened heart is *never* blessed by God. Never! If it continues, it will meet judgment.

All Asia Hears the Word - It Travelled From Paul's Lecture Hall

19:10 “*And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.*” Ephesus was the major city of Asia Minor. Paul did not dissipate himself by going all over the province. Instead, he stayed in Ephesus and trained the people of Asia. Then his disciples went out to evangelize and teach their own people...“*so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.*”

While Paul stayed in Ephesus for two full years, a number of his disciples and colleagues carried on missionary activity in the neighboring cities. It was during these years that the churches at Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea were founded, although Paul does not appear to have visited these cities in person (cf. Col. 2:1, 4:13). It is possible that all seven of the churches of Asia which John addressed in Revelation were founded about this time. The province was intensively evangelized, and became one of the leading centers of Christianity for centuries afterwards.

Paul later stationed Timothy at Ephesus. He wrote—“Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. As I besought thee to abide still *at Ephesus*...that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine” (1 Tim. 1:2-3).

Truth Has a Cost

Eleven years later (68 A.D.), Paul said to Timothy: “All they which are in Asia be turned away from me” (2 Tim.1:15). Many in Asia Minor were not loyal to Paul or the truths he had taught them. It was the same in all the Galatian churches, too. Many of these people received the truth and greatly rejoiced in it *for a season* (cp. Jn. 5:35, 6:66). After a time the pressures of life challenged these truths and they lost them. This is an awesome thing that we should understand—we do not own these truths until we have paid for them. *Hearing* them does not make them ours. Handling them, admiring them, quoting them, and even preaching them does not mean they belong to us. They are purchased at a very high cost (see Job 3:20, Prov. 23:23, Rev. 3:18).

It is one thing to preach on meekness, but quite another thing to possess it. Meekness is “holy acceptance of our circumstances.” People can preach about meekness until something very unfair happens and then they turn sour and resort to vengeance. We can speak of God's love but true love “bears all things and endures all things.” Some of the greatest advocates of the *love* message cannot bear or endure *anything*. Grace is “divine enablement.” It is a divine substance that God pours into us to sustain us when we are in need (Heb. 4:16). His grace is sufficient. Grace enables us to bear up under any pressure. The greater the pressure, the greater the grace that is poured into us ... unless we harden our hearts and cut off that life flow of grace. We have seen many who have failed to receive available grace in their time of trouble (Heb.12:15).

All of the Bible truths are so good and right and it is so easy to say “Amen” when we hear them preached. The question arises, “How much have we allowed these truths to penetrate our hearts and change our lives?” Everyone will be tested on the truths he receives. If we have not permitted God to work them into the fiber of our being they will only be theories and truisms to us, and eventually we will lose them (cf. Mk. 4:24-25). Bible truths are like beautiful pearls. Yet we cannot claim ownership of these gems until we have *paid* dearly for them. Spiritual blessings and truths are not bought with money but with something far more expensive—the cost of obedience (Isa. 55:1-3).

A number of years ago, I resided in a church that had experienced revival for ten years. This church had tremendous spiritual life and vision. Everyone seemed to be walking together with the same common purpose. Then the scene changed and God created new circumstances to test the people. He wanted to see if they would be faithful to the truths with which they had been entrusted. To my surprise, most failed the test. Many were living superficial lives and disregarded those sacred truths.

Paul Performed Notable Miracles

19:11-12 “*And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.*” The healing of the sick by means of pieces of material which had been in contact with Paul is reminiscent of the healing of those who touched the fringe of Jesus' garment (Mk. 5:27, 6:56). From these passages we understand that some diseases are caused by evil spirits. “The diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.” It is Scriptural to have prayer cloths. Unfortunately, some evangelists have abused this truth, using prayer cloths to make money. Notwithstanding, the healing ministry is very much in operation today. It is not a thing of the past. Kathryn Kuhlman was used by God to heal or bless over five million people in her lifetime. It is such a tragedy when theological schools insist that healing and the supernatural are not for today.

The Exorcists

19:13-17 “Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.”

What is an Exorcist?

At Ephesus, Paul performed many extraordinary miracles of healing and deliverance. So powerful was “the name of Jesus” when he cast out the demons, that onlooking exorcists also began to use the name of Jesus. Exorcists are men who cast out spirits by the power of another spirit. Actually, a bigger demon pushes out a smaller one. This is very common in France where people go to exorcists to be healed. They pay money to have a spirit expelled from them but unfortunately they receive a greater bondage, for then they are controlled by another spirit.

Formulas Do Not Work

“We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.” The exorcists who are mentioned here thought they could use Paul’s formula (the name of Jesus), but they were in for a big surprise. When they tried to expel a powerful demon from a man, *the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.*

Demons Know Who is Who

The spirit world knows who is who. The demons recognized Paul immediately. They knew he was a messenger from the kingdom of light and that he had special authority over them. Thus, the demons were terrified of him. The spirits also knew that these unconverted exorcists were children of darkness held in bondage by Satan, and that they could not have the mastery over them. Satan’s kingdom is very confused, disorganized, and competitive. When the seven men attempted to cast out this evil spirit from the man, using the name of Jesus, the man with the evil spirit attacked them with great violence and overcame them. This reminds us of the maniac of Gadara whom men could not bind, not even with chains and fetters (cf. Mk. 5:3-4). Only Jesus could tame him.

Demons know who people are, and they know if we are real. They know if a Christian is living his message or not. There was a missionary in a certain country who had tremendous authority over demons. One day an outsider offered the missionary a handsome sum of money, but the incident was very dishonest. That night when the missionary tried to cast out demons in the service, the demons replied, “We had the utmost respect for you until you took that money. We will not obey you, you have no authority over us.” The man of God quickly returned the money. We should understand from this lesson that we are being *watched* all the time. The spirit world knows who we are and if we are real. The only way we will be able to bind the bigger principalities and powers is by first being *dead to self*. We cannot be hypocritical and expect to have authority over the Evil One.

Works That Accompany Revival

19:18-20 “*And many that believed came, [confessing and declaring] their deeds. 19 Many of them also which [practised magical] arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20 So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.*”

Ephesus was a center of magical practice. Yet even among the Ephesian practitioners of magic the Gospel proved its superior power. A great number of them believed and came to Paul and his fellow-missionaries, making confession and revealing their spells. “Deeds” could be rendered *spells*. According to magical theory, the potency of a spell is bound up with its secrecy; but if it be divulged it becomes ineffective. Thus, these converted magicians renounced their power by revealing their secret formulas. Open *confession* is often necessary to find a release from sins. Until we bring our sins to the light, they will continue to have dominion over us.

Repentance literally means “another mind, or a changed mind.” A changed mind means a changed direction, a changed lifestyle. They renounced their magical spells and burned evil books. Books are powerful because they have spirits in them, and these spirits get into the readers. You will receive the spirit of the author. Pictures also have spirits in them. Pornography can be diabolical and destroy the mind and heart. God commands evil pictures to be destroyed (cf. Num. 33:52). The Ephesians made a complete break with their past life, and this is a sign of true repentance. The value of the books was 50,000 pieces of silver. It is significant that the number *fifty* is associated with this episode. Fifty is the number of liberty, release, jubilee. Release from the bondage of these iniquities can only come when people rid themselves entirely of these books and pictures.

Revival Changes Society

Only a sovereign move of God can change society. It is not demonstrations, protests, marches, or an emphasis on political change. Revival changes society—it changes the home, the schools, the economy, the labor market, and the political scene. Consider what revival did to Wales in 1904:

- A nation divided and embittered by labor strikes was unified within weeks.
- Family members who had not conversed for years prayed side by side in the same meetings.
- Feuds and differences were forgotten; peace and harmony took the place of discord and enmity.
- People who had sued one another prayed and held hands in church.
- Men ordering drinks at the taverns turned and walked out before the waiter could serve them.
- Gambling and alcohol businesses lost their trade. Many casinos and taverns closed.
- Famous ball players got converted and joined in the open air meetings to testify. So many of the players were converted that the teams were disbanded. Stadiums normally full were left empty.
- Life in the coal mines was completely transformed. Workers and management engaged in prayer meetings and Bible studies. They worshipped before they started new shifts...on company time. Cursing and profanity was so diminished and so many men gave up foul language that even the horses stood still totally confused. Normally the horses started or stopped by a curse word.
- Denominations forgot their differences, joined together, and met where the most could be seated.
- The lowliest of believers became passionate in prayer;
- The most passive became the most fervent witnesses for Christ.

Churches and denominations that men thought could never change were suddenly on fire. The most unlikely, seemingly impossible places, suddenly experienced the shaking of the mighty power of God. People who felt they could never be reconciled to one other were melted together in a matter of days. All of this was accomplished “by my Spirit saith the Lord.” The true anointing brings people together; it does not divorce them, as the counterfeit spirit of counsel recommends.

The presence of God was inescapable. The Spirit of the Lord was everywhere—in the streets, the cars, and the work places. Everywhere God's presence was the theme of the conversations, and it was done in very hushed, reverential tones.

The leader of the revival, Evan Roberts, deflected all praise and attention away from himself and his location. This illustrates humility. When newsmen from around the world came to inquire about the phenomena, Roberts said that there were hundreds of other ministers that God was using, and that there were twelve counties in Wales and that God was moving in every one of them. He urged the media to go to them. It was his utmost desire not to glorify himself, or his place of residence. I think we could all learn something from his attitude.

Paul Leaves Ephesus Briefly / Visits Macedonia and Achaia / Returns to Ephesus

19:21-22 *“After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season.”*

Well over two years had passed since Paul had made Ephesus his headquarters. In early 57 A.D. Paul departed from Ephesus *briefly* and revisited Macedonia and Achaia. Achaia is a reference to Corinth, the capital city of Achaia. This was his second visit to Corinth. During his second visit there, Paul was grieved and humbled with tears as he wept for many who had fallen back into moral impurity and had not repented. Soon he returned to Asia (Ephesus) where he wrote an epistle to Corinth (an epistle now lost - 1 Cor. 5:9). The Corinthians wrote back to Paul, asking him many questions, especially regarding the subject of marriage (1 Cor. 7:1). Paul replied from Ephesus with the epistle we know as *First Corinthians*, in the Spring of 57 A.D. This was probably just before the time of the uproar over the goddess Diana (Acts 19:23-41). Paul is at Ephesus until the end of chapter 19.

During his brief departure from Ephesus into Macedonia and Achaia, Paul had a growing desire to visit Jerusalem and he determined to do so (v21). Also, he said, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.” As it turned out, Paul did not reach Jerusalem until the next year, in May or June (58) during the feast of Pentecost (20:16).

The Uproar of the Silversmiths at Ephesus - Spring 57 A.D.

Meanwhile, Paul has now returned to Ephesus from Corinth and Macedonia. There was such revival going on in Ephesus that men were turning from idolatry and it was hurting the revenue of the silversmiths. When people think you are tampering with their pocketbooks, it will always stir up a hornets' nest! The uproar that is about to follow was over the issue of *money*. The complaint of the silversmiths was that *the economy* was being ruined by Paul and his Christian message.

Outraged Silversmiths Scream—“Paul Has Taken Away Our Wealth!”

19:23-28 *“And the same time there arose no small stir about the Way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth. And When they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying Great is Diana of the Ephesians.”*

The Gospel Paul preached detracted from the worship of the goddess Diana and threatened the industry of those who were largely dependent upon the cult for profit. The silversmiths of Ephesus relied on the sale of their small shrines as a source of sizable wealth. They were alarmed at the declining demand for their shrines, which the spread of Christianity was causing. When devotion to Diana and economic interests were diminished together, an impassioned anger was engendered. All of this was stirred up and fueled by Demetrius, a prominent member of the “union” of silversmiths.

Outrage of the Silversmiths Spreads to the Whole City

19:29-31 *“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. And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre.”*

Infuriated by the words of their ringleader Demetrius, the “union workers” ran into the open street, invoking their goddess aloud, crying “Great is Diana of the Ephesians.” Then the venom of the silversmiths infected the whole city, and a demonstration was hastily staged in the open-air theatre, which is estimated to have accommodated 25,000 people. As the populace hastened to the theatre, they seized Gaius and Aristarchus, two of Paul's fellow-travelers, and dragged them along with them. F.F. Bruce suggests that it was probably from one or the other of these two men that Luke received his vivid impression of the proceedings in the theatre.

Paul Restrained by the Brethren and Prominent Civil Leaders

On their way, the mob seemed to have been foiled in the attempt to lynch Paul, but as soon as Paul knew what was afoot, he made up his mind to go and face the unruly assembly in person. Perhaps this gesture was out of a sense of duty to protect his two companions, as well as his zeal for the truth. However, the Ephesian Christians used all their efforts to restrain him. Even the chief citizens urged him not to run such a risk. These “chief citizens” were high-ranking city officials who had a friendly feeling toward Paul; and well knowing the passions of an Ephesian mob when it was incited, sent an urgent message to him to prevent him from venturing into the scene of disorder and danger. Paul reluctantly consented to remain in privacy. The people continued to crowd violently into the theatre, filling the stone seats, tier above tier, and filling the air with their confused and fanatical cries.

In the Theatre - Utter Confusion

19:32-34 *“Some of them cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people. But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.”*

In the theatre there was complete disorder. The majority of the crowd had no idea why they were even there, except that there was rumor that some in the city were in opposition to Diana. The Ephesians knew well that the Jews as well as the Christians did not worship Diana. Therefore, the Jews deemed it necessary to dissociate themselves openly from Paul and the other missionaries, and they put Alexander forward, one of their number, to make it plain to the mob that the Jewish society had nothing to do with the present trouble. When the assembly understood that Alexander was a Jew, they showed him no respect. All they cared about was the fact that he was no worshipper of Diana. Some of them may even have thought that he was the instigator of the trouble, seeing that he appeared so eager to make a speech of defense. Therefore, when he beckoned for silence and audience, they shouted him down for the next two hours, crying *“Great is Diana of the Ephesians.”*

The Townclerk's Intervention

19:35-41 *“And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter? Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. For ye have brought hither these men [Gaius and Aristarchus], which are neither robbers of [temples], nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another. But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of these concourse. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.”*

There was one man who was especially alarmed by the people's riotous conduct. This was the “town-clerk” or secretary of the city. He was the executive officer who published the decrees of the civic assembly. He was the most important official and acted as a liaison officer between the civic administration and the Roman provincial administration. The provincial administration would hold him responsible for the riotous assembly, and might impose a severe penalty on the city. Therefore, he did his best to calm the assembly, and when at last he succeeded, he addressed them.

The town clerk persuaded them to stay calm and not be led by excitement into some rash course of behavior which they would later regret. Furthermore, he said that the men (Gaius and Aristarchus, including Paul) had not committed any crime. “They have not done injury to or taken anything from any temple and they have not insulted anyone's religion.” Paul never lashed out against the beliefs of others. He simply delivered the truth in love. This statement is so important. Paul never got into *politics* and he never insulted the beliefs of others. He simply preached the truth. Therefore, we should preach a positive Gospel and be careful not to attack, revile, vilify, or denounce anyone. The town-clerk also advised that if Demetrius and his fellow union workers had any serious complaints to make, they should be done in the appropriate manner—in the court system according to the law.

Chapter Twenty

PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY CONTINUES

Leaving Ephesus, Paul Again Revisits Macedonia and Corinth

20:1-3a “*And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia. And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece. And there abode three months...*”

The uproar over Diana is dated in the spring of A.D. 57. In the early summer, Paul left Ephesus and headed west toward Macedonia (20:1). On his way there, he stopped briefly at Troas (see p.127), but felt impelled to leave this fruitful field to move quickly into Macedonia in order to meet Titus (2 Cor. 2:12-13). Paul wanted to know how the carnal Corinthians had responded to his first Epistle. The first major stop in Macedonia would be Philippi. Undoubtedly, it was here that Paul came in contact with Titus, who relieved him immeasurably with the reassuring news which he brought from Corinth (2 Cor. 7:5-8). The Corinthians had come to deep repentance.

While residing in Philippi of Macedonia, Paul wrote his *Second Epistle to the Corinthians* in the fall of A.D. 57. In his epistle he told them he was on his way for a third visit (2 Cor.12:14, 13:1). From Philippi, Paul continued south to Greece (Corinth was in Greece). Coming to Corinth, Paul stayed there for three months (Acts 20:3, 2 Cor.13:1)—perhaps from December to early March. While in Corinth he resided in the house of his friend Gaius (probably the Gaius Titius Justus of Acts 18:7, Romans 16:23).

During His Three Months at Corinth—Paul Writes *Galatians* and *Romans*

As soon as Paul arrived at Corinth, intelligence reached him informing him that all the churches in Galatia had been infected by the Judaisers and had turned away from him. Therefore, in December of A.D. 57 while at Corinth for a third visit, Paul wrote his *Galatian Epistle*. Several months later, while still in Corinth, Paul wrote his *Epistle to the Romans*. Romans would be dated in the early spring of A.D. 58. Galatians and Romans were written at nearly the same time, from the same location, and both epistles were occupied with the same thoughts.

In his Roman Epistle, Paul expressed a tremendous burden he had for Jerusalem (Rom. 9:1-3, 10:1), and also his desire to visit Rome and then Spain (Rom.1:9-13, 15:24-28). Paul had already determined to visit Jerusalem and Rome a year earlier (Acts 19:21). Shortly after writing his Epistle to the Romans, Paul did visit Jerusalem at the feast of Pentecost, but was arrested there in May or June.

Paul Makes Arrangements For Bringing a Collection to Jerusalem

Among the other things that Paul accomplished in Macedonia and Greece at this time, he completed arrangements for bringing the collected gifts from the churches of these provinces to Jerusalem. The only hint which Luke gives of this collection appears in Paul's words to Felix (cf. Acts 24:17). For Paul's own sense of the importance of the collection see 1 Cor. 16:1-3, 2 Cor. 8:1, Rom.15:25. Paul fully intended to go to Jerusalem in person with the collection.

Paul had resided in Greece (Corinth) for three months (20:3). It was now March of A.D. 58. and Paul's heart was fully set on going to Jerusalem to bring a collection to the saints there. He was about to set sail in the direction of Syria, a route which picked up (at all the principal ports) those who wished to be in Jerusalem for the forthcoming feast of Passover. But detecting a plot by the Jews to kill him when once he was on board this ship, he changed his plan and decided to go back to Macedonia and sail from there. In all probability, Paul's original plan was to be in Jerusalem for the Passover in April. When the delay caused by the Jews' plot made that impossible, he determined at least to arrive there in time for Pentecost (cf. 20:16). Thus, Paul would work his way through Macedonia to Troas to Ephesus, and then go on to Jerusalem. (See map, p.127).

Paul's original plans for the future were these:

- He intended to go to Jerusalem at the Passover, and bring a collection to the saints. Because of the plot to kill him, he took another route and would come to Jerusalem at Pentecost.
- From Jerusalem, he planned to go to Rome (Acts 19:21).
- From Rome, he desired to go to Spain (Rom.15:24-28, 1:10-15).

All this he told the Romans in his epistle (March 58), just before attempting to go to Jerusalem. As it turned out, when Paul came to Jerusalem at Pentecost, he was arrested and then imprisoned in Caesarea for two years. Paul came to Rome as a prisoner, having requested a hearing before Caesar.

20:3-5 *“And there abode three months [in Corinth, Greece]. And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia. 4 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. 5 These going before tarried for us at Troas.”* Paul was not going to make his trip to Jerusalem unaccompanied. Seven brethren went with him who were probably representatives of the various churches that had contributed to the relief fund for the poor saints at Jerusalem. Luke rejoins Paul again in Philippi (Macedonia) and together they went on to Troas where the seven brethren mentioned by name awaited them.

From Macedonia to Troas

20:6 *“And we [Luke included] sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days.”* The feast of unleavened bread included the Passover, a celebration that lasted eight days. Originally Paul had planned to be in Jerusalem for the Passover and unleavened bread. The date is April, A.D. 58. Paul and Luke were in Philippi during the days of unleavened bread. Then they came to Troas and stayed seven days.

At Troas—Paul Raises the Dead

20:7-12 *“And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow: and continued his speech until midnight. And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together. And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead. And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him. When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed. And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted.”*

In every place Paul walked, he brought the blessings of the Gospel. The plot to murder Paul in Corinth only redirected his travels to Macedonia and Troas. At Troas, the Lord was glorified when Paul raised a young man from the dead. This change in plans also occasioned a stop near Ephesus where Paul gave an important farewell speech to the Ephesian elders.

After Paul had raised Eutychus from the dead, he continued preaching until Monday morning. At daybreak the ship on which they were to sail was due to leave, and the team, except for Paul, went on board because he wanted to stay until the last possible moment. Then he took a short cut by land to join the ship at Assos. The description of this journey from Greece to Macedonia to Troas to Miletus, and then on to Jerusalem is given in chronological exactitude. This is due to the fact that Luke has now rejoined the party and kept a meticulous logbook.

From Troas to Miletus

20:13-16 *“And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot. And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene. And we sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios; and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogylium; and the next day we came to Miletus. For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hastened, if it were possible for him to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.”*

In spite of his natural desire to see Ephesus again, Paul decided that this was not possible if he was to be sure of reaching Jerusalem in time for Pentecost. Therefore, he bypassed Ephesus and entered the port at Miletus, a small city some thirty miles south of the capital. At Miletus, while the ship was still in harbor, Paul sent a message to Ephesus requesting the elders of the church in that city to come and see him. It is estimated that the brethren arrived at Miletus on the third day of Paul's stay there. Paul's desire was to give them much encouragement and exhortation because they would not see him anymore—and a major test was coming. His farewell address is recorded in 20:18-35.

Paul's Farewell Address to the Ministers of Ephesus - v18-35

20:17-19 *“And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews.”*

If there is one thing that could depict Paul's character it would be the word *stability*. Paul testified, “You know how I have lived my life before you *at all seasons*.” It was no up and down situation with Paul. He was constant. What was the key to his stability?—his vision! Vision strikes a holy terror in our hearts. When God gives a revelation of eternity, there is a clear goal to press toward and also a holy fear of coming short of it. We should ask God for greater vision.

“Serving the Lord with all humility of mind and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews.” Humility always relates to what we are *thinking* about ourselves (cf. Rom.12:3). Paul had no lofty thoughts about himself. He was a hunted man and his life was in constant jeopardy. Therefore, in great humility, he had to *depend* upon the Lord for preservation continually. Humility by definition means “holy dependence.” Meekness means “holy acceptance.”

Earlier in life, Paul was the one who hunted others, but now he is the one being hunted. Paul fully understood the damage he had done to the Church in the past, and this knowledge helped him to accept his circumstances. He had the sense of being a “debtor,” knowing he owed mankind his all.

“With many tears, and temptations.” A true pastor has many tears and much heartache. He has to plead with people, and then he has to plead with God for them. Also, a leader faces many personal temptations. We all face pressures and temptations on our own particular levels, but this does *not* mean that we have to yield to them. We must continually watch ourselves and guard our hearts, but as we seek God, He will help us discern the snares so that we can be kept from them.

The Church Met in Houses

20:20-21 *“And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”* In the New Testament, many of the churches met in houses. Therefore, Paul did not have to plead for money for building programs. Often when a preacher is under financial pressure, it is his own doing. In many places where there is revival today, the people meet in houses or smaller buildings until the group gets too large. Then they rent a larger building, or buy it, and they avoid building magnificent structures. In adopting this practice, they save themselves from the trap and bondage of astronomical debt.

Paul Feels Constrained to Go to Jerusalem

20:22-23 *“And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.”* When Paul said he was “bound in the spirit,” it is very difficult to determine whether he meant the Holy Spirit or his own spirit (cp. 19:21). Paul had a great burden for his fellow Israelites, as he had recently stated to the Romans (Rom. 9:1-5). He hoped that the gifts carried by him to the poor saints at Jerusalem from the Gentile churches (Rom. 15:25-28), would open the hearts of the law-bound Jewish believers unto his Gospel of grace. Paul fully understood by the Spirit that trouble awaited him in Jerusalem (cf. Rom. 15:30-31), but he had no details. The great affection and burden he had for his fellow countrymen urged him to continue toward Jerusalem.

Finishing Our Course With Joy

20:24 *“But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.”* Here is the key to finishing our course—“Not counting my life dear unto myself.” “None of these things move me.” The problem today is that men are “lovers of their own selves” (2 Tim. 3:2). Many Christians “seek their own interests” and comfort (Phil. 2:21). I will tell you this—those men and women who carefully practice the law of self-preservation will never reach the mark or win the prize. There are some ministers whom God would lose immediately if He did not give them success every time they preached. They would quickly turn their backs on Him. Many who are in the ministry insist on better living conditions and more conveniences, and unless you pamper their flesh, they will forsake their post. Brother, sister, if we want to finish our course with joy, we must not allow *anything* to move us. The attitude of wives is very important too. When ladies hinder their husbands from fulfilling the call of God by constantly complaining and demanding better living conditions, they will have to give an account to God.

Paul Declared “All the Counsel of God”

20:25-27 “*And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.*”

Paul presented his audience with the whole truth. He was not serving the god of success, nor was he seeking the praise of man when he preached. Paul taught about the consequences of disobedience as well as the blessings of obedience. He is making reference here to Ezekiel 3:17-21. Ezekiel was made a watchman unto Israel who was guarding their souls. If a man was violating the law of God and heading toward destruction, Ezekiel had to warn the offender of the consequences. If Ezekiel did not faithfully warn the offender, he would be responsible *for the blood* of the man. Paul said, “I am pure from the blood of all men.” Like the trustworthy watchman in Ezekiel 33:1-6, he had sounded the trumpet aloud so that all the province of Asia heard. Any who paid no heed, their blood would be upon their own heads, but Paul was free of responsibility for their doom.

Ministers in Hell

There will be many ministers in hell. In hell they are obligated, as part of their punishment, to preach to their congregations those same precepts that brought their souls down to perdition. People who have seen visions of hell will confirm this. Ministers in the afterlife are forced to tell the people that “A loving God would never send anyone to hell.” “There is no hell.” “God loves you unconditionally no matter what you do.” “There are many roads to heaven, as long as you are sincere.” As the ministers preach this in hell to their congregations, the people absolutely hate them and jeer at them incessantly. The anguish the minister feels is indescribable.

Truly, the leader has the greater condemnation (cf. Jas. 3:1). We can be sure of this one thing—if we want the praise of men on earth, we will not have it in the hereafter. On the other hand, the ministers who have faithfully told men the truth and withstood the frowns of the people while on earth will be exonerated for all eternity.

The Minister Must Guard His Own Heart First, Then the Flock

20:28 “*Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*”

The flock is *not* the minister's first concern. The minister's first concern is his own life. Paul said the same thing to Timothy (cf. 1 Tim. 4:16). We must make sure that our own heart is right before God. Secondly, we should look after the flock. Paul is speaking to the ministers here, not lay people.

Paul is addressing “the elders” of Ephesus. *Elder* is a general term. It can refer to a number of offices, depending on the context. This group of *elders* consisted of many pastors and leaders in the churches of Ephesus. The Apostle Peter said he was an elder (1 Pet. 5:1). The Apostle John called himself an elder (2 Jn.1:1, 3 Jn.1:1). Although the apostles were called “elders,” not every elder was an apostle or pastor. Therefore, “elder” is a loose term for anyone who has some role of spiritual authority in the Church. A pastor has elders in his church, but they are not equal to the pastor. They are under his authority. In a technical sense, the pastor is the *senior* elder. Every church must have *one* head. When there is more than one head in a church, you have a monster. You have confusion.

Paul Warns—A Great Test is Coming

20:29-31 *“For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.”* Paul was speaking to the leaders of the Ephesian Church as one who spoke to them for the last time. He was bidding them farewell. He had planted the precious truths of the Gospel for three years, and it was now their business to water those truths and to walk in them. Now Paul looks to the future. Being a prophet, he warns that after his departure, ferocious wolves would infiltrate the flock and ravage the sheep. Truly, a test was coming to the churches of Ephesus. But even more so, a test was coming for the *ministers*.

“Of Your Own Selves”

Now we come to the saddest part of all. Some of the ministers themselves who had listened to Paul for nearly three years would cause the most harm to the flock. Paul had warned and exhorted the brethren numerous times and with many tears. If they had not received the message by now, would they ever? Unfortunately, a number of Paul's pupils had never allowed God to cleanse the motives of their hearts. After Paul left they would “draw disciples after them.” Here is the trademark of people who are *not* genuine—they draw men to *themselves*. A true shepherd draws men to Christ. We can see that the greatest problem of all is not Satan but an unsundered heart! People who will not commit themselves fully to the Lord later become a conduit through whom Satan works.

That this falling away did in fact take place at Ephesus is apparent from Paul's letters to Timothy (cf. 1 Tim. 1:3-7, 1:19, 4:1; 2 Tim. 1:15, 2:17). The Pastoral Epistles tell of a general revolt against Paul's teaching throughout the province of Asia. John also in the Revelation had to admonish them for having abandoned their first love (Rev. 2:4).

20:32 *“And now brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.”* Although Paul must leave, God was ever with them and His Mighty Word which was able to sustain and keep them.

Paul's Immaculate Testimony

20:33-35 *“I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”* Paul was a true servant. He worked very hard, and had great financial integrity (1 Sam. 12:3-5). Believers who are not honest and upright with money ultimately do not prosper. Money reveals much about our character and conscience.

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Some always have their hand out and complain: “I did not get anything out of the worship service or sermon!” But do they come to church just to *receive* something? People should bring a sacrifice of thanksgiving. *“Give and it shall be given unto you.”*

20:36-38 *“And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.”* The brethren had a tremendous love for Paul. The genuine are respected. Now, Paul heads for Jerusalem.

Chapter Twenty-One

THE THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY ENDS PAUL IS REJECTED AND IMPRISONED AT JERUSALEM

From Miletus to Tyre

21:1-3 *“And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them [i. e. the elders at Miletus], and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara: And finding a ship sailing over unto [Phoenicia], we went aboard, and set forth. Now when he had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden.”* (See map on p.127).

Paul Warned Not to Go to Jerusalem

21:4 *“And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem.”* While residing at Tyre for seven days, the disciples there warned the Apostle Paul by the Spirit not to go to Jerusalem. Paul himself knew that trouble was waiting there (cf. 20:22-23). Whether or not Paul should have continued his journey to Jerusalem has been a matter of debate for centuries by theologians. We should not conclude that his determination to go on was disobedience to the guidance of the Spirit of God. Paul was driven by an overwhelming burden that he had for his people (Rom. 9:1-3). Since his friends by the prophetic spirit were able to foretell his tribulation and imprisonment, it was natural for them to try to dissuade him from going.

From Tyre to Caesarea Where They Abode at Philip's House

21:5-9 *“And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed. And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again. And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day. And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.”* This is the Philip who preached to Samaria and the Ethiopian eunuch in chapter 8. He is one of the seven deacons mentioned in Acts 6:5. By this time he had a flourishing family of four daughters. These were a crown of glory to him, for they were all prophetesses.

The Holy Spirit Again Warns Paul

21:10-14 *“And as we tarried there [a number of] days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. [Luke was also beseeching him here.] Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.”*

Paul and his company tarried several days at Caesarea. While they were there, the prophet Agabus came to visit them. He was the prophet who foretold the famine (Acts 11:27) that came to pass in 45 A.D. Although Agabus warned that Paul would be bound in Jerusalem, he did not interpret his utterance to mean that Paul should not go on to Jerusalem. However, Paul's companions, Luke included, drew that conclusion, and entreated him with tears not to proceed.

Paul would not be detracted by their entreaties, although he was moved by their weeping. His determination was in fact weakened by it for he said, *“What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart?”* “Breaking my heart” from the original language means “to soften the will.” He asked them to desist for he was prepared not merely to be imprisoned, but to give up his very life in Jerusalem, if necessary. When the brethren saw that his mind was made up, they prayed that the Lord's will might be done.

Paul Arrives at Jerusalem / Third Missionary Journey Ends

21:15-16 *“And after those days we took up our [baggage], and went up to Jerusalem. There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an [early] disciple, with whom we should lodge.*

After spending a number of days in Caesarea, the team set forth on the last stage of their trip. Travelling by land, they started their journey of sixty-four miles to Jerusalem. Accompanying them were some of their friends from Caesarea who knew a place in Jerusalem where Paul and his party could be housed. This was the house of Mnason, who was born in Cyprus. Not every member of the Jewish-Christian church in Jerusalem was willing to entertain a party of Gentile Christians in his home. Mnason was a Hellenistic Jew and was probably more openhearted to the Gentiles. Mnason was “an early disciple”—one of the original Jerusalem disciples. Now that Paul has arrived at Jerusalem, his third missionary journey has been completed.

Paul Warmly Received by the Jerusalem Leaders

21:17-20a *“And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord...”*

Upon their arrival at Jerusalem, Paul and his fellow-travelers received a friendly welcome from the leaders of the church, which was presided over by James. Without a doubt, the gift from the Gentile churches (which was probably quite lavish) was much appreciated, although Luke says nothing of it here. Then Paul gave a detailed account (“particularly”) of all that God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. He reported on the progress of the churches in Phrygia, Galatia, and other parts of Asia Minor, and likewise those in Macedonia and Achaia, from whence he had just returned.

Paul would have to avoid subjects which would excite painful feelings, and arouse bitter prejudice in some of his audience. He could hardly speak of Galatia and the perversion of his converts there. Nor could he mention the state of Corinth and the Judaisers from Palestine who had introduced confusion and strife among the believers in that city. Paul tactfully avoided this. Accordingly, we find that the majority of the elders were favorably impressed by his report. Then the assembly glorified God for the wonders He had wrought. But then they made a request of him in v 20-25.

The Request—Conform So As Not to Offend

21:20b-26 “*And they said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law; And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; Take them, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. As [concerning] the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication. Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.*”

The elders of the church of Jerusalem unburdened their minds to Paul about a pressing issue at hand. It was freely rumored among the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem that Paul had not only excused the Gentile believers from the rituals and customs handed down by Moses and the ancestors, but that he actually dissuaded the *Jewish* believers as well from practicing them. His opponents charged that Paul had even urged them to give up circumcising their sons.

There was a way in which Paul himself could prove those reports to be false. If he were seen publicly taking part in one of the ancestral customs, it would be realized that he was, after all, a pious and observant Jew. Therefore, he was asked to join four other men of their number who evidently had taken a Nazarite vow. Paul was advised to join with them in the purification rite and to pay the expenses of their offering. By doing this, said the elders, the whole multitude of Jerusalem (believers and unbelievers alike) will see for themselves that you conform to the law of Moses and the customs.

They further assured Paul that they had no desire to go back on the decision of the Apostolic Council (Acts 15) and impose these rituals on the Gentile converts. Paul's participation in the temple was saying in effect that he did not attack or criticize the Jewish customs and the law, though he knew very well that those customs were now *obsolete*. As for the Gentile believers, of course, the leaders had already agreed at the Council of Acts 15 that nothing should be imposed on them except the four abstentions detailed in the apostolic letter (Acts 15:23-29).

Points to Remember:

- Paul never attacked Jewish customs, the temple, or circumcision.
In fact, he even circumcised Timothy, whose mother was Jewish, just for wider acceptance.
- However, Paul would not allow the Jews to *impose* these rituals upon the Gentiles.
Titus, a Gentile, Paul would not circumcise. None of these rituals were necessary for salvation or perfection. The Jews had grown up with these customs and wanted to hold on to them.
- Paul was willing to comply with the Jewish customs, just to show that he was not attacking them.
- It was 58 A.D.—28 years after Pentecost. The Church in Jerusalem had not moved on. They were still bound up in rituals and sacrifices. Jerusalem and her children were in bondage (Gal. 4:25).
- Though born-again and Spirit-filled, they were in bondage to the customs of the Old Testament.
- Later Paul wrote his *Epistle to the Hebrews* in an attempt to wean them away from these rituals.

The State of the Church at Jerusalem

Twenty-eight years had passed since the day of Pentecost. The mother Church at Jerusalem still continued to offer sacrifices in the temple and to observe all the Levitical ordinances instituted by Moses. Instead of moving forward, they were going backward. In all of Paul's epistles, you can detect the state of the people by the things he had to say to them. Five years later, in 63 A.D., Paul wrote to the Hebrews. This was their state:

- 2:1 They were not giving heed to the things which they had heard.
- 2:3 They were neglecting so great a salvation.
- 3:8 They were hardening their hearts.
- 3:12-14 Some had an evil heart of unbelief and were turning from the living God.
- 4:1-11 They were not entering into rest, nor ceasing from their own works, ideas, or opinions.
- 5:11 They were dull of hearing. Paul had so much more to say but they could not hear it.
- 5:12-14 They should have been teachers by this time, but were still infants requiring “milk.”
- 6:1-3 They had not progressed past the foundational teachings, and were not clear on the basics, and were not going on to perfection.
- 6:6 They were crucifying the Son of God afresh....by offering animal sacrifices, etc.
- 6:7-9 They were bearing *thorns* (works of the flesh) instead of *herbs* (fruit of the Spirit).
- 6:12 Some were slothful and impatient.
- 7:11,19 They were trying to come to perfection by Old Testament rituals. Paul told them that if the first covenant and priesthood had worked, God would not have raised up a new one (8:7).
- 10:1-3 They were still offering sacrifices. Paul explains that by *one* offering Christ has put away our sins forever (9:26, 9:28, 10:10, 10:12, 10:14).
- 10:26 Some were sinning wilfully, while others were sinning through ignorance.
- 10:35,36 Some were casting away their confidence, and had need of patience.
- 11:1-40 Paul preaches a whole chapter on *faith* because they were seeking perfection through rituals and works. Faith comes from *a relationship*, not rituals.
- 12:5-11 They had forgotten the exhortations not to despise the chastenings of the Lord.
- 12:8 Many were spiritually “illegitimate” because they refused the Father's corrections and did not bear His likeness.
- 12:12 They were feeble and discouraged; their hands were hanging down and their knees were weak.
- 12:15 They were troubled with bitterness and were failing to receive the grace of God.
- 12:16,17 They were in danger of losing their birthrights, as did Esau.
- 12:25 They were refusing Him who was speaking from heaven.
- 13:9 They were carried about with strange doctrines ... Levitical ordinances and legalism.

Paul exalts Jesus as God and Co-creator, being greater than Moses, the Law, the prophets, and angels. The Father created the whole universe by Christ (Heb.1:2). By one offering, the offering of Himself, He has perfected forever them who are sanctified (10:12-14). Paul reasons with the Hebrew believers in this manner—“Why should we *continue* to offer the blood of animals when God Himself has offered his own blood once and for all. What can we add to God.” Paul's whole epistle shows how much *greater* the new covenant is than the old covenant which is now outdated.

The result of neglecting, not giving heed, refusing Him who is speaking from heaven, hardening the heart, and not ceasing from their own works, was this—the Jerusalem church was drying up, backsliding. They were discouraged and not entering into rest, which was the fruit of not making a break with the past religion. The same message applies to today's charismatic movement and all others who have experienced an awakening from God but have not since moved on with God.

Just twelve years later in A. D. 70, Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Roman armies. Since that time, Israel has not had a temple or sacrifices. This event gave further evidence that God was finished with the Old Covenant. The destruction of Jerusalem was also God's wrath on that city for what they had done to His Son on the cross. Although there were thousands of believers in Jerusalem, the vast majority of the city had rejected Christ and His apostles.

Paul Seized in the Temple

21:27-30 “And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut.”

The city was in an uproar. Not only were the non-believing Jews incensed against Paul but born-again, Spirit-filled Jews got caught up in this as well. Many Jewish believers had been so poisoned against Paul that he was considered an enemy; therefore, they took part in the riot. This should serve as a lesson to all of us today. Believers can become instruments of the devil when they are misled or misinformed. We should not get into *causes*, marches and demonstrations ... all in the name of “righteous indignation.” “The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God” (Jas.1:19-20). There was such animosity against the name of Paul in Jerusalem that when Paul wrote to the Hebrews several years later he did not affix his name to the epistle.

Paul Rescued by the Roman Authorities

21:31-36 “And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul. Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done. And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle. And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him.”

Unfortunately, some of the Christian community joined the frenzy. As soon as the military tribune (or chief captain) received a report of the tumult, he summoned a detachment of soldiers, probably not less than two hundred with their centurions, and they came and forced Paul's assailants to stop manhandling him. Then Paul was arrested and ordered to be handcuffed to two soldiers. When the chief captain tried to find out what Paul had done and who he was, he could get no clear answer. The denunciations hurled at Paul were too confused and conflicting. Therefore he commanded the soldiers to bring Paul into the nearby fortress for questioning. The angry mob pressed hard upon the soldiers who had custody of Paul. When they reached the steps leading up to the fortress, Paul had to be carried by the soldiers so the crowd would not pull him down.

The Chief Captain Authorizes Paul to Speak to the Multitude

21:37-40 “*And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek? Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers? But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people. And when he had given him license, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying...*” Paul gives his defense in the next chapter.

As the chief captain (or tribune) tried to size up the situation, he suddenly jumped to a conclusion as F.F. Bruce deduces from the writings of Josephus. Three years previous to this, an Egyptian appeared in Jerusalem claiming to be a prophet, and he led a large band of followers to the Mount of Olives. There he bade them wait until, at his word of command, the walls of the city would fall flat. They should then march in, overthrow the Roman garrison and take possession of Jerusalem. Felix the procurator sent troops against them, killing several, and taking others prisoner. Then the Egyptian disappeared, his followers feeling mocked by their imposter leader. The chief captain thought Paul was that Egyptian who had secretly revisited the city, and being detected had become the target of the people's rage.

Therefore, he was quite surprised when Paul, having been carried to the top of the steps, addressed him in an educated Greek tongue and asked for permission to speak to the throng below. “Do you speak Greek?” he asked. “I thought you were that Egyptian who led four thousand men into the wilderness some time back.” Paul assured him that he was not an Egyptian, but a citizen of the famous Cilician city of *Tarsus*, and born of Jewish stock. Then he requested permission to speak to the crowd of Jews below. The chief captain gave Paul permission, and the apostle, standing at the top of the steps, which were no doubt strongly guarded by soldiers to prevent any of the mob from trying to mount them, began to speak to the Jews standing down in the outer court of the temple, addressing them in the Hebrew tongue.

Saul of Tarsus

Before we get into Paul's defense before the people, I would like to take a few moments to look at the city of Tarsus where Paul was born and raised until the age of thirteen. Twice in this part of the narrative (21:39, 22:3), Paul draws attention to his native city. Christ mentioned him once as “Saul of Tarsus” in 9:11. Altogether, Tarsus is mentioned five times (9:11, 9:30, 11:25, 21:39, 22:3). Tarsus was the capital city of the province of Cilicia. It was “no ordinary city.” The population was half a million inhabitants. Let us have a look at the city God chose for the upbringing of the man who would become the Apostle to the Gentiles and writer of 14 of our 27 New Testament books. Remember—accent, mannerisms, and mentality are influenced by the place of our nativity.

Industrially the province was known for its Cilician cloth, a dark coarse material made of goat's hair. It was used for tentmaking as well as for other purposes. Tentmaking was Paul's trade and most likely the trade of his father.

Culturally Tarsus was a Greek city of higher learning. It competed with Rome and Alexandria as one of the best cities in the empire, being more illustrious for learning than was Athens. The Greek language and literature were studiously cultivated there. Tarsus was a city of refinement.

Learning was a passion in Tarsus. It had a state-supported university like other major cities in the empire. But unlike other cities, the university was filled with people from Tarsus and Cilicia. In other cities, their universities were filled with outsiders.

Tarsus was a city of *refined speech* and writing. The Greek language was the richest and most delicate the world has seen, and it was destined to become the language of the holy Scriptures. Paul learned it well in Tarsus. He memorized the Greek version of the Old Testament by heart, and quoted it more often than the Hebrew in his epistles, and that verbatim. The command Paul had of the Greek language, as seen in his speech on Mars Hill in Athens, would not have been attained by a Jew unless it had been the familiar speech of his childhood.

Morally Tarsus was conservative. Women wore veils on the streets. In other cities the standards were much more loose. Also, there was little racial prejudice there, and it was not anti-Semitic.

Commercially Tarsus was a thriving emporium of trade. Paul was reared amid the busy streets and crowded bazaars of Tarsus, thronged with merchants, students, and sailors from all parts of the world. Tarsus was ten miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea and was connected to the sea by the Cyndus River. Ships from many countries came up the Cyndus into artificial docks of the city. Unconsciously, as he grew, Paul was being prepared to understand every aspect of human life, and to become acquainted with the thoughts and habits of the marketplaces, stores, customs and cultures and languages of all people. He was becoming a man for whom nothing which touched human life was foreign. Jews raised in Palestine were not exposed to all this and remained locked in their narrow world of prejudice. Paul was accustomed to seeing men from all walks of life which helped him develop a broad world outlook. He was being prepared to become the teacher of the nations.

Summary—Ways Tarsus Molded Paul

- He grew up among Gentiles and was familiar with men of all walks of life. This made him versatile, “all things to all men.” *Subconsciously* a broad world outlook was developed in him during his impressionable years (age 1-12), yet he remained a “Hebrew of Hebrews.”
- He imbibed a passion for learning in Tarsus. This was the mentality of the city. Paul wanted only one thing in life—“the excellency of the knowledge of Christ.” At first, he wanted to be a rabbi.
- He mastered the Greek language as a youth. Tarsus was a city of refined speech. His synagogue (where he was trained as a child) and his family were well exercised in their use of the Greek version of the Old Testament. This was the version that most of his future listeners were familiar with, and the language in which he wrote the sacred Scriptures.
- He was accustomed to Jewish synagogues that were filled with Gentile proselytes. After conversion he preached in synagogues that had many Gentiles who usually responded better than the Jews.
- He was exposed to Roman law and the Roman court system by being in a prominent city like Tarsus. His father was a Roman citizen, thus, Paul was “freeborn” with the same rights. Paul's knowledge of the laws and rights of the empire saved him numerous times.
- He was well acquainted with metropolitan life. Tarsus was the capital city with a population of 500,000. Paul later stood before Caesar, and many other dignitaries.

Chapter Twenty-Two

PAUL TESTIFIES AT JERUSALEM

22:1 “*Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you.*” The word “defence” is *apologia* in Greek, the root for “apologetics.” Although Paul was making a necessary defence for his Christian stand, it is not good for us to become overly involved in Christian apologetics. Trying to prove the existence of God or the story of creation is usually futile. Unless God imparts grace to a person, he cannot understand. Not everyone is given the gift of repentance. Therefore, it is better to *offer* the truth to your hearers rather than *defend* it. The servant of the Lord must not strive (2 Tim. 2:24-26). The Word of God is “the Sword of the Spirit;” it is a weapon. When you confront your enemy, do not *defend* your weapon. Evil spirits in people deny the truth, saying, “I don't believe in that sword, it is old and dull, it can cause no harm.” You would not reply to your enemy—“Oh, but it is an effective sword.” No, you would *use it* on him!

Paul Addresses Jerusalem in the Hebrew Tongue

22:2 “*(And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,)*” Paul was seeking to open the hearts of the Jews by speaking to them in their own native Hebrew tongue. This gesture would call forth at least a temporary measure of good will because speaking in Hebrew was saying to the audience—“Paul is one of us.”

Paul's Heritage and Upbringing

22:3-4 “*I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.*”

Two Homes - Tarsus and Jerusalem

As a Jew speaking to Jews, Paul tells his hearers that his upbringing was that of a strict orthodox Jew. He was born and raised in Tarsus, yet brought up in Jerusalem. Paul had two homes. From birth until age thirteen he had lived in Tarsus, but in his teenage years he came to Jerusalem to study to be a rabbi (or teacher of the law). Besides this, he was trained by the eminent Gamaliel (5:34).

The Famous Gamaliel - Paul's Teacher

Gamaliel's learning was so outstanding and his character so revered that he was only one of seven men among Jewish doctors honored with the title of Rabban. Gamaliel represented the liberal wing of the Pharisees, having risen above the prejudices of his denomination. Youthful Paul, on the other hand, was “of the strictest sect a Pharisee” (26:5). Subconsciously, Gamaliel had an effect on young impressionable Paul, teaching him to be less biased and more open-minded.

Therefore, Paul was “taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers and was zealous toward God” ... just as his audience. The Israelites had a zeal for God “*but not according to knowledge*” (cf. Rom.10:2-3).

22:4 “*And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.*” Paul attempts to establish a rapport with his audience:

- He is speaking to them in their own native Hebrew language.
- He himself was a devout Jew.
- He was raised in Jerusalem, not only in Tarsus.
- He was trained by the famous Rabbi Gamaliel.
- He was zealous of the law, even as they were.
- He had persecuted the Christian “way” even unto death.
- He was saying in effect—“I am totally identified with you in every respect.”

Paul's Conversion

22:5-9 “*As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished. And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.*” This is the second place in Acts where Paul's conversion is narrated, and the first of two places where Paul himself is giving the account (the other being in Acts 26:12-18). In chapter 9, the story is told by Luke.

Paul continues to seek a sympathetic response from his audience in Jerusalem. Some twenty-four years earlier, he had inaugurated a campaign to repress all those who belonged to “The Way.” On a particular day Paul was traveling to Damascus with a mission in mind. He was armed with letters authorizing him as an emissary from the high priest and Sanhedrin at Jerusalem to arrest and extradite Christians who had fled to that city for refuge. Suddenly, as he approached the walls of Damascus at noon time, a light enveloped him, whose intensity surpassed that of the sun.

Falling to the ground from the awesomeness of the Light, a voice with great authority challenged him: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” In astonishment Paul asked, “Who are you, Lord?” Even more astounding was the swift reply, “I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.” While the dialogue continued between Paul and the risen Christ, his traveling companions stood perplexed nearby (cf. 26:13-18). They, too, had seen the blazing Light and were temporarily dazed by it and fell to the ground. Now the men could hear Paul speaking, but were unable to see or hear the One to whom he was speaking.

“What Shall I Do, Lord?”— Others Will Tell You!

22:10-11 “*And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.*” God uses other men and women to speak to us. Christ could have told Paul more but instead, He had Paul go into the city. There, He provided a man (Ananias) to speak further to him. Also, Paul needed others to guide him there. Thus, he was learning *dependence* upon others.

Ministry of Ananias to Paul

22:12-16 *“And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”*

In 22:12-16, Paul describes the visit paid him by Ananias. The ministry of Ananias to Paul is recorded more fully in 9:10-18. Ananias was a pious and law-abiding Jew of Damascus who was respected by of all his fellow-Jews in that city. Paul would make this point to the Jews in Jerusalem—that Ananias was law-abiding and had the favor of all the Jews. The first thing Ananias did when he came into the house where Paul abode was to announce the restoration of his eyesight. The words “Brother Saul, receive your sight” in 22:13, are an abbreviated version of 9:17.

“The God of our fathers,” said Ananias in language characteristic of Jewish piety, “has appointed you to learn His will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear the voice from His mouth; because you are to be His witness to all men concerning the things that you have seen and heard. And now, why delay? Rise up, get yourself baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on His name.”

Paul's Commission to the Gentiles Reaffirmed

22:17-21 *“And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.”*

After his conversion at Damascus and three years in the Arabian desert, Paul made a short visit to Jerusalem. During those fifteen days there (Gal.1:17-18), the Lord had told Paul while he was worshipping in the temple to get out of Jerusalem quickly. He had already engaged in vigorous debate with the Hellenistic Jews of Jerusalem and had roused keen hostility (9:29). The animosity was intensified even more because they remembered his former zeal *against* the Christian movement. Now they looked upon him as a *traitor*. Notwithstanding, Paul was minded to remain in Jerusalem during that first visit (37 A.D.).

Then Paul received a direct command from Christ while in the temple to leave immediately because the Lord knew his testimony would not be received there. Paul pleaded in gentle protest, pointing out that his former anti-Christian activity in Jerusalem was still fresh in the people's minds and that many would remember the responsible part he had in the stoning of Stephen. But his former record did the opposite—it made them even more unwilling to hear him. Thus, the Lord told him to depart from Jerusalem. Henceforth, his mission field would be primarily to the Gentile world. The brethren, knowing of a plot against Paul's life, sent him home to Tarsus (9:29-30).

Lord, I Know Who I Can Relate to Best!—God Says, No You Don't

Paul reasoned with the Lord that he could “relate” to the people of Jerusalem because he was one of them and understood them. “After all, they know my former life and how I repressed the Christian movement, and my role in Stephen's stoning.” But God had a different plan and knew which people Paul could minister to most effectively. Therefore, rather than *tell* the Lord what we can do best and what we would like to do for Him, let us *ask* Him—“What wilt thou have me to do?”

At the Mention of the Gentiles, Jealousy Explodes Again

22:21-23 *“And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.” And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live. And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air,”*

The crowd in the outer court of the temple listened patiently to Paul until he spoke of his mission to the Gentiles. As soon as he mentioned the Gentiles, jealousy erupted with redoubled fury. While the chief captain could not find the precise reason for their grievance against Paul, it was quite clear that they were bitterly hostile to him and were out for his blood. The Jews were vexed with jealousy. They believed they had a monopoly on spiritual matters and did not want to share that position with anyone. The very thought of God's blessing the Gentiles infuriated them. If you are troubled with jealousy, remember that God's acceptance of others is not His rejection of you.

The Chief Captain Seeks to Know the Reason for the Uproar

22:24 *“The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him.”* The chief captain despaired of getting any coherent explanation from the mob for the uproar. Therefore, he sought to find out the truth from Paul himself—by torture. Thus, he ordered him to be scourged.

Paul's Roman Citizenship Exempts Him From Scourging

22:25-29 *“And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born. Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.”*

Once again, Paul was protected by the Roman government because he was a citizen. Being a Roman citizen exempted a person from shameful punishments such as scourging or crucifixion. Also, a Roman citizen was entitled to a fair hearing. Men could be put to death for punishing a Roman without a fair trial. Thus, the chief captain was afraid when he learned that Paul was a Roman. Roman citizenship could be purchased for a large sum of money, as was the case with the chief captain. It was also granted to individuals for services rendered to the state or imperial family. Paul was “freeborn” which is to say that his father was a Roman citizen and Paul automatically assumed the same rights and privileges.

The Chief Captain Orders the Sanhedrin to Hold a Session

22:30 “On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them.” The agitated crowd could give no coherent reasons for their grievance against Paul, but certainly the Sanhedrin should be able to explain to the chief captain what was at the bottom of all this. Therefore, the chief captain ordered the Council to hold a meeting the next day, and when they were in session, he brought Paul from the fortress to the assembly of elders. Before Paul testifies before the Jewish supreme court, I would like to digress for a moment to mention several reasons why it is important to study the life of Paul.

REASONS FOR STUDYING PAUL'S LIFE

1. God Made Paul Our Example: The Lord made Paul a “*pattern* to all those who would believe” according to 1 Timothy 1:16. Paul himself said, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 4:16, 11:1, Phil. 3:17, 1 Thes. 1:6). Therefore, Paul is our role model.

2. God Gave Paul Special Revelation to Give to Us: For this reason we must listen to everything he speaks to us. In Ephesians 3:2-4, Paul says “God gave me this Gospel to give to you.” God opened Paul's eyes so that Paul could open our eyes. He says, “The mystery ... which is given to me *for you* (Col. 1:25-26). When Christ met Paul on the Damascus Road, it affected you and me.

3. We Are to Partake of Paul's Grace: “Ye are all partakers of my grace” (Phil. 1:7). Paul had met Christ in unusual ways, and we can receive the same spirit that Paul had as we open our hearts to his message and life. It is good to be around godly men, for what they have rubs off on us.

4. Paul is the Supreme Interpreter of the New Covenant: He is the writer of 14 of our 27 New Testament books. His life also takes up most of the narrative of Acts. He understood the mysteries of redemption and explained them to us in his writings. Paul had an understanding of eternity, having been in the third heaven, and he understood the hope of our calling.

5. Paul Gives Us the Right Goals for Which to Aim: He was seeking to attain to the highest calling in his own personal life, and he sought to birth the same aspirations in each of his listeners. We are his listeners just as much as those who read his epistles in the first century. He wanted to know Christ and finish his course with joy; he wanted a better resurrection and a better eternity.

Paul exhorted: “Set your affections on things above, not on things in the earth.” He reminded us that “our citizenship is in heaven.” Paul shows us what the real issues are in life and what to aim for, how to get there, how to lead others there, and what to avoid in our march toward Zion. His goal was Christian perfection for himself and all his listeners, not just to make it to heaven. There will be many Christians who get to heaven with unfulfilled calls and forfeited crowns (Rev. 3:11). They will have to settle for an inferior place in the eternal kingdom of heaven (Mt. 5:19).

* Paul's missionary journeys also directly affect us. The churches he started, the methods he employed, the sermons he preached, the epistles he wrote—all of these affect us and our eternal destiny. His words are carefully written down and preserved for us so that we can benefit from them just as much as (and even more than) the original readers of the first century.

6. Paul's Life Shows How God Trains Us Even Before Conversion: God is at work in our lives long before we know Him as our Savior. This is clearly seen in the life of the Apostle Paul. Paul said he was “separated [unto God] from his mother's womb” (Gal.1:15). Yet he did not know Christ until the Damascus Road experience in his early thirties. Not only from birth is God's hand upon our lives. In Ephesians 1:4, Paul goes back even further, saying that we are “chosen in him before the foundation of the world.” (cf. Jer.1:5).

God had a purpose for Paul being born and raised in Tarsus, rather than in Palestine. It is God who determines where we are born and brought up. To form a man who was to become “the apostle to the Gentiles,” God needed a Hebrew who had contact with both the Hebrew and Gentile worlds because Christianity grew out of Judaism. Therefore, God needed a man who was well versed in the Old Testament law and rituals and could open up their hidden spiritual meanings and present them to both Hebrews and Gentiles. Paul was such a man. He was uniquely tailored for the job. He was a devout Jew who was brought up in a notable Gentile city, raised in a synagogue that was filled with Gentile proselytes, and acquainted with men of all walks of life.

His teacher, Gamaliel, was a liberal Pharisee. There were many different sects of Pharisees, just as there are many variations of Baptists or Methodists. Paul was a Pharisee “of the strictest sect.” He was ultraconservative, but God placed him under a liberal teacher to make him less biased, even before he knew Christ. God also made sure that Paul's father had Roman citizenship so that Paul would have it as well. Paul needed to understand the Roman system of law because being a Roman saved him on numerous occasions, and it also gave him the right to appeal to Caesar later in life.

7. In Paul We See God's Grace to the Chiefest of Sinners: When we look at Paul's past, this gives us hope that we can also make it. In spite of missing the mark grievously before he was saved, Paul really amounted to something, and so can we. The writer of most of the New Testament was a terrible man before his conversion. Paul could say, “He is able to save to the uttermost” (Heb. 7:25). Although Paul was ashamed of his past, he had no condemnation in his heart (Rom. 8:1). Such is the power of the blood of the new covenant.

8. Paul's Life and Ministry Give us Keys For Propagating the Gospel: In just ten years, (from 48 to 58 A.D.), Paul was nearly done with his life's work. He had founded countless churches in many countries and cultures and these churches were flourishing. Paul did not believe it would take “generations” for his converts to be cleansed of their traditions, superstitions, and philosophies.

9. In Paul's Life We See the Effects of Being Dedicated to a Right or Wrong Idea: In his life we see the power of an idea. Compare Paul before and after his conversion. Before meeting Christ Paul used all of his energy to destroy the Church of Christ. Later, he became the greatest defender of it. What made the difference?—it was a changed mind. Sincerity is not enough. It is the truth that sets us free, not sincerity. Paul knew what a wrong idea could do to a man. For this reason, he was very particular about what his converts listened to and believed. This is seen repeatedly in his epistles.

10. In Short, Paul Tells Us How to Live: Paul confronts believers with practical issues such as: financial integrity, faithfulness in secular work, family relationships, getting along with others, and much more. As Christians, we should not put the secular and the spiritual into separate categories. Everything is spiritual. If we are not faithful in the natural (job, money, family) we will fail spiritually.

Chapter Twenty-Three

PAUL GOES FROM JERUSALEM TO CAESAREA

In this chapter, Paul testifies before the Jewish supreme court in verses 1-10. During the hearing he turned the Pharisees against the Sadducees by claiming that the charges laid against him concerned his hope in the resurrection. Still, the chief captain could not understand why Paul was such an object of controversy among the Jews. The hearing did not clarify anything, but only produced more discord. The tribune remained puzzled. *Jealousy*, of course, was at the bottom of it all.

Then more than forty Jews bound themselves to an oath, determined that they would not eat or drink until they had murdered Paul. When the plot to assassinate Paul was told to the chief captain, he made hasty preparation to transfer Paul to the Roman military base at Caesarea under the cover of night, sending Paul with an escort of two hundred Roman soldiers (verses 12-24).

In verses 25-30, the chief captain (Claudius Lysias), writes a letter to Felix the governor. In the letter he summarizes the events surrounding Paul, from the temple riot to the plot to kill him, and his consequent decision to send Paul to Caesarea that the case might be further reviewed in the governors court. In the final verses (31-35), Paul arrives at Caesarea where the chief captain's letter is read and Felix promises Paul to hear him fully when his accusers come.

Paul Stands Before the Sanhedrin

23:1-5 *“And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law? And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God’s high priest? Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.”*

A Good Conscience

“I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.” Paul always tried to live up to the dictates of his conscience (cf. Acts 24:16). In his unconverted state, he was “blameless” regarding his observance of the letter of the law (Phil. 3:6). Sincerity, however, cannot justify men. Man's conscience is often misinformed and needs to be reeducated and redeemed. Paul believed he was doing the right thing when he persecuted the Christian Church in his younger years. He acknowledges in 1 Timothy 1:13 that God showed him mercy because he did it “ignorantly in unbelief.”

Everyone is judged by the *measure* of light he possesses. The more light we have, the more we are held responsible. Paul was very sincere before his conversion but he lacked the light, the truth. God saw the sincere motives of his heart and elected to show him mercy. God knew that when He showed Paul the truth he would be loyal to it. Someone else in history devoured God's heritage—Lucifer. He did not receive mercy or the gift of repentance because of the light he had. Lucifer lived in the very presence of the Light but he chose to rebel and lead an insurrection against the Most High. He persuaded one-third of heaven to turn from God to follow him. Man's situation is different. He is veiled from the Lord and His light, and therefore, man is given the opportunity to repent.

Ananias the High Priest

“And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.” Paul was not allowed to proceed any further with his defense. Ananias was so upset by Paul's claim of a good conscience that he signaled those who stood near him to smite him. Ananias the high priest was one of the most despicable men ever to hold his office. Known for his bad character and greed, Josephus says he swindled tithes for himself which belonged to the other priests. Even after being deposed from the priesthood, he used violence and assassinations to further his greedy interests.

Paul Retorts

Such unseemly behavior from a member of the Sanhedrin urged Paul into an indignant retort. “God shall strike you, you whitewashed wall. You sit in a position to judge me in accordance with the law, and yet you break the law yourself by ordering me to be struck.” Under Jewish law, the rights of defendants were carefully protected. Men on trial were presumed innocent until proven guilty. Up to this point, a legal charge had not even been posted against Paul, yet he was smitten in contempt as though he were a condemned criminal.

The metaphor “thou whitened wall” suggests a tottering wall whose precarious condition has been covered by a generous coat of whitewash. In spite of outward appearances, a man who behaved as Ananias was destined to come to ruin. His was the haughty spirit of Proverbs 16:18 that goes before a fall. Paul's words, “God shall smite thee thou whitened wall,” were more prophetic than he realized. If he had known Ananias more intimately, he could not have spoken more suitably of his character and destiny. According to Josephus, in A.D. 66, his own countrymen dragged him from an aqueduct in which he had tried to hide and put him to death along with his brother.

Authority is Honored

Bystanders were shocked at Paul's spirited counter. “Was this any manner in which to speak to the high priest?” they thought. When they informed Paul that the man to whom he had spoken so freely was God's high priest, he apologized immediately. 23:5 “Then said Paul, I [knew] not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.” Here Paul is quoting from Exodus 22:28. Paul was careful not to attack leadership, even if the leader was an evil man. Remember, he later appealed to Caesar for help, and Nero was a homosexual. We should never spend our time reviling others, especially those in authority. A hardness and bitterness enters our hearts when we call people names or treat them without due respect. Paul always taught the Church to respect authority (cf. Rom. 13:1-7). Whether the authority is good or not is irrelevant.

The Sanhedrin Are Turned Against One Another

23:6-10 *“But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both. And there arose a great [clamor]: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God. And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.”*

Paul Divides the Supreme Court

The interruption made by the high priest caused Paul to change his tactics. Paul had noticed that part of the assembly were Sadducees, a denominational group who did not believe in the resurrection, and the other part were Pharisees like himself who very much believed in the resurrection. To divert the opposition of the assembly away from himself, he set the two parties against each other.

Suddenly Paul cried out: “Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.” The hope of the resurrection was fundamental to the Pharisaic members of the Council, and, of course, of every redeemed person. Immediately, the Pharisees were sympathetic to Paul and conceded that a man so sound on basic Pharisaic doctrine could just not be that bad after all.

Thus, the segment of Pharisees rallied around Paul to defend him, and the Sadducees were more enraged than ever. The dispute which broke out almost immediately between the two rivals made it impossible to secure a serious examination of Paul or a clarification of the charges laid against him. Paul, likely to be torn asunder between the two livid factions of the Sanhedrin, was snatched from the midst of them. The chief captain's attempt to clarify the complaints against Paul again proved unsuccessful.

Christ Appears to Paul the Following Night

23:11 *“And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.”* Paul probably felt dejected and despondent after the events of the last two days. He had hoped that Jerusalem would receive his message (Rom.15:25-32). Then he intended to go to Rome and on to Spain. Now he faced his worst apprehensions. Then the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to Paul, telling him to “be of good cheer.”

Was Paul in the will of God by coming to Jerusalem? We see no rebuke from the Lord here but only reassurance. As Paul had testified of Christ in Jerusalem (referring to his speech before the crowd in the temple court), Christ assured Paul that his life would be preserved and that he *must also* bear witness of the Gospel at Rome (cf. Acts 19:21). This assurance would mean much to Paul during the delays and anxieties of his next two years at Caesarea. Paul was not the victim of circumstances but the master of them. He *never* called himself the prisoner of Rome or of his circumstances, but the Lord's prisoner (cf. Eph. 3:1, 4:1, Philemon 1:1, 1:9).

The Assassination Plot Against Paul

23:12-16 *“And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy. And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to morrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him. And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul.”*

Paul Sends His Nephew to Inform the Chief Captain

23:17-22 *“Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee. Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me? And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to morrow into the council, as though they would inquire somewhat of him more perfectly. But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee. So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast showed these things to me.”*

Little is known of Paul's private life and family relationships. Here we have mention of a nephew, Paul's “sister's son.” Therefore, Paul had at least one sister. His father was a Roman citizen and a Pharisee of the strictest sect. The only mention of his mother is that Paul was “separated [unto God] from his mother's womb.” We see a great sense of loyalty to Paul in this unnamed nephew. After he had quickly reported the plot to Paul, his uncle Paul sent him to inform the chief captain.

As a Roman citizen, Paul was kept in honorable custody in the fortress of Antonia. He was allowed to receive visitors, and centurions promptly carried out his requests. Therefore, when his nephew came and told Paul of the conspiracy, Paul quickly told a centurion to take the young man to the chief captain. The tribune received him kindly and listened to his message. The tribune sensed that the report was true and regarded the matter seriously. Then he warned the nephew not to tell anyone that he had given him this information about the plot, probably for the nephew's own safety. At once, the chief captain made up his mind what had to be done. Under the cover of night—that very night—he would send Paul to Caesarea, the Roman military base, for protection. Actually, the chief captain acted with great tact and uprightness. He is mentioned *by name* for the first time in verse 26.

Paul to be Sent to Felix at Caesarea

23:23-24 *“And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; And provide them beasts that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.”*

Paul's life clearly was not safe in Jerusalem and the chief captain would not incur responsibility for the assassination of a Roman citizen, nor expose himself to any of the other risks that he would run so long as he had Paul in his custody. Thus, he summoned two centurions and commanded them to prepare a strong escort of heavy infantry, cavalry, and light-armed troops (spearmen) to set out by night for Caesarea with Paul. At nine p.m. they departed. This was the third hour of the night, Jewish time. No one could pursue them until 6:00 a.m. when the gates reopened. The sixty miles had to be covered as quickly as possible. The chief captain could not rest until he knew that Paul was safe in Caesarea in the governor's custody. Here we see the Roman government protecting the Roman citizen Paul from the religious fanatics of Jerusalem.

Concise Letter From the Chief Captain to Felix the Governor

23:25-30 *“And he wrote a letter after this manner: Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sending greeting. This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman. And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council: Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds. And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell.”*

Luke the narrator did not have a copy of this letter. He says in verse 25 that the chief captain wrote a letter “after this manner” or “containing these things.” This implies that he was giving the *tenor* of the message without professing to quote it verbatim. In verse 26, the chief captain's name is now given for the first time—Claudius Lysias.

The letter is concise and to the point. This is an art we should ask of God. His letter summarizes the events from the temple riot up to the assassination plot against Paul's life. Claudius Lysias learned that Paul was a Roman *after* he had ordered him to be scourged, not *before* he rescued him from the rioters in the temple plaza. This part would be tactfully omitted from his letter.

After a fruitless hearing before the Sanhedrin, Lysias recognized that the dispute concerned Jewish theological interpretations, not Roman law. Lastly, he informs the governor, Felix, that when he had intelligence of the attempt on Paul's life, he made his consequent decision to send Paul to Caesarea so that the case could be reviewed there.

Paul Arrives at Caesarea

23:31-35 *“Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris. On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle: Who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him. And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia; I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall.”*

The military escort reached Antipatris the following morning. It must have been a hurried march for the weary infantry—Antipatris was 35 miles from Jerusalem. Since the conspirators had now been left far behind it was no longer necessary for Paul to have such a strong escort. The infantry therefore returned to Jerusalem from Antipatris and left the cavalry to accompany Paul the remaining 27 miles to Caesarea.

When they arrived, Paul was handed over to the custody of Felix. When Felix read the letter, possibly in Paul's hearing, he asked Paul what province he was from. The fact that Paul came from a Roman province (Cilicia), made it ethical and legitimate for Felix to go ahead with the litigation. Until the upcoming trial, Paul was detained in the palace built by Herod the Great at Caesarea, a building which then served as the governor's headquarters.

Chapter Twenty-Four

AT CAESAREA—PAUL TESTIFIES BEFORE FELIX

Paul is Accused Before Felix

24:1-9 *“And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul. And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words. For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of [insurrections] among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands, Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him. And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so.”*

Five days later Paul's accusers from the Sanhedrin, led by the high priest came to Caesarea to state their case against Paul. They employed the services of an eloquent professional speaker named Tertullus to present the charges to the governor. Satan uses a lot of rhetoric and can sound very convincing. *Lawyers* are one of the finest channels through which Satan speaks.

First Tertullus flatters the governor with lavish remarks about his moderation and mercy. He was quite the opposite. After excessive courtesy in his preface, he then asks Felix to bear with him briefly about a matter of concern—Paul the troublemaker. He hurls three charges against the Apostle:

- Paul is a thorough pest, provoking uprisings among the Jews all over the empire.
- He is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.
- He was caught in an attempt to profane the temple.

All of the other Jews (including the high priest) affirmed that these things were so. It is interesting that Jesus was charged with the same crimes at his trial, none of which were true.

Paul's Defense Before Felix the Governor

24:10-21 *“Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.”*

“Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me. Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council, Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day.”

In verse 10, Paul was invited to state his case in response to the prosecution speech by Tertullus. Paul used courtesy as he addressed the governor, but not flattery. Since Felix had been the administrator of Judaea for several years, the experience he gained of the Jewish nation would enable him to assess the charge against Paul more accurately. This was Paul's confidence in his opening statement.

In verses 11-13, Paul explained that he had been absent from Jerusalem for several years until his recent visit at Pentecost. He had arrived there only twelve days earlier. During the days that followed his arrival, he had committed no wrongdoing whatsoever. He had not engaged in any public debate, nor gathered a crowd, nor done anything to provoke an uproar—not in the city, temple, or synagogues. Paul further reasoned that none of the charges brought against him could be substantiated.

While he had done none of the things that his opponents alleged, Paul did not hesitate to declare what he actually did do in verses 14-16 – He worshipped the God of his fathers, as he had every freedom to do under Roman law. He believed wholeheartedly in everything declared by the Scriptures (especially the hope of the resurrection) as the majority of his nation believed. He implies that his accusers themselves shared this hope. It is interesting to note here that Paul believed in a resurrection of both “the just and the unjust” (v15). *All* will be raised up to give an account of their lives to God. (See Dan.12:2, Eccl.12:14, Jn. 5:28,29, Rev. 20:11-15).

In verse 17, Paul gave his reason for coming to Jerusalem after a lapse of several years. He was bringing alms and offerings to his fellow-Jews in Jerusalem. This is the only reference in Acts to the collection Paul had organized in the Gentile churches as a gift to the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem. Paul esteemed this generous collection very highly. To Paul, it was an acknowledgment on the part of the Gentile Christians of the debt they owed Jerusalem, the city from which the Gospel had started and was brought unto them (Rom.15:25-28). He also hoped, no doubt, that this gesture of good will would help unify the Jerusalem believers with the Gentile churches.

Paul continues his defense in verses 18-19. Shortly after coming to Jerusalem, he was in the temple completing a purification ceremony. He had done nothing to arouse the public tumult that broke out. Those who actually caused the uproar were some Jews from Asia. It is these Jews, Paul reasoned, who ought to have come before Felix as Paul's prosecutors if they had any serious charge to bring against him. Perhaps the Sanhedrin recommended that the Asian Jews not appear since cross-examination would have soon shown the shallowness of their charges.

Verses 20-21: Since the Asian Jews had not appeared in court, Paul recommended that the members of the Council who were present at the hearing enunciate clearly what crime Paul had committed when the chief captain had brought him before the Sanhedrin for examination in Jerusalem. The only crime they could charge him with as a result of that examination was declaring, “Of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question” (23:6. In other words, he had committed no crime at all.

Felix Adjourns the Proceedings

24:22-23 *“And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that Way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter. And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him.”*

“Having more perfect knowledge of that Way.” Where Felix the governor obtained his special information about Christianity, we are not told. He probably discerned the crux of the matter (which was the jealousy of the Jews), but for the present he deferred the hearing. The governor said he needed to hear the testimony of Lysias the chief captain first before he could make a decision. This was only an excuse to appease the Jews. Actually, he had no intention of acquitting Paul (24:27). Therefore, he postponed the hearing, giving Paul reasonable freedoms which befitted a Roman citizen against whom no crime was yet proved. Yet, Paul was kept in custody in Caesarea.

Paul's Interviews With the Governor

24:24-26 *“And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee. He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.”*

Having an eminent Christian in custody, Felix thought it suitable to improve his knowledge of Christianity. It may be that Drusilla was the one most interested in having an interview with Paul. (Drusilla was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I—the Herod of Acts 12:1 who had James killed with the sword). Drusilla was hardly 20 years old at this time and was the third wife of Felix.

Felix and Drusilla listened as Paul expounded the Christian faith. Paul made it clear that Christianity had moral implications. As he talked about righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come, the two felt that the interview had taken an uncomfortable turn. Yet these were the subjects they needed to hear most. Felix began to feel terrified and decided that he had heard enough for now. After a time, he called the apostle into his presence, but for another motive. He was hoping that Paul would offer him a substantial bribe for his release.

Politics—How to Please the People

24:27 *“But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix’ room: and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.”* Here is the reason for many of the actions of politicians—it is popular opinion. Two years went by and Felix was recalled from his governorship due to an outbreak of strife between the Jewish and Gentile inhabitants of Caesarea. When Felix intervened with troops, it caused much bloodshed among the leaders of the Jewish faction. He was then succeeded by Porcius Festus. However, the change of administration brought no advantages to Paul. Felix left Paul in custody hoping that this would be accepted by the Jewish authorities as a gesture of good will. The arrival of a new and inexperienced governor would mean the reopening of the case in circumstances even less favorable for Paul than before. Two years had passed. It was now A.D. 60.

Chapter Twenty-Five

PAUL BEFORE FESTUS / HIS APPEAL TO CAESAR

The Jews Request the New Governor to Send Paul Back to Jerusalem for Trial

25:1-3 *“Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem. Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him, And desired favor against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him.”* It was only reasonable that a new governor should make acquaintance as soon as possible with the leading representatives of the people of his province. Therefore, three days after his arrival in Caesarea, Festus went up to Jerusalem to meet the Sanhedrin and other leading Jews. After preliminary salutations, they lost no time exploiting the favor which Felix had done them in leaving Paul imprisoned at Caesarea. Counting upon the new governor's inexperience, they raised the question of Paul with him, and requested that he send orders to Caesarea to bring Paul back to Jerusalem for trial. Those who sought to assassinate Paul before would find a better opportunity to attack him while he was on the road from Caesarea to Jerusalem. One way or another, they wanted Paul out in the open for a target.

25:4-5 *“But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither. Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.”* The new governor saw no need to consent to their request. Festus did not intend to stay long in Jerusalem. He was going back to Caesarea shortly. He welcomed the Jewish rulers to return with him. They could accuse Paul before him there.

25:6-8 *“And when he had tarried among them [no more than eight or ten days], he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought. And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove. While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all.”* The case against Paul was now reopened, thanks to the irresponsibility of Felix not to clear Paul of the false charges. Festus took his seat as judge and gave Paul's enemies the opportunity to restate their accusations against him. This time the Jews laid even more serious charges against Paul, none of which they had the evidence to prove. They must have raised political complaints too, because Paul said he had committed nothing against Caesar either.

Festus Asks Paul to Go to Jerusalem for Retrial

25:9 *“But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?”* It was a good political move on the part of the new governor to begin his administration by doing something to gain the favor of the people he ruled as long as it did not infringe upon Roman justice. It made no difference, as far as Roman law was concerned, whether the reopened case was held in Caesarea or in Jerusalem. Since the Council plainly desired it to be heard in Jerusalem, Festus would at least concede this to them. Therefore, he proposed to Paul that he should go up to Jerusalem and have the matter dealt with there. After all, many of the specific charges were of crimes allegedly committed in Jerusalem.

Paul is Forced to Appeal to Caesar

25:10-11 *“Then said Paul, I [am standing] at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar.”* (cf. 28:18-19)

Paul had done no wrong to the Jews and testified to the governor—“you know that very well.” To go back to Jerusalem meant placing himself in jeopardy all over again. If Festus was going to make concessions like this to the Sanhedrin, he would be inclined to make further ones even more prejudiced to Paul's safety. Since Festus was a novice, the Jews might well exploit his inexperience to Paul's disadvantage. Besides this, the trip itself to Jerusalem would be very dangerous, and Paul was apprehensive about the result of a trial before Festus in Jerusalem. He had not lost confidence in Roman justice, but he feared that in Jerusalem Roman justice might be overborne by powerful local influences. There would be no reason for such fear at Rome. As a Roman citizen there was only one alternative left to Paul, and that was to appeal to Caesar.

Festus Grants Paul His Request to Go to Rome to Caesar

25:12 *“Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.”* Paul's appeal to the supreme court at Rome probably came as a relief to Festus, as Paul had given him “a way of escape” from a very difficult duty. Festus conferred with the officials of his administration, and after doing so, willingly granted Paul permission to have his case referred to Rome.

Festus first needed to issue a report to Caesar but still was unclear on the issues himself. Thus, when King Agrippa visited him he explained his quandary to him. Since Agrippa (ruler of territories north/northeast of Palestine) was known as an authority on the Jewish religion, Festus looked to him as the man who could best help him frame the report which he had to remit to Rome in connection with Paul's appeal to the emperor. In verses 13-22, Festus explains his predicament to Agrippa.

Festus Looks to Agrippa for Help

25:13-22 *“And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to Salute Festus. And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix: About whom when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to having judgment against him. To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning crime laid against him. Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth. Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed: But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters. But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus [a term for Caesar], I commanded him to be kept til I might send him to Caesar. Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him.”*

Paul is Brought Before Agrippa

25:23-27 *“And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus’ commandment, Paul was brought forth. And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer. But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him. Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.”*

The next day an assembly was gathered. It was attended not only by Agrippa and his sister Bernice, but by members of the governor's staff, and other leading citizens of Caesarea. Paul was then conducted into the hearing room and Festus introduced him to Agrippa and the others. He explained that he could find no substance in the capital charges which his Jewish opponents urged against him, and how Paul had appealed to Caesar. It is plain from his words that Festus was still at a loss about the terms in which he should draw up his report on Paul's case. “I have nothing definite to write to my lord the emperor about him” he said. Therefore, he was very pleased with Agrippa's cooperation in the matter, and handed over the conduct of inquiry to his royal visitor. In chapter 26, Paul's defense is directed specifically to King Agrippa.

Points to Remember:

- Court tie-ups are not peculiar to our century only. Look at the court system of Paul's time.
- Even when there was no proper evidence to convict Paul, he was held in custody for years.
- Paul never called himself the prisoner of Rome, but “the prisoner of the Lord.”
- Judges were partial in their rulings because of “special interest” groups they wanted to please.
- Paul's rejection at Jerusalem opened new doors to testify before many kings (Acts 9:15,16).
Also, his rejection at Jerusalem brought him to Rome.
- The Lord showed no displeasure with Paul for going to Jerusalem (23:11).
Instead, He told Paul he *must also* testify at Rome, as well as Jerusalem.
- Jerusalem was “filling up the measure” of her iniquity and was ripe for judgment (Mt. 23:32,33)
- Six years later, the Roman armies began coming against Judaea (from 66 to 70 A.D.).
By A.D. 70, the temple and city were utterly destroyed and over one million Jews perished.
- Paul said that his imprisonment resulted in the “furtherance of the gospel” (Phil.1:12-13).

Paul's testimony at Jerusalem was necessary. It became a witness against them. Some have felt that young Joseph made a mistake by telling his dreams to the brethren (Gen. 37:5-9). All it did was anger them and stir up murder in their hearts. But there was coming a day when they would be bowing to him, and the brethren would remember that day. Therefore, the dream had to be told as a witness against them, although it kindled their wrath. Jerusalem only had several years left before its desolation, and their rejection of Paul and the Christian message filled the cup of their iniquity.

Chapter Twenty-Six

PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE KING AGRIPPA

The defense speech of Paul before Agrippa could be summed up as follows:

- A complimentary introduction (v2-3);
- Paul's Pharisaic heritage (v4-8);
- His former zeal for persecuting Christians (v9-11);
- The vision on the Damascus road (v12-18);
- His lifelong obedience to the vision (v19-20);
- His arrest at Jerusalem (v21);
- His teaching (v22-23).

To an extent, the content of Paul's speech before Agrippa in 26:2-23 is similar to the testimony he delivered at Jerusalem before the crowd in the temple court (22:1-21). Yet the general tone of the two speeches is different, each one being adapted to its own distinctive audiences. In Jerusalem, he spoke to the Jews in the Hebrew tongue. Here it is given in Greek.

The Introduction to Agrippa

26:1-3 *“Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself. I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee [concerning] all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.”*

Paul was pleased for the opportunity to state his case before a man of Agrippa's caliber, especially because Agrippa was so knowledgeable of the customs and problems of the Jewish religion. Here, at last, (Paul thought) is a man who might appreciate that the message I proclaim is simply the fulfillment of Israel's ancestral faith and expectation. In Paul's testimony before Agrippa, he undertakes to show that neither his manner of life nor his teaching should arouse hostility among the Jews, since he was “saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.”

This account in verses 1-23, is probably *an abbreviated version* of all that Paul really said before Agrippa. Paul had asked Agrippa to “hear him patiently,” and expected that the king might be interested enough to listen to a fairly lengthy statement.

Paul's Pharisaic Heritage / Their Strong Belief in the Resurrection

26:4-8 *“My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?”*

Of the Straitest Sect

Paul was an ultraconservative Pharisee, being “of the straitest sect.” This indicates the kind of home life he grew up in while in Tarsus, and also the personality of his father (22:3). His contemporaries could attest to the zeal he had as a Pharisee, having seen him adhere to the strictest rules. All faithful Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead. The resurrection was a central belief of the Pharisees. They saw no fulfillment of Israel's ancient hope apart from the resurrection. The irony of the present dispute was that Paul was being prosecuted for his proclamation of this very hope—and prosecuted by Jews, of all people.

His Former Persecution of Christians

26:9-11 *“I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.”*

The Heavenly Vision

26:12-15 *“Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.”*

It was while Paul was enraged that the greatest revolution in his life took place. Again he tells of his journey to Damascus and the stunning light that blinded him, and the voice of the resurrected Christ that arrested him. The words, “It is hard for thee to kick against the [goat]” is a proverb from agricultural life. It suggests that there was already in the depths of Paul's heart a subconscious conviction that the Christian Way was true. Stephen's arguments given in Paul's hearing before the Sanhedrin were more valid than he had allowed himself to admit. To stifle this conviction, Paul threw himself even more furiously into his campaign against the Christian Way. Yet the “goat” of God's Spirit kept pricking his conscience until at last the truth that Jesus was risen indeed burst forth into full realization on the Damascus road.

Irresistible Grace?

The revelation of Christ to Paul on the Damascus road was overwhelming. Paul was knocked to the ground by the power and glory of God. Under such conditions, how could anyone *not* have responded to Christ? Yes, to initially get Paul headed in the right direction, God did give irresistible grace to Paul. But this would not always continue. Certainly Paul would have many other difficult decisions in life that required the power of his own choice. There were many who received grace from God, but then turned back from following Him. Demas is a prime example (cf. 2 Tim. 4:10). Demas was a fellow-minister of Paul, but he loved the world and returned to its death-grasp.

Other Details of Paul's Conversion and Commission

26:16-18 *“But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee. Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.”*

These passages supply several statements that are not included in the other accounts of Paul's conversion in Chapter 9 and 22. In 26:16, Christ told Paul to “rise and stand upon his feet.” This is reminiscent of Ezekiel 2:1,3 when God told the prophet, “Stand upon thy feet ... I send thee to the children of Israel.” Also, it is similar to Jeremiah's commission: ...“Whomsoever I shall send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak ... for I am with thee to deliver thee.” Christ also promised to appear unto Paul at other times in the future ...in order to make him a minister and witness.

Many Visions and Revelations of the Lord

Paul would have *many* visions and revelations of the Lord in his career (cf. 2 Cor. 12:1,7). Paul was taught the Gospel in the Arabian desert for three years after his conversion (Gal.1:12,17,18). While in the Arabian desert for three years, Paul was unable to return to Jerusalem to attend any of the feasts or holy days. As a result, Paul's “perfectionist” spirit was being tainted and he could no longer boast of perfectly keeping the law.

Translated From One Kingdom Into Another

The purpose of the Gospel is to turn people “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God” in order to receive an inheritance (cf. Col.1:12-14). People who do not know Christ are under the power of Satan and belong to another kingdom—the kingdom of darkness. They are lost. Do not ever let anyone tell you that the heathen who have never heard the Gospel are saved. Paul's duty in preaching is seen in 26:18. Our preaching is to “turn people from the power of Satan and darkness unto God, that they receive forgiveness and *inheritance*.”

Paul - Obedient to His Calling and Commission

26:19 *“Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:”* Here is the reason God chose Paul. God knew that Paul would be faithful to the truth once he saw the light (cf.1 Tim.1:12-14). We have to be obedient to the Lord and His calling during our whole lifetime. Many are faithful for ten, fifteen, or twenty years but then they go off course. May we be obedient to the end. Otherwise, we will lose our crown or maybe our soul (cf. Rev. 3:11; Mt. 24:12,13).

26:20 *“But showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.”* If people truly have a born-again experience, their works will begin to change. If there are no fruits of repentance evident, we may question the genuineness of their new birth.

Jews Tried to Kill Paul For Announcing Good News to Gentiles

26:21 *“For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.”* For announcing the good news to the Gentiles of forgiveness and having an inheritance [said Paul], my Jewish brethren laid violent hands on me in the temple and tried to kill me.

Festus had found it extremely difficult to determine why Paul had been arrested in the first place and why the Jews were so anxious to have his blood. Yet it was important that he should find the reason in order to include it in his report to Rome and to Caesar. He counted on Agrippa's help in this matter. Finally Agrippa has learned why the Jews were so hostile to Paul and why they mobbed and nearly murdered him in the temple. Knowing the Jews as he did, Agrippa understood why they would cherish such animosity toward a former rabbi (Paul) who now offered Gentile believers spiritual privileges on the same level as the chosen people. The problem all along was *jealousy*.

The Substance of Paul's Teaching

26:22-23 *“Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.”*

Finally, Paul emphasized that the teaching he had given to all was thoroughly loyal to Israel's faith. It was in complete harmony with the divine revelation given through “Moses and the prophets.” Here Paul probably cited passage after passage of Old Testament Scripture to substantiate the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ, although Luke does not record this. Festus was so deluged by Paul's massive information that he cried out in verse 24: “Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.”

Festus is Overwhelmed

26:24-26 *“And as he thus spake for himself [or made his defense], Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.”*

Festus could take no more—Paul's tremendous learning had driven him mad, he vocalized. Stunning light, unseen voices, visions, revelations, endless quotations from the Scriptures—no man in his right mind could have antagonized his whole nation with such unsubstantial philosophizing.

But what was sheer madness to the governor's way of thinking was the purest truth and good sense to Paul's. Thus, he told Festus, and appealed to Agrippa for confirmation. After all, the events which fulfilled the prophecies of Scripture were well known and public. The life, ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ were matters of common knowledge. The resurrection was amply attested to, and the Gospel had been openly proclaimed in Jerusalem for thirty years since Pentecost with signs following. Anyone who believed the prophets and compared their predictions with the events concerning Jesus of Nazareth must acknowledge the truth of Christianity.

Turning From Festus to King Agrippa

26:27-29 *“King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. “And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.”*

Paul turned from Festus and facing Agrippa he said: “You believe the prophets, don't you, Your Majesty? I know you do!” King Agrippa seemed embarrassed by Paul's appeal and would not give any appearance of supporting Paul or his case. What would the governor think of Agrippa if he expressed agreement with a man whom Festus had just called “mad?” Therefore, he would not admit or deny that he believed the prophets. Thus, he disregarded Paul's appeal, probably with a diplomatic smile and said, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.”

Then Paul told the audience that his immense desire to God was not only that Agrippa, but that all who heard him that day would be Christians just like himself ... except for these chains, holding up his shackled wrists as he said this.

The Dignitaries Agree on Paul's Innocence

26:30-32 *“And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them.” 31 And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. 32 Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.”*

Enough had been heard for the immediate purpose. The audience was over. Then the governor, Agrippa and Bernice, together with their staff officers and other associates, discussed what Paul had said. One thing at least was clear; even if Paul was as mad as Festus thought, he had done nothing worthy of death or even imprisonment. As a matter of fact, he was completely innocent in the eyes of Roman law and might have been freed then and there, had he not appealed to Caesar. Paul's appeal had taken the decision out of the governor's hands and he must be sent to Rome.

By appealing to Caesar, Paul had put himself into a new position in relation to the law, and the course prescribed by the law for citizens in that position (appellants to the emperor), must now be followed. Paul must be sent to Rome. Presumably Agrippa had no difficulty in telling Festus what to write in his report. In chapter 27, Paul begins his voyage to Rome, and is shipwrecked en route. Luke is on board in the narrative.

Bernice

Bernice is mentioned three times in Acts (25:13, 25:23, 26:30). She was the oldest daughter of the Herod who had James the apostle slain with the sword (Acts 12:1). Drusilla was her youngest sister (24:24). Bernice had evil relations with Agrippa her own brother. Later she was the mistress of Vespasian and his son *Titus*, the man who destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70. Bernice, along with the others, had heard the Gospel. Yet the Gospel avails nothing if it is not obeyed.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

VOYAGE AND SHIPWRECK OF PAUL EN ROUTE TO ROME



- 23:23-33 After rejection at Jerusalem (May 58 A.D.), Paul was sent to Caesarea for his own safety. Paul stayed in Caesarea two years (24:27), testifying at numerous hearings.
- 27:1,2 In about August (A.D. 60), Festus the governor sent Paul to Rome to appear before Caesar. Accompanying Paul on ship were Luke and Aristarchus.
- 27:3 From Caesarea, they sailed to Sidon (27:4). Leaving Sidon, they went above Cyprus.
- 27:5 Sailing over the seas of Cilicia and Pamphylia, they came to Myra.
- 27:6 While at Myra, a city of Lycia, Paul was put on another ship going to Italy (27:6).
- 27:7,8 Sailing slowly many days, they came near Cnidus. Then turned south, to go under Crete. Going under Crete, they went by Salmone and came to *the Fair Havens*, near Lasea.
- 27:10 - Paul advised them to stay there for the winter. The majority decided to sail on to Phoenix, a more suitable harbor in western Crete. When the winds were gentle and innocent they loosed anchor and headed for Phoenix, sailing close to the shores of Crete. Suddenly a hurricane swept down from the island and caught the ship by surprise. The ship could not head into the wind and was blown adrift for two weeks until it was wrecked on Melita.
- 28:1-11 The 276 people on board were saved and spent the winter on Melita three months.
- 28:11-15 From Melita, the ship went to Syracuse, a city of Sicily, on to Rhegium, Puteoli, and then by land from Puteoli, up the Appian Way (a famous Roman road) to Rome.
- 28:16 Finally, Paul arrived at Rome in the Spring of 61, and stayed two whole years there (v30).

Luke's narrative of the voyage and shipwreck of Paul is a small classic in its own right. Luke, who accompanied Paul on the trip, viewed the sea through Greek eyes and tells us what he saw in unforgettable word-pictures. In the Old Testament there is another notable story of a storm at sea and that is the account of Jonah. Human life has often been compared to a voyage across a stormy sea. It is not surprising, then, that many readers and expositors have found an allegory of the soul's experience in Acts chapter 27. In particular, we may learn much from Luke's portrayal of Paul's character and behavior in time of crisis, for this is where the real man is most likely to be revealed.

The Voyage to Rome Begins

27:1-8 "And when it was determined that we [Luke included] should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band. 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. And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself. And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein. And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not [further allowing] us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone; And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The Fair Havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea." (If you follow your map on page 173, the narrative will be much more interesting.)

v1 Luke now surfaces in the narrative. He was last visible in 21:18. We have no knowledge of his whereabouts during the two intervening years, but undoubtedly he was in contact with Paul and lived in the vicinity of Caesarea where the great Apostle was kept in Roman custody. Paul and other prisoners were escorted by a kindly Roman centurion named Julius. Who and what the other prisoners were we cannot tell. In any case, a Roman citizen who had appealed to the emperor would occupy a much more favorable position than ordinary prisoners.

v2 The ship which they boarded belonged to Adramyttium, a seaport of Mysia in northwest Asia Minor. The ship was to stop at various ports of the province of Asia Minor. At one of these ports, Julius knew he would find another ship bound for Rome. Aristarchus of Thessalonica, another close friend of Paul, went with them. Whether or not Aristarchus boarded the second ship and went all the way to Rome is not certain. However, he was in Paul's company in Rome at some point during the next two years (cf. Col. 4:10, Philem.1:24).

v3 The day after their embarkment at Caesarea, they put in at Sidon, about 70 miles north. Here Paul was given a number of privileges by Julius the centurion. (In the New Testament, many centurions received favorable notice.) At Sidon, Paul was allowed to go ashore and visit certain Christian friends, but presumably, soldiers were detailed to accompany him.

v4-5 Putting out to sea again, they sailed east and north of Cyprus on the lee side of the island, since the prevailing winds throughout the summer months in that location are westerly. Then a stretch of open sea had to be crossed, the sea between Cyprus and the south coast of Asia Minor. Working against the westerly winds, the Adramyttian ship crept on slowly until it finally reached Myra, a port of Lycia, the most southerly region of Asia Minor. (Be following your map - p.173).

v6 At Myra, the first part of the voyage ended. When Paul's ship from Adramyttium docked there, other ships carrying grain from Egypt to Rome were already in port (cf. v38). Ships carrying wheat from Alexandria, Egypt to Rome commonly used this route, for Myra was directly north of Alexandria. At Myra, Julius the centurion transferred his party to a particular Alexandrian ship.

v7 From Myra the going was slow and difficult because a strong northwest wind was blowing against them. After several days they reached Cnidus, a port frequently stopped at by merchant ships from Egypt. Here at Cnidus they had a choice of two alternatives. They could wait for a fair wind and then sail due west. However, if they preferred to continue the voyage without delay, their only course was to turn south and sail under the lee of the Island of Crete along its south coast. This is the course they chose, first reaching Salmone (the eastern extremity of Crete), and then sailing under the southern coast of the island.

v8 Even coasting underneath southern Crete was difficult with the wind blowing contrary to them, but finally they came to the small bay known to this day as “The Fair Havens.” This bay was slightly west of the city of Lasea.

Paul's Warning of Shipwreck

27:9-13 “And when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the Fast was now already past, Paul admonished them, And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives. Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul. And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part [or majority] advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice [Phoenix], and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west. And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete [i.e. near the shore].”

The delay caused by the adverse winds began to make them anxious. As they waited for a change of wind at Fair Havens, it soon became clear that they could not complete the voyage to Italy before winter. The dangerous season for sailing began in mid-September and lasted until mid-November. After that, all navigation on the open sea came to a halt until winter was over. (In that part of the world, seas become passable again in February.) It was now the dangerous season for travel. By this time, the “fast” (or Day of Atonement) had gone by. Therefore, it was already past early October.

When they set sail from Fair Havens, fifty or sixty miles brought them under the lee of a small island named Clauda (v16). From Clauda, after fourteen nights of being pushed by the storm, the ship broke apart on Malta (Melita), where they wintered three months (28:11). The seas were closed to sailing until the beginning of February at the earliest. Therefore, the three months spent in Malta must have been roughly November, December, and January. They must have left Fair Havens not much earlier than mid-October. Some scholars believe that a ship's council was held, and that Paul (perhaps because he was an experienced traveler), was invited to attend it. At this council Paul “admonished them” or rather “offered his advice.” This actually was a “word of knowledge.” The advice he gave them, if we combine the language in v.10 with that of v.21, was that they should remain at Fair Havens for the winter, as any attempt to continue the voyage now would involve great peril, not only to the ship and cargo, but also to the passengers and crew.

The Majority is Wrong

The opinion of the pilot and shipowner differed from Paul's. They thought there was a reasonable chance of reaching Phoenix, a more suitable port a little farther west along the coast of Crete. The centurion, knowing the experience of the seamen, accepted their view rather than Paul's. A merchant-shipowner normally acted as captain of his own ship, but the final decision was left to the centurion. As the highest official on board, he ranked as commanding officer. The centurion ruled that the advice of the experts should be followed.

The pilot, shipowner, and majority of the crew felt that Fair Havens was not a convenient harbor in which to spend the winter. Therefore, they decided to set sail in hope of reaching the more accommodating harbor of Phoenix. However, it was a well known fact that if gales (which were frequent and violent) were to spring suddenly from the north, ships traveling even close to the coast line could be driven out to sea and lost. On the morning of their departure, the winds were blowing softly and everything looked safe. Besides, this course of action was the consensus. Can the majority be mistaken? They were being cautious, of course, as the ship sailed close to the shores of Crete so that at the slightest appearance of trouble, they could pull inland.

The Typhoon Strikes

27:14-16 *“But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind called Euroclydon. And when the ship was caught, and could not [face or head] into the wind, we [gave way to the wind and shortened sail]. And running under [the lee of] a certain island which is called Clauda, we [were able, with difficulty, to secure the smaller lifeboat:]”*

Everything had seemed so right. The *majority* said it was right. The winds were calm. However, the prophet said it was not right. Suddenly the soft gentle winds from the south ceased, and a furious east, northeast wind sprang up in its place and rushed down upon them from the Isle of Crete. It was a typhonic wind, as Luke describes. The sailors recognized this wind as an ancient foe and their name for it was Euroclydon. The word is equivalent to *“east by north-east wind.”*

The ship was caught up in the gale, and being unable to head up to it, was driven by it. Twenty some miles to the leeward side of the wind lay the small island of Clauda. Soon they were blown to the island, and made speedy and timely use of the brief space of shelter it afforded. First, they hauled the small lifeboat on board which was normally towed behind but hoisted in during foul weather. Euroclydon's suddenness gave them no time to bring it in, and by now it must have been full of water. Luke says, *“We were able, with difficulty, to secure the boat.”* His use of the word *“we”* might suggest that he too helped pull the boat on board, and he well remembered the blisters.

Desperate Measures to Survive the Storm

27:17-20 *“Which when they had [hoisted] up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven. And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship; And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship. And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.”*

The next thing to do was to undergird the ship, passing cables round it transversely underneath in order to hold the timbers together. The word translated “helps” in verse 17 was a nautical term used in such contexts as these. As a safety measure, ships in those times were provided with cables ready for bracing the hulls to enable them to resist the destructive force of these winds.

Also, the crew were afraid of being driven onto the quicksands off the African coast, west of Cyrene. Although this was still a great distance away, the wind might continue to blow for many days and this was the direction in which it was driving them. To avoid this, they “strake sail.” With storm sails set, the ship drifted slowly at a rate of 1 1/2 miles per hour.

The next day, seeing no abatement of the gale, they began to empty the ship of its cargo (cf. Jon. 1:5), but the third day, a more drastic measure was necessary. The spare gear had to go too if the ship were to have a chance of surviving. Eleven dreary nights and days followed. The storm blotted out the sun by day, and the stars by night. Thus, they had no means of knowing where they were, or where they were headed. Undoubtedly, the ship was leaking badly and the fury of the typhoon continued. At this point the demoralized passengers and crew felt that all hope of being saved was gone. Paul did not feel that way. Two years earlier (Acts 23:11), the Lord had stood beside him and told him to be of good cheer. Not only was it necessary to testify at Jerusalem, but he was also to go to *Rome* and Paul cherished this promise. Even during the storm, he knew he was going to be in Rome.

Paul Speaks on Behalf of God

27:21-26 “But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.”

As things were, they had little desire to eat. Besides, it would have been difficult to prepare food as most of their supplies would have been spoiled by the seawater. Everyone was suffering immensely from seasickness, having been in that storm-tossed vessel for nearly two weeks nonstop.

In the midst of this general dejection, despair, and physical weakness, Paul stood up to address his companions in distress. Here was a man who himself had suffered shipwreck on three previous occasions (cf. 2 Cor. 11:25), one time staying afloat in the open sea for a whole day before he was picked up or washed ashore. Yet now Paul was confident that, while this ship was destined to ruin, no life would be lost. This assurance did not come from any shrewd calculation but from an angel of God who had visited him during the night. Not only would Paul himself survive to go to Rome (cf. Acts 23:11), the lives of his shipmates were also going to be spared for his sake. The world has no idea how much it owes to the mercy of God, and to the presence of righteous men and women.

Having received this divine communication from an angel, Paul was completely assured that everything would turn out just as he had been told. The ship would not survive, but the men would be saved and they would be washed ashore on an island (v26).

Land is Near

27:27-28 *“But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in [the sea of] Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country; And sounded [the depths], and found it twenty fathoms; and when they had gone a little further, they sounded [the depths] again, and found it fifteen fathoms.”*

They had drifted nearly 476 miles, an average of 36 miles every 24 hours, since going by Clauda nearly two weeks before. The sea of Adria mentioned in verse 27 is the central Mediterranean. At midnight, the shipmen perceived that they were within distance of land and lowered a weight twenty fathoms (120 feet), and touched bottom. Probably within a half-hour, they lowered it again and measured 15 fathoms (90 feet). Thus, the men knew they were approaching land.

Too Close to Rocks to Go Ashore

27:29 *“Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.”* It was too dangerous to go any farther. They dropped four anchors from the rear of the ship to keep it from being swung around by the wind and to keep the front of the ship pointed toward land. Then they hoped and prayed for daylight in order to know just exactly where they were and what they were doing.

The Shipmen Try to Abandon Ship

27:30-32 *“And the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under color as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these [shipmen] abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off.”*

The shipmen now attempted to make sure of their own safety at the expense of the others on board. They lowered a smaller boat into the sea, pretending that they were going to lay out anchors from the bow as well as from the stern, but actually with the intention of making for the shore. Paul detected their aim and reported it at once to the centurion. Why the presence of the shipmen aboard was necessary for the safety of all is not clearly said. Plainly it would have been disastrous if the ship had been left as it was with no skilled hands to attend it. By this time, the centurion had learned that it was not wise to disregard Paul's advice. The centurion decided that it was necessary to cut the ropes of the small boat and let it go adrift to prevent the shipmen from a second attempt of abandoning the ship.

Paul Urges Everyone to Eat

27:33-38 *“And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take [food], saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. Wherefore I pray you to take some [food]: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you. And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat. Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some [food]. And we were in all in the ship 276 souls. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.”*

Paul now imparted further encouragement to his shipmates. As dawn was breaking he advised them to take some food after not eating for fourteen days. The situation was now easier. Land was within reach, perhaps the storm was relenting, and most of all, God had promised them that all their lives would be spared. Hard work lay ahead that day if they were to come to land. It would do them all good and give them new energy and enthusiasm for the day's task if they had something to eat.

Luke tells us how many were on board. Perhaps it was necessary to number them in order to divide the available bread among them. When they had eaten enough, they first used their new strength to throw the remainder of the wheat-cargo overboard to lighten the ship, although most of it had already been thrown over at the beginning of the storm (v.18), Now it was best that the ship be further lightened in order to run aground as far as possible.

The Ship is Purposely Run Aground

27:39 *“And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain [bay] with a [beach], into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship.”* By this time it was daylight and the sailors did not recognize the land which they had approached. Noticing a creek with a sandy beach, they decided to try to run the ship aground there.

27:40 *“And when they had taken up the anchors, they [left them in the] sea, and loosed the [steering paddles], and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.”* They had no further use of the four anchors, so they left them in the sea. At the same time they unleashed the lashings of the steering-paddles and hoisted a small sail on the foremast. Thus, they had the ship under command to run her aground on the beach which they had noticed.

27:41 *“And [lighting upon] a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmovable, but the hinder part was [breaking up] by the violence of the waves.”* Here the ship struck a bottom of mud graduating into tenacious clay into which the fore part would fix itself and be held fast, while the stern was exposed to the force of the waves. The foreship was held together until every passenger got safely to dry land.

The Centurion Keeps His Soldiers From Killing the Prisoners

27:42-44 *“And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape. But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land: And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all to land.”*

According to Roman tradition, the soldiers were responsible for the safekeeping of the prisoners in their charge. But now it would be easy for the prisoners to escape in the confusion of abandoning the ship. The soldiers, therefore decided to prevent any such attempt by slaughtering them. The centurion, Julius, forbade them to do any such thing. He owed gratitude to Paul and would not expose him to this fate. Instead he commanded that the prisoners get safely to land along with the others. Those who could swim should dive overboard and swim ashore. The rest could float ashore on planks or other pieces of the wrecked ship. At any rate, they all reached land safely. The divine promise made to Paul in their darkest hour had been fulfilled to the letter. The ship and cargo were lost, but every life on board was saved. Also, they were cast onto an island (v26).

Chapter Twenty-Eight

WINTER ON MALTA / ON TO ROME

The Viper's Bite Does Not Harm Paul

28:1-6 *“And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. And the barbarous people showed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold. And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet [justice] suffereth not to live. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.”*

It was not until they had gotten ashore that they learned that the island upon which they had landed was Melita (or Malta). It was located sixty miles south of Sicily. Probably many of the crew knew about Malta, but were not accustomed to putting in there. Malta was first called Melita by Phoenician sailors. It is the Canaanite word meaning “refuge.” The natives of Malta were largely of Phoenician extract, and so was their dialect. They were regarded by both Greeks and Romans as “barbarians.”

The barbarians showed them tremendous hospitality. It was a cold, rainy morning, and the men from the destroyed ship were wet and shivering as they came ashore. Certainly, the members of the ship would have to change their minds about any preconceived notions they had held about these “barbarians.” How often do we find in life that everyone cannot be put into the same *category*.

Another Act of the Apostle

Again we see the practical side of Paul in verse 3. He was picking up sticks. This is another one of the acts of the apostles—picking up sticks. He instructed the Church to “work willingly with their hands”, and he taught them so by his own example. Paul was about age sixty at this time. An approximate date of his birth would be 1 A.D. We can only be conjectural here, but Paul was believed to be in his early thirties when he was converted in A.D. 34.

Fire Causes the Serpents to Manifest

When he had gathered a bundle of wood and put it on the fire, a poisonous snake uncoiled from the fire and latched on to Paul's hand. There is a spiritual truth that we should observe from this scene. Fire represents the Holy Spirit. Fire provokes evil spirits in people to manifest themselves. Evil can be resident in people, but when the fire of God comes, these things rise up and come out in the open.

I vividly remember a story about twelve missionaries in Africa who sought God earnestly for revival in their village. After a long season of prayer, God responded and overnight, the compound had a thousand people swarming around the little church. To their amazement, two of those twelve missionaries who had prayed the most vehemently were the first to *reject* the visitation. God did not move in the manner they had expected. Perhaps God was using people whom they deemed unfit. Whatever the reasons, they were vexed with jealousy and closed their hearts to what God was doing.

When the fire of God descended upon that village, it stirred up the “serpents” in those two ladies who had prayed so ardently for revival. They had never allowed God to cleanse their motives, and when the fire of God came, it revealed their devilishness. This should serve as an admonition to us. While we are praying for revival fire, let us also ask God to rid us of those vipers that are so well hidden in our lives. Those slithering little snakes are dormant and undisturbed until the fire comes. Let us deal with these issues in private before the fire has to reveal them in front of everyone.

The Need For a Changed Mind

The Barbarians saw the reptile hanging on Paul's hand and concluded that he must be an evil man. They thought, “He has escaped the fury of the sea, but divine justice will not overlook his deeds and therefore has devised a new way of punishing him.” For some time they stood watching him after he shook the snake into the fire, but when nothing happened, “they changed their minds, and said he was a god.”

First, the visitors of the island had to “change their minds” about the barbarians. Now the barbarians had to change their minds about Paul. I have learned in life that until a person's mind is changed, nothing ever changes. “Every man is right in his own eyes” (Prov. 21:2, 16:2, 30:20). One of the greatest maladies in man is *self-blindness*. Men and women believe they are fine as they are, but the light of revelation reveals our real needs. May we ask the Lord to show us what He sees in us. The word *repentance* literally means “to change the mind, or to have another mind.” Transformation can only take place by “the renewing of the mind” (Rom.12:2). Therefore, I would like to repeat this: Until our mind is changed, nothing changes.

The Blessings of the Gospel Comes to the Island

28:7-10 *“In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously. And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him. So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed: Who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.”*

God was working everything together for good in the life of Paul. The storm had only served to drive them closer to Rome, in fact, perfectly in that direction. Normally, the ship would not have stopped at Malta, but now that it had, the blessings of the Gospel were brought to that whole island. Publius, the chief man of the island, showed favor to Paul and others, and treated them as his guests for three days. When Paul heard that Publius' father was suffering from a fever and dysentery, he went to him, laid his hands upon him, and healed him.

The news of Paul's healing powers in the name of Jesus spread rapidly across the island. Soon everyone in Malta who was suffering from any ailment came for divine treatment. This gave Paul splendid opportunities to preach the Gospel to them. This shipwreck occasioned Paul to have the whole island of Malta for a spiritual inheritance. When at last the time came for the party to leave Malta, after being there for three months, the natives showed their appreciation of Paul and his friends by supplying them with ample supplies for the remainder of their voyage.

Leaving Malta / On to Rome

28:11-15 “*And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux. And landing at Syracuse, we tarried three days. And from thence we [made a circuit], and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli: Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we [came to] Rome. And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.*”

The three months at Malta were winter months, presumably November, December, and January. They could not continue their journey to Italy until early spring when the seas began to be passable again for navigation. Probably sometime in February the ship set sail for Rome from Malta. The ship they boarded was another Alexandrian ship. This, too, was probably a grain ship. It had spent the winter in Malta, but had harbored at Valletta. Obviously, this ship, unlike Paul's, had arrived at Malta before the typhoon, and was well intact. Ships took their names from the figures carved at the front of the vessel. “Castor and Pollux,” meaning *The Two Brothers*, were the figureheads positioned on the bow of the ship. Thus, the ship was identified by this name.

After leaving Malta, they arrived at Syracuse in about a day's time. Syracuse was the most important city of Sicily. Here they spent three days, possibly because the south wind which brought them from Malta, had slackened. From Syracuse they made their way to Rhegium, in the toe of Italy. From Rhegium, they came to Puteoli (in the Bay of Naples). In less than two days, they were able to travel 180 nautical miles. Puteoli was the most sheltered part of the Bay of Naples, and was the great emporium for the Alexandrian wheat ships.

At Puteoli for Seven Days

It is not surprising that Christians were to be found in such a strategic seaport. There was an important Jewish community there as well. It seems that the centurion, Julius, had official business in Puteoli which involved a week's halt there. During that week Paul was allowed to receive the hospitality of the local church. This could be compared to the similar permission granted him at Sidon at the beginning of the voyage (cf. 27:3).

“And so we came to Rome,” says Luke in 28:14, but then in verse 15 he goes back briefly to mention an event that was especially encouraging on that last stage of the journey. Leaving Puteoli and traveling only a few miles north, they came to *The Appian Way*, one of the great Roman roads of southern Italy. Traveling this road, they continued heading for Rome. But news of their approach had reached the capital already, and a number of Christians started southwards along the Appian Way to meet the apostle and escort him back to Rome. Some of them got as far as The Three Taverns, a resting place on the Appian Way, about 33 miles south of Rome. Others walked another 10 miles further south and met Paul at the market-town of Appii Forum. (See map on p.173).

By now it was late February, 61 A.D. Paul had written to the Romans three years earlier (February or March of 58). He had asked them to prepare the way for his visit. He longed to see them face to face, desiring to impart unto them some spiritual gift. Paul greatly anticipated the Romans and himself being comforted together in the mutual faith (Rom.1:10-11). At the sight of all these dear friends who had walked so far from Rome to welcome him, Paul took courage and thanked God.

Paul Arrives at Rome

28:16 *“And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.”* At last, they arrived at Rome. Here, the “we” narratives come to an end. However, Colossians 4:14 and Philemon 1:24 supply firm evidence that Luke remained with Paul, at least for part of the next two years.

While at Rome, Luke probably completed his Gospel and continued to construct his account of the Acts of the Apostles which he would later send to Theophilus (Lu.1:1-4, Acts 1:1). Paul had special freedoms at Rome while awaiting his hearing before Caesar. He was allowed to live as a private resident and have his own rented house, though remaining lightly chained to a Roman guard.

Paul's First Meeting With the Roman Jews

28:17-22 *“And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of. For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain. And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came showed or spake any harm of thee. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.”*

True to his standard procedure, Paul took steps as soon as it was practical to make contact with the Jewish community of this new city in which he found himself. Paul always entered the synagogues first, presenting his message “to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile.” Because he was unable to do so being in bonds, Paul invited the leaders of the Jewish community in Rome to come and see him.

Paul briefly introduced himself to the Jewish leaders and summarized the course of events which had brought him to Rome. He took special caution not to speak negatively of Jerusalem's authorities, yet he emphasized his innocence of any betrayal of the ancestral law or the traditions of his people. He had appealed to Caesar only to establish his innocence, not to bring any complaint against his nation. As things stood, it was only his faithful devotion to the ancestral hope of Israel that had cost him his freedom and brought him to Rome as a prisoner. In Rome, as in Jerusalem, he emphasized that the Christian message which he proclaimed, far from undermining the religion of Israel, was its *fulfillment*.

The Christian Message is the Fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures

Christianity grew out of Judaism. There are 1000 quotes from the Old Testament in the New Testament. Ten percent of the New Testament is solid quotation from the Old. Paul's only Bible was the Old Testament as the New Testament books were not collected into one volume and canonized until 396 A.D. All the apostles, especially Paul, applied the Old Testament Scriptures to the Church. On the next page, we would like to review Paul's teachings to the Church.

PAUL APPLIES OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE
TO ALL BELIEVERS—JEW OR GENTILE

- All believers, Jew or Gentile, are a royal priesthood.
- As New Testament priests, we are to offer up spiritual sacrifices.
- We are invited to enter the holy of holies now that the veil has been rent.
- We are exhorted to fulfill the law—not just in the exterior but in spirit, in our hearts.
- We are to be circumcised in our heart, in our spirit. The outward circumcision is symbolic.
- We are to keep the feasts spiritually because all of them have a spiritual meaning.
- We are to ascend Mt. Zion in the spiritual realm, in the heavenlies.
- New Jerusalem is our final destination.
- True believers are Abraham's seed. We are Abraham's *spiritual* seed, and Jews inwardly.
- We are the temple, corporately and individually.
- We are on a journey just as ancient Israel was, and there are tests to pass.
- There is an inheritance for which we must fight.
- And there are enemies to dispossess, but our battles are not against flesh and blood.
- We have a wilderness to get through, and a Jordan to cross.
- Christ is our Passover Lamb.
- The blood of animals cannot take away sins, only God's own blood can take away sins.
- And much more

Paul did not attack the temple, the law, or the customs of the Jews. Instead, he announced good news—Christ the Messiah has ushered in a new covenant—the covenant which was promised by all the prophets. This wonderful Christ did not make void the law and prophets, He brought total fulfillment and meaning to them. Paul taught that the blessings of the Messiah were being extended to *anyone* with faith among the Gentile world.

The “hope of Israel” was that they should possess total redemption and release from the fall because Christ had been slain to take away the curse man had brought upon himself. The Messiah opened up all of the promises made to the fathers. He now offers a rent veil, complete access to God, full inheritance, healing, forgiveness, perfection, peace, joy, the hope of the resurrection and everlasting life—to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile. For announcing these blessings, Paul was put in chains.

Many Jews resented Paul and his message for several reasons. It upset their routine and the way they were used to doing things. That was bad enough, but when the Gentiles could be coheirs with the Jews and partakers of the same promises – that was too much. The thought of putting an inferior Gentile on their level was unthinkable. Yet the whole purpose of God for making Israel a separated nation was not that they should be standoffish and proud, but that they should be a light to the other nations. They were to bring light to all those who had a believing heart among the nations of the world. In Abraham, all the families of the earth were to be blessed.

28:21-22 “*And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came showed or spake any harm of thee. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.*” Paul had achieved his goal in appealing to Caesar, and that was to remove his cause into a court where his adversaries dared not follow him. This was David's policy and security also when he fled from Saul into the land of the Philistines. Here Saul would no more pursue him (cf. 1 Sam. 27:1,4). So, too, the religious leaders at Jerusalem had let the matter alone regarding Paul. The Jews in Rome showed courtesy and were willing at least to listen to what Paul had to say, though they acknowledged that his teachings were known to be a source of controversy everywhere.

Paul's Second Meeting With the Jews

28:23-29 “*And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them (cf. Isaiah 6:9-10). Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.*”

The Jews appointed a certain day to meet with Paul. “Many” came to the place where he stayed and listened to what he had to say. For a whole day Paul sought to persuade them about Jesus from the law of Moses and from all the prophets, “from early morning until evening.” Paul labored to prove to his fellow-Jews from all the Old Testament Scriptures that the Gospel of Christ was *the true fulfillment* of Israel's promises and prophecies.

Luke's Final Summary of Acts

Most Jews Said “No” to God's Gift / Therefore, the Gospel Went to the Gentiles

What was their response? “Some believed and some did not believe” but the majority remained unpersuaded. Most of the Jews in Rome continued to oppose the Gospel. In Rome, as in other cities, Paul approached the Jews first. True to the usual pattern, the greater part of the Jews would not accept God's gift. Therefore, Paul offered the same gift to the Gentiles who readily received it. The Book of Acts not only records the expansion of Christianity among the Gentiles, it also highlights the rejection of the same message by most of the Jews. This is Luke's summary of Acts.

“Their Eyes Have They Closed”—Intentional Rejection

It was fitting for Acts to conclude with the solemn statement given in Isaiah 6:9-10. No one is more deaf than those who have purposely closed their ears. No one is more blind than those who have purposely closed their eyes and hardened their hearts. It is *an unspeakable tragedy* when God offers life, healing and forgiveness, and then man refuses it. The use of Isaiah 6:9-10 to depict the Jewish refusal to obey the Gospel had the highest authority. It was quoted or alluded to by our Lord Himself in all four Gospels: Matthew 13:14,15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; and John 12:39-41.

The Two Years at Rome

28:30-31 “And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.”

For two years, Paul stayed in Rome. His arrival date was approximately in late February, A.D. 61, and he remained under house arrest until about March of A.D. 63. The conditions of his custody apparently did not permit him to go anywhere he wished, but anyone who desired to might come and visit him, and Paul seized this opportunity to freely proclaim the Gospel of Christ.

Certainly, if Paul's message was illegal and subversive propaganda, it could not have been taught for two years in Rome, especially while Paul was under Roman guard. The authorities must have known what he was doing all that time, and yet they made no objections whatsoever. Paul spoke “with all confidence, no man forbidding him.” In early 63 A.D, Luke ends his narrative here.

Four Epistles Written During Those Two years

In the early part of A.D. 63, Paul appeared before Nero Caesar who acquitted him and set him free. Therefore, in the early spring, he was set at liberty. During those two years, Paul wrote four important epistles which are known as the “Prison Epistles.” In the spring of 62, he wrote epistles to the *Ephesians* and the *Colossians*. Also, he sent a personal letter to *Philemon*, an elder in the Colossian church. All three epistles were sent at the same time and delivered by the same messenger, Tychicus. The fact that *Ephesians* and *Colossians* were written at the same time is substantiated by the fact that there are 55 identical verbatim verses in each of these twin-sister epistles. Later that year, in the autumn of A.D. 62, Paul wrote his Epistle to the *Philippians*.

It is most probable that soon after his release from Roman custody, Paul wrote the famous *Epistle to the Hebrews* while he was still in Italy. Clearly, *Hebrews* was written from Italy and the writer was an intimate friend of Timothy (see Heb.13:23-24). Also, he asked the recipients of the letter to be sensitive to pray for those who were in bonds. This is because the writer himself had been in bonds (cf. Heb.13:3). A probable date for the writing of *Hebrews* is 63 or 64 A.D.

Summary: From Paul's Rejection at Jerusalem to His Release at Rome (Acts 21:3 to 28:31).

- He was seized in Jerusalem by the mob at the time of Pentecost. (May, 58 A.D.)
- He remained at Caesarea under Roman custody (May, 58 to August, 60) for two full years.
- From Caesarea, he was sent to Rome because he had appealed to Caesar (August, 60).
- In October, he was shipwrecked en route to Rome and resided on Malta for three months.
- Leaving the Island of Malta after the winter, he resumed his journey to Rome (February, 61).
- Paul arrived at Rome (late February, 61).
- In Rome he was under house arrest (February 61 to March 63) for two full years.
Here he wrote *Ephesians*, *Colossians*, and *Philemon* - (Spring of 62 A.D.).
Then he wrote *Philippians* (Autumn, 62 A.D.)
- In early 63, he appeared before Caesar and was cleared of all charges.
- Probably in 63 or 64, while still in Italy, Paul wrote the *Epistle to the Hebrews*.

A SCAN OF PAUL'S LIFE

(Most dates are approximate)

4 B.C.	1 A.D.	14 A.D.	33 or 34 A.D.	34 A.D.	34-37 A.D.
<p>The Birth of Christ</p>	<p>Paul's birth. (the exact date of his birth is not known; 1 A.D. is a fair estimate). He was born and raised in Tarsus (Acts 21:39; 22:3).</p>	<p>At age 13, Paul left Tarsus for Jerusalem to study to be a rabbi. He was taught the Law by Gamaliel (Acts 22:3, 26:4). Most likely he remained in Jerusalem in his teens, then returned to Tarsus. There is no evidence that he was in Jerusalem during Christ's ministry.</p>	<p>At Stephen's Martyrdom, Paul gave his "vote" for this deed (cf. Acts 8:1, 22:20, 26:10). As a member of the Sanhedrin, he had influence. Paul was now in his early thirties. Acts 7:58 terms him a <i>young man</i>. His residence was now Jerusalem.</p>	<p>Paul's conversion. (cf. Acts 9, 22, 26). In 9:15-16, we see his three-fold call — to the Gentiles, Israelites, and kings/dignitaries. From Damascus, he went into Arabia for three years (Gal. 1:11-17).</p>	<p>After conversion, Paul departed to the Arabian desert for <i>three years</i> where Christ taught him the Gospel (Gal. 1:11-18). Paul returned briefly to Damascus, but had to escape. Then he came to Jerusalem for 15 days.</p>
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	37 A.D.	44 A.D.	45 A.D.	48-49 A.D.	50-51 A.D.
<p>Paul escaped from Damascus (Acts 9:23-26; 2 Cor. 11:32-33) and came to Jerusalem 15 days (Gal. 1:17-19, Acts 22:17-21). The brethren sent him home to Tarsus (Acts 9:30-31; Gal. 1:21).</p>	<p>Paul came to Antioch and taught a year (Acts 11:25-26). He had been in obscurity for nearly ten years since conversion. God was training him during the silent years.</p>	<p>Paul's second visit to Jerusalem to bring relief because of the famine (Acts 11:27-12:25). The famine started in 45 A.D. The narrative digresses to the deaths of Herod and James in 44 and then resumes with Paul's return from Jerusalem (45).</p>	<p>The First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:1 to 14:26). Paul was launched from Antioch his home base. He was beginning to fulfill his call to the Gentiles (9:15-16). They came home and rested a long time (14:28).</p>	<p>The Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15:1-29, Gal. 2:1-10) was to determine what laws were necessary for the new Gentile believers to observe. It was Paul's third visit to Jerusalem since conversion.</p>	
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	51-54 A.D.	54-58 A.D.	58 A.D.	58-60 A.D.	61-63 A.D.
<p>Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36 to 18:22). From Antioch, he started the Philippian, Thessalonian, and the Corinthian churches. He wrote 1,2 Thessalonians.</p>	<p>Third Missionary Journey (Acts 18:23 to 21:16); 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans were written during this time.</p>	<p>Paul's final visit to Jerusalem. Acts 21:17-23:30. He testified to all of Israel. He was rejected and bound there. This was the beginning of his first imprisonment. (58 to 63 A.D.)</p>	<p>At Caesarea two years (Acts 23:32 to 26:31) He testified before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa. Appeals to Caesar. His rejection in Jerusalem opened new doors to stand before kings. Now, he headed for Rome.</p>	<p>Paul went to Rome, (Acts 27:1 to 28:31) being shipwrecked en route. He stayed 2 full years at Rome. Writes Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon. Paul was acquitted by Nero, and released in the spring of A.D. 63.</p>	<p>In A.D. 63, Paul resumed his missionary work. Probably he wrote Hebrews while still in Italy (Heb. 13:24). In A.D. 67 he wrote to Titus, and his first epistle to Timothy. Imprisoned for the second time, he wrote 2 Timothy - his last words. He was beheaded under Nero in May 68. Nero died in June.</p>

Order of Paul's Epistles

- | | | | | |
|----------------------------|---|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1.) 1 Thessalonians | - 52 A.D. - while in Corinth | (Acts 18:11) | | |
| 2.) 2 Thessalonians | - 53 A.D. - while in Corinth | (Acts 18:11) | | |
| 3.) 1 Corinthians | - 57 A.D. - while in Ephesus | (Acts 19:22) | Spring | |
| 4.) 2 Corinthians | - 57 A.D. - while in Macedonia
(probably Philippi) | (Acts 20:1) | Autumn | |
| 5.) Galatians | - 57 A.D. - while in Corinth
(Greece) | (Acts 20:2-3) | Early Winter | |
| 6.) Romans | - 58 A.D. - while in Corinth
(Greece) | (Acts 20:2-3) | Spring | |
| 7.) Ephesians | - 62 A.D. - while in Rome
(prison) | (Acts 28:30) | Spring | |
| 8.) Colossians | - 62 A.D. - while in Rome
(prison) | (Acts 28:30) | Spring | |
| 9.) Philemon | - 62 A.D. - while in Rome
(prison) | (Acts 28:30) | Spring | |
| 10.) Philippians | - 62 A.D. - while in Rome
(prison) | (Acts 28:30) | Autumn | |
| 11.) Hebrews | - 63 A.D.? - while in Italy
(after release) | (Heb.13:24) | | |
| 12.) 1 Timothy | - 67 A.D. - while in Macedonia | (1 Tim.1:3) | Summer | (to Ephesus) |
| 13.) Titus | - 67 A.D. - while in Ephesus (?) | | Autumn | (to Crete) |
| 14.) 2 Timothy | - 68 A.D. - while in Rome
(in prison) | (2 Tim.1:17) | Spring | (to Ephesus) |

Background of Paul's Epistles

I-II Thessalonians - On his second missionary journey (Acts 15:36 - 18:22), Paul launched from Antioch (51 A.D.) with his new partner, Silas. They visited Cilicia, Lycaonia, and Galatia that year; and in 52, Troas, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth. Paul stayed in Corinth for 18 months (Acts 18:1-18 v11). While in Corinth for 18 months, he wrote his two epistles to the Thessalonians—*First Thessalonians* in 52 A.D. and *Second Thessalonians* in 53 A.D.

I-II Corinthians - On his third missionary journey (Acts 18:23 - 21:16), Paul spent a great deal of time in Ephesus, the chief city of Asia minor (Acts 19:1-20 v10). He was in and out of Ephesus from 54-57 A.D. In Acts 19:21, Paul made a short departure from Ephesus and a brief visit to Corinth (Corinth is in Achaia), and then in 19:22 he returned to Ephesus (Asia) for a season. While back at Ephesus, he wrote an epistle to Corinth, an epistle now lost (1 Cor. 5:9). The Corinthians wrote back to Paul asking him numerous questions, especially concerning the subject of marriage (1 Cor. 7:1). Paul replied from Ephesus with *First Corinthians*, in the Spring of 57 A.D. This was probably just before the uproar over the incident of the goddess Diana (Acts 19:23-41).

In the early summer of 57, Paul left Ephesus and headed west toward Macedonia (Acts 20:1). On his way there He stopped at Troas but felt compelled to leave this fruitful field to get into Macedonia in order to meet Titus (2 Cor. 2:12-13). Paul wanted to know how the Corinthians had responded to his first epistle. The first major stop in Macedonia would be Philippi. Undoubtedly it was here that Paul met Titus who gave him a favorable report of Corinth (2 Cor. 7:6-8). While in Philippi of Macedonia, Paul wrote his *Second Epistle to the Corinthians* in the Autumn of 57 A.D. From here Paul continued south to Greece (Corinth is in Greece). See Acts 20:2-3. Paul stayed in Corinth for three months. This was Paul's third visit here (2 Cor.13:1).

Galatians / Romans - While Paul was at Corinth (Greece) for a third visit (Acts 20:2-3), news reached him that the Galatian churches had been infected by the Judaizers. Therefore, in December of 57, Paul wrote his *Epistle to the Galatians*. Several months later, he penned his *Epistle to the Romans*, in the early Spring of 58 A.D. (perhaps late February or early March). Both Galatians and Romans were written within several months of each other as Paul's mind was occupied with the same thoughts. In Romans, Paul had a burden for Jerusalem (Rom. 9:1-3; 10:1), and had a desire to visit Rome (Rom.1:9-13). Soon after, in May of 58, Paul visited Jerusalem (Acts 21:17 - 23:31) but was arrested. Then he spent two years in Caesarea (Acts 23:31 - 26:32). Acts chapters 27-28 record Paul's trip to Rome and his two years there when he was under house arrest. (see Acts 28:30).

Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, Philippians - These are called "The Prison Epistles." While Paul was two years in Rome in his own rented house, he produced these four beautiful, inspired letters. In the Spring of 62, Paul wrote *Ephesians*, *Colossians*, and a letter to *Philemon*, an elder in the Colossian church. These were all delivered by the same messenger, Tychicus. In the autumn of the same year, Paul wrote *Philippians*. In early spring 63, Paul was released by the emperor Nero.

Hebrews - In A.D. 63 or 64, probably while he was still in Italy, Paul wrote his *Epistle to the Hebrews*. It is quite apparent that the epistle was written in Italy. (See Hebrews 13:24).

I Timothy, Titus, II Timothy - Timothy was based in Ephesus (1 Tim.1:3), Titus in Crete (Tit.1:5). *Paul wrote personal letters to these two spiritual sons in 67 A.D.* Then Paul was imprisoned a second time, and sent Timothy a second and final epistle from a prison in Rome in the Spring of 68. He was executed in May or June. Nero himself died at the end of June.

Cities of New Testament Times

Memorize the location of each of the following:

- Aenon - a place where John baptized because there was much water there
- Arimathea - city of Joseph, the godly counsellor who buried Jesus in his own sepulchre (Lk.23:51)
- Azotus - the city to which Philip was translated, after being in Gaza (Acts 8:26-40)
- Bethany - the town of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus
- Bethsaida - in Galilee, hometown of Philip, Peter, and Andrew, near the place where Jesus fed 5000
- Bethlehem - where Jesus was born, the city of David
- Beersheba - the southern most part of Judea
- Bethabara - another place where John baptized
- Caesarea - Roman military base on the Mediterranean where resided Pilate, Cornelius, and others
- Caesarea Philippi - at the base of Mt. Hermon, where Peter confessed - "Thou art the Christ."
- Capernaum - Christ made his headquarters here (in Galilee) during his ministry, also Peter
- Cana - where Jesus performed his first miracle of turning water to wine at the wedding
- Chorazin - a city condemned by Christ because of the miracles they saw, but no repentance
- Damascus - oldest city on earth / place of Paul's conversion / 140 miles northeast of Jerusalem
- Decapolis - an area east of the Jordan River where Christ ministered
- Ephraim - a town northeast of Jerusalem (Jn.11:54) near the wilderness where Jesus abode awhile
- Gadara - a town near the Sea of Galilee where Jesus delivered the demon possessed man
- Galilee - a sea, also a large territory in northern Israel where Jesus and all the apostles came from
- Gaza - where Philip preached to the Ethiopian eunuch
- Hebron - one of the oldest cities on earth, yet never mentioned once in the New Testament
- Jericho - where Jesus healed blind Bartimaeus
- Joppa - where Peter had the vision at noon of God cleansing and accepting the Gentiles
- Jordan R. - beginning at the base of Mt. Hermon, going into the Sea of Galilee, to the Dead Sea
- Judea - This is southern Israel. Jerusalem was the capital. The temple was here - the center of Judaism
- Lydda - where Peter healed Aeneas, and all that dwelt in Lydda and Sharon turned to the Lord
- Machaerus - the site of Herod's castle where John was imprisoned and executed
- Mount Hermon - where Jesus is believed to have been transfigured
- Nazareth - hometown of Jesus, twenty miles southwest of Capernaum
- Nain - where Jesus raised the widow's son from the dead
- Peraea - the area directly east of Jerusalem, across Jordan, where Jesus ministered
- Phoenicia - area of Lebanon (Tyre) from which the Syro-Pheonician woman's daughter was healed
- Sycar - in Samaria, where Jacob's well was (Jn. 4:5-6) where Jesus spoke to the woman at the well

Especially fix in your mind the five main areas of Israel where Jesus ministered:

JUDEA

SAMARIA

GALILEE

DECAPOLIS

PERAEA

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