

Rod Rutherford

The Beloved
Physician's Second
Treatise to Theophilus

**Acts of
the
Apostles**

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

**The Beloved Physician's Second Treatise to
Theophilus**

A Commentary

by

Rod Rutherford

**6477 Hugh Willis Road
Powell, TN 37849-5615
rodrutherford@comcast.net
USA**

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Thanks to My Helpers:

My wife, **Brenda** the love of my life, and my co-worker in the kingdom of God, deserves a lot of credit for this book as well as for everything else I have written. Without her technical skill and computer knowledge, it would never have seen the light of printed day! Our son, **Brett**, a diligent scholar of the Bible, has carefully proofread the manuscript and made valuable suggestions for improvement. My former student, **Paul Vaughn**, who is currently teaching Acts, has also kindly read the manuscript and made several helpful suggestions. **Doug Hoff**, also a former student, has meticulously proofread the manuscript and made many corrections.

Dedication:

I am indebted to my parents, **Lester** and **Olive Rutherford**, who revered the Bible as God's Holy Word and taught me to have the same love and respect. I am also indebted to many good teachers at whose feet I have been privileged to sit through the years. Among them were **Marie Hamilton**, my first Sunday school teacher; **Donald Lankford**, an elder of the church in Paoli, Indiana who taught the teenage class in Acts when I obeyed the Gospel; **Olen Voyles** and **Merl Zink**, elders of the Kansas church of Christ in Washington County, Indiana who taught me in my later teens; **Thomas Whitfield**, a professor at David Lipscomb College who introduced me to the Original Commentary on Acts by J. W. McGarvey; **Frank Young**, superb instructor at the Memphis School of Preaching whose class on Acts was both scholarly and practical; and **Curtis Cates** who taught Acts as a graduate course in the Alabama Christian School of Religion. These are deceased but they left an indelible impression on my life.

Author's Biography

Rod Rutherford was educated in the public schools of Washington County, Indiana; David Lipscomb College in Nashville, Tennessee; Memphis School of Preaching in Memphis, Tennessee and the Alabama Christian School of Religion in Montgomery, Alabama. He obeyed the Gospel in 1953 and was married to Brenda Luttrell in 1963. The Rutherfords have three children, eight grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. They were missionaries in Zambia and Tasmania for fifteen years and worked with Truth for the World, a multimedia work for fifteen years. Rod has taught in several schools of preaching as well as has serving as the minister of several small congregations. He is the author of several books, tracts and articles designed to teach the Word of God accurately and simply.

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

Most people read a book but skip the preface or foreword. I believe they are making a mistake. I have learned that reading the preface is usually very helpful in understanding a book and getting the most out of it. I hope all the readers of this commentary on the book of Acts will take the time to read this preface. One needs to know the version of the Bible which serves as the overall text upon which the comments are being made and why it was chosen. One also needs to understand the references and abbreviations which may be used.

My original plan was to use the New King James Version or possibly the New American Standard Bible. However, I learned that most new versions of the Bible including the New King James Version and the New American Standard Bible are under copyright. This means that one is allowed to quote various verses from them in writing, but cannot quote an entire book without special permission and payment for the privilege. I also considered using the American Stand Version 1901 which was my main study Bible for many years, but it is not widely used or known today among the general population, and is not readily available especially outside the United States.

I decided to go back to the beloved King James Version (also known as the Authorized Version of the Bible). It was first published in 1611 but has undergone several major revisions through the centuries to keep it current with the English language. English, like all living languages, is constantly undergoing changes in expressions, spelling, grammar, and vocabulary. The Bible itself does not change just as its Author does not change (Psa. 119:89; Mal. 3:6; Matt. 24:35)! However, the languages in which it may be translated do change. I have consulted various translations, and relied heavily on the Greek tools available. I found Chester Estes' **The Better Version of the New Testament** especially helpful in updating the language and grammar of the KJV. At all times I have tried to be extremely careful not to change the meaning of the text in any way, lest I find myself under the condemnation of our Lord (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Psa. 119:89; Prov. 30:6; Gal. 1:6-9; Rev. 22:18,19).

When a quotation from another translation of the Bible is used, the translation will be noted in the Scripture reference; for example: (John 3:16: NKJV). If another book is quoted from, it will be referenced by the author's name and page number; for example: (Unger, pp. 99,100). At the back of the book there will be a complete bibliography of all the works quoted from, referenced or consulted in the writing of this commentary.

Rod Rutherford: Powell, TN. USA. November, 2025.

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INTRODUCTION TO ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Many years ago, James D. Bales penned a popular study of the second chapter of the book of Acts which he entitled The Hub of the Bible. However, not only the second chapter of Acts, but the entire book is the hub of the Bible. Like the hub of a wheel with all the spokes centered in it, the book of Acts is central in describing the fulfillment of the numerous Old and New Testament prophecies of the coming of the kingdom of God on earth. Jesus, the Divine Word, became flesh by being born of the virgin, Mary, who was from Nazareth in Galilee. He grew to manhood, and at the age of thirty, He responded to the preaching of John who baptized Him in the Jordan River. Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit as He came up out of the water. He was then led into the wilderness of Judea where He was tempted by the Devil for forty days before He began His three year ministry among the people of Israel.

Jesus worked many amazing miracles in the presence of numerous witnesses and preached the Gospel of His coming kingdom. He was rejected by the Jewish leaders who had Him put to death by crucifixion. He was raised from the dead on the third day and made many appearances to His disciples over the next forty days. Finally, having given them the Great Commission, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature," Jesus ascended back to Heaven in the sight of His apostles. Angels stood by as He went up in the clouds. They said to the apostles: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus who was taken up from you into Heaven, will so come in the same manner as you have seen Him go into Heaven" (Acts 1:9-11). Most Scriptures quoted are from the King James Version but in updated English. Other versions are noted.

The book of Acts records the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles on Pentecost Day to equip them for the task of being ambassadors of the kingdom of Heaven (Acts 2:1-21; 2 Cor. 5:20). The baptism of the Spirit was later given to the household of Cornelius to prove to the Jews that Gentiles were also to be recipients of the grace of God (Acts 10:44-48; 11:15-17). Miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit were also given to others by the laying on of the hands of the apostles (Acts 8:14-21; 19:1-7; Rom. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:6). These gifts were the means of revealing and confirming God's Word and equipping the early church for the work of the ministry until God's revelation of His Word was complete (Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:3,4; 1 Cor. 13:8-13; Eph. 3:1-6; 1 Thess. 2:13; Jude 3).

The book of Acts records several examples of the conversion of souls to Christ. It gives us the pattern for what we must do in order to be saved. This pattern requires hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:8-17; Acts 2:37). It tells of

the essentiality of believing that Jesus is the Christ, the only begotten Son of God who died on the cross for our sins and was raised again the third day (John 3:16; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 18:8). It further reveals that faith leads to repentance from past sins (Luke 24:46,47; Acts 2:38). Faith then leads one to confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:8-10). Baptism for the remission of sins is the final act of obedience that puts one into Christ (Gal. 3:26,27) and adds him to the church of Christ (Acts 2:38; 41-47; 22:16; 1 Cor. 12:13) which is His body (Eph. 1:22,23). In baptism (immersion in water) one dies to sin, is buried in the water, and is raised to live a new life in Christ (Rom. 6:1-18).

The book of Acts reveals the beginning of the church of Jesus Christ on the earth. The prophecies of its coming were fulfilled in the events which occurred on the first Pentecost Day following the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of the Lord (Joel 2:28-32; Isaiah 2:2-4; Daniel 2:31-45; 7:13,14; Psa. 24:7-10; Matt. 16:18,19; Acts 2:1- 47).

The book of Acts also reveals God's plan by which the Great Commission is to be carried out (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16). The preaching of the Gospel was to begin in Jerusalem, go next into all Judea, then to Samaria and from there unto the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). In the book of Acts and the epistles which Paul wrote to the various congregations, we can see the principles followed by the apostle to the Gentiles whose zeal exceeded that of all the others (1 Cor. 15:10). The method of planting churches that Paul followed is just as wise and effective today as it was in his day.

The Lord had foretold that persecution would come to His followers (Matt. 5:10-12; John 15:20). Acts revealed how persecution came first to the apostles (Acts 4:1-31; 5:17-41). Then Stephen, one of the seven servants appointed by the apostles to oversee the daily distribution of food to the widows, became the first one to die for his faith after the establishment of the church (Acts 6:8-7:60). At the stoning of Stephen, we are introduced to a young man named Saul who began a furious persecution that resulted in the scattering of the church from Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-19). While Saul was on a mission to Damascus to arrest Christians and bring them bound to Jerusalem to stand trial, the Lord appeared to him. As a result, Saul (later known as Paul) became a zealous Christian who often faced persecution himself (Acts 9:1-21; 22:1-21). Years later, Paul wrote to Timothy, a preacher trained by him: "Yes, and all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).

The book of Acts really is the first history of the Lord's church. It covers a period of about thirty years. It is a record of the rapid spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem, a remote post in the eastern end of the Roman Empire, to the mighty

city of Rome in the west. Within the lifetime of the apostles, the Gospel was taken to the whole world. The apostle Paul said the hope of the Gospel was “preached to every creature who is under heaven; of which I Paul was made a minister” (Col. 1:23).

We will now turn our attention to the following subjects: (1) the authorship of the book of Acts; (2) the date and place of writing of Acts; (3) the one to whom it was originally written; (4) the purpose of the book of Acts and the importance of our study of it today.

The Author of the book of Acts, indeed of the entire Bible, is the Holy Spirit (2 Sam. 23:2; 2 Tim. 3:16,17; 2 Pet. 1:21). The human author used by the Holy Spirit to put the words into human language was Luke, traveling companion of Paul, the apostle. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John reveal to us all we need to know of the “things which Jesus began both to do and teach” (Acts 1:1). Luke himself was privileged to be the human author of one of the four Gospel accounts of our Lord’s life on earth. The book of Acts is simply a sequel to the Gospel of Luke. It is Luke’s second treatise on the life and teachings of the Christ and the salvation He brought to this world. Luke begins with the return of Christ to Heaven and the promise of the angels that one Day He will come again. It reveals the coming of the Holy Spirit in power, the preaching of the Gospel in its fulness for the very first time, the conversion of three thousand souls, and the beginning of the church of Christ, God’s kingdom on the earth. It then traces in broad outlines the carrying out of the Lord’s Great Commission that must be done by His disciples in every age until the Lord comes again!

It is helpful if we know something about the author of a book. Luke, the inspired penman of the Holy Spirit, was chosen to write two books of the New Testament: the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Luke was not an eyewitness of the life of Christ, so far as we know, but he was a careful historian who, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, “set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them to us, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the Word” (Luke 1:1,2). Not only had Luke learned from those who knew, saw and heard Jesus in the flesh, but he had “perfect understanding of all things from the very first.” That is, he was inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. As a result, Luke gave believers the account of the life of our Lord recorded in the Gospel which bears his name (Luke 1:3).

Luke was a contemporary of the apostles and a close companion and co-worker of the apostle Paul. Several of the events recorded in Acts are his eyewitness reports written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In many of the passages in Acts recorded by Luke, he uses the first person plural pronoun

“we.” This indicates his presence when the events happened (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:17; 27:1- 28:16). Paul himself mentions that Luke was with him during his first Roman imprisonment (Col. 4:14), and again during his second Roman imprisonment (2 Tim. 4:11). In the second century, Ireneaus, a disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of the apostle John, testified that Luke was a traveling companion of Paul. Other early Christian writers such as Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian and Origen also testified to the fact that Luke was Paul’s companion in his travels and in his imprisonment (Harrison, pp. 14,15).

It is believed that Luke may have been a native of Antioch of Syria where the great missionary congregation sent Paul out on his journeys. It is possible that he could have been a convert of Paul’s. We know from Paul’s own pen that Luke was a medical doctor and a close and highly valued friend of his for he calls him “Luke, the beloved physician” (Col. 4:14). Some writers point out that the medical terms Luke used in the original Greek are indicative of his profession of a practitioner of medicine (Thiessen, pp. 179,180).

Luke was a Greek, therefore he was a Gentile. He is generally regarded as being the only Greek among the New Testament writers (Barclay, p. ix). Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke as well as the Acts of the Apostles. Some have even suggested he may be the author of the book of Hebrews for it is written in excellent Greek (New Analytical Bible, p.1387). An early writer, Clement of Alexandria, said Paul wrote Hebrews in Hebrew since he was a Jew writing to Jewish Christians and then Luke translated it into Greek for the benefit of Gentile Christians (Bruce, p. xxxvi). Luke was an accurate historian. He carefully dates the major events of which he writes by giving the names of the various rulers at the times the events happened (Luke 1:5; 2:1,2; 13:1-3; 23:1 ff.; Acts 12:1; 18:1,2; 24: 1-3, 24-27; 25:1,9-13, 24-28). Sir William Ramsey spent years in research to disprove the historicity of Acts, but found that Acts was amazingly accurate. In Acts, Luke mentions 32 nations, 54 cities, 9 islands, and 95 different individuals who lived in a world of constant change but he has never been proven to be wrong in any detail in a single detail (Rutherford, 9. 39).

It is always helpful to know who were the original recipients of Biblical books. The book of Acts is addressed to someone named Theophilus (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-4). This name is a combination of two Greek words “theos” - “God” and “phileo” - “lover of.” Does this mean that Theophilus was a specific person who loves God, perhaps a Christian? Or, was it simply addressed to all lovers of God wherever they were? If an individual, was he a patron of Luke who would pay for the publication of the book as he may have paid for the publication of the book of Luke? Or was he already a Christian? Perhaps Theophilus was one who Luke hoped to convert to Christ? We cannot give a definite answer to these questions. However, it is certain that Luke intended for

the book to be for all Christians everywhere in every age. We make no mistake if we regard Acts as the work of a careful historian, who was guided by the Holy Spirit, and wrote for a world-wide audience for all the centuries to follow.

It is also helpful to know when and where Luke wrote the book of Acts. It is possible that Luke was recording the events found in Acts during the time he was Paul's companion in advancing the Gospel. "Luke had his own personal experience for the 'we' sections. Then he had the benefit of Paul's own notes or suggestions for all that portion where Paul figures from chapter 8 to 28, since Luke was apparently with Paul in Rome when he finished the book. This would include Paul's sermons and addresses which Luke gives..." (Robertson, Vol. III, pp. ix, x). Luke would also have had opportunity to learn of early events of the church in Jerusalem and Judea from the apostle Peter (Gal.1:18; Acts 15; Gal. 2). Too, he spent several days with Philip the evangelist in Caesarea and could have learned much about the church in Jerusalem, Samaria and other places from him (Acts 21:8 ff). Luke very likely completed the writing of the book of Acts while he was with Paul during his Roman imprisonment. The book would have been published soon thereafter, but before Paul's final imprisonment and execution for it does not record them.

If Luke completed the writing of Acts while Paul was imprisoned in Rome and published it soon after, the date of writing would have been before 63 A.D. according to many writers. We agree with the following statement from a highly respected conservative scholar: "We regard the abrupt close of the book as an indication of the date of the book. The most natural explanation of the phenomenon is that there was nothing further to report at the time. Since Paul came to Rome in A.D. 59 and had been in that city for two years when Acts closes, we confidently date the book at A.D. 61" (Thiessen, p.185).

The book of Acts fills a definite need in the New Testament. Without it we would not have vital information regarding the ascension of the Lord, the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit, the beginning of the church, the examples of conversion which clearly illustrate how the Great Commission is to be carried out and what respondents to the preaching of the Gospel must do in order to be saved and added to the church which Christ established. Without the book of Acts we would not know of the many persecutions against the early church, nor would we have much knowledge of the early heresies, such as the effort made by the Pharisees who believed in Christ to require Gentiles to become Jews in order to be Christians. This is known as the Judaizing heresy. Without Acts we would know little or nothing about the rapid progress of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome and would have little information about the early congregations planted by Paul and his co-workers. Without the book of Acts we would have only partial information about the travels of Paul and the

opposition of both Jews and Gentiles. We would know little about the God given organization of the church nor of the day of the week and the pattern of worship of the early church. Simply put, without the Acts of the Apostles, the New Testament would be incomplete!

Review Questions

1. Explain how Acts is the hub of the Bible.
2. Review briefly the life of Jesus from His birth to His ascension back to Heaven.
3. What did the angels say to the apostles who were watching the ascension of Jesus?
4. What is the pattern of salvation found in the examples of conversion in the book of Acts?
5. Does one join the church, or is he added to the church by the Lord?
6. Who began the persecution which scattered all the church in Jerusalem except for the apostles?
7. How and when is one added to the church by Jesus?
8. Who was the first Christian martyr?
9. The book of Acts is the sequel (continuation) of which other book of the New Testament?
10. Who is the actual, overall author of Acts and of all the other books of the Bible?
11. Who was the specific human author who was used by the Holy Spirit to write the book of Acts?
12. To whom were the books of Luke and Acts addressed?
13. What is the origin of the name "Theophilus" and what does it mean?
14. What is the approximate date of the publication of the book of Acts?
15. What was the first major heresy taught in the church?

Chapter 1:

THE ASCENSION OF JESUS

“The former treatise 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 Spirit, had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom also He showed Himself alive after His death on the cross by many infallible proofs, being seen by them for forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (verses 1-3).

Luke, the beloved physician, Paul’s traveling companion, a fellow preacher of the Gospel, as well as an inspired historian, began writing the first history of the beginning and growth of the church of Christ on earth. He referred to his earlier account of the life, ministry, miracles, teaching, and death, burial and resurrection of the sinless Savior as all that “Jesus began both to do and to teach.” Jesus was not only a man of words, but He was also a man of action. His teaching was the foundation of God’s new and final covenant with mankind (John 16:13; Heb.1:1-4; Jude 3).

Luke’s treatise on the life of Christ and the account he is now beginning were both addressed to the same person, someone called “Theophilus.” Scholars through the ages have debated the identity of Theophilus. It is a Greek name made from a combination of two words: “Theos,” the Greek word for God and “phileo,” one of the Greek words for love. “Phileo” is particularly the word which refers to the love between friends. “Theophilus” then means “a friend of God,” or one who loves God. Was this used of a specific individual? Or, is it used generally of all who love God? Or, perhaps it has reference to both? Whichever it is does not affect the meaning of the message.

Jesus’ earthly ministry began following His baptism by John and the forty days of His temptation in the wilderness (Luke 4:14 ff.). It continued until His ascension to Heaven. Jesus’ final days were filled with His many appearances. These appearances were to His apostles and those who knew Him best. Therefore, these witnesses would not be easily deceived by an imposter.

Jesus’ apostles were now to be the ambassadors of His kingdom (Luke 22:29, 30; 2 Cor. 5:20). They had the credentials to be personal witnesses of Jesus. They had seen Him when He was crucified and buried. He had appeared to them on various occasions and under different circumstances over a period of forty days following His resurrection from the dead. The apostles had seen Him with their eyes, handled Him with their hands and heard him with their ears (John 20:1-29; 1 Cor. 15:1-8; 1 John 1:1-5). He provided infallible evidence that He was sent by God, died for the sins of mankind, and arose from

the dead (Rom. 1:4). The only thing the apostles lacked was the baptism of the Holy Spirit Who would guide them into all truth and bring to their remembrance all that Jesus had taught them (John 14:26; 16:13). They were going to receive the baptism of the Spirit just ten days after the Lord's ascension to Heaven.

“And being assembled together with them, He commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, He said, ‘You have heard from Me, for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’” (verses 4,5).

Jesus met with His apostles most likely in the upper room where they had eaten the Passover meal together. He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem until they had received the power from Heaven. Jerusalem had long ago been foretold by the prophets to be the place where the house of God, which is the kingdom of Christ, would be established (Joel 2:28-32; Isaiah 2:2,3; Dan. 2:44,45). They were to wait for “the promise of the Father.” This does not mean the Father was the promise, but refers to the promise which the Father had made. This promise was the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles within a few days to give them power. Pentecost always occurred fifty days after the Passover (Lev. 23:15,16). Jesus was with His apostles after His resurrection for forty days before He ascended to Heaven. Therefore, “not many days from now” amounted to only ten days until they would receive “the power which came from on high.” This was fulfilled when the apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21).

John the baptizer had baptized (immersed) all who came to him in the waters of the Jordan River (John 3:23; Luke 3:21). John's ministry was a work of preparing the people for the coming of the Savior (Malachi 3:1; 4:1,2; Mark 1:1-8). Just as John immersed people in water, the apostles were to be immersed in the Holy Spirit. John's baptism was for the house of Israel. It was a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4; Luke 7:29,30). The baptism in the Holy Spirit was to prepare the apostles for revealing, preaching and confirming the Gospel of Christ (1 Cor. 2:1-16; Heb. 2:1-4). The baptism of sinners on Pentecost was for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38). They were by this means added to the church of Christ (Acts 2:46,47; 1 Cor. 12:13). Today, there is but one baptism (Ephesians 4:4-6). It is an immersion in water for the remission of sins which is taught in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38). It will continue until the end of the age {world} (Matt. 28:18-20). It puts one into Christ where all spiritual blessings are found (Gal. 3:26,27; Eph. 1:3).

“When they had therefore come together, they asked Him: ‘Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father has placed in His own authority. But you shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth’” (verses 6-8).

The apostles still did not understand the nature of the Lord’s kingdom. In common with their fellow Jews, they were expecting (hoping) for a restoration of the physical kingdom of Israel as it was in the days of David and Solomon when it extended from the Euphrates River in the East to the Mediterranean Sea in the West and from Syria in the North to the borders of Egypt in the South. They would understand the spiritual nature of the kingdom once they had been enlightened by the baptism of the Holy Spirit and they were guided into all the truth (John 16:13).

Many today continue to make the same mistake the apostles were making on this occasion. They consider the church of Christ, which is the kingdom of Christ, to be a mere temporary measure, or “Plan B,” which the Lord put in place when the Jews rejected Him and crucified Him. Such is an insult to the Lord bordering on blasphemy. The rejection of Christ was foretold in the Old Testament (Isa. 53:1-12). It was part of God’s eternal plan to save man from his sins (Rev. 13:8). Christ Himself denied His kingdom was of this world (John 18:33-37). The Jewish leadership rejected Jesus as the Christ and crucified Him because they wanted an earthly Messiah to build an earthly kingdom, not a lowly Savior who would die on a cross for their sins.

The Lord pointed out that there are some things which God the Father has kept to Himself. Long ago, Moses wrote: “The secret (unrevealed) things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut. 29:29). When He was here in the flesh, our Lord did not know the time of His second coming and the end of the world. “But of that day and that hour no one knows, no, not the angels who are in Heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only *knows*” (Mark 12:32). How vain, foolish, and blasphemous it is for mere men to declare they know the time when the Lord is coming back, and even set dates for it, when the Lord Himself said He did not know it!

The apostles would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them and they were immersed in the Spirit. They would then be equipped to be Jesus’ witnesses. By definition a witness is one who testifies to that which he

has seen and heard (Acts 22:14,15; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8). As the witnesses of the Lord, they would testify to that which they had actually seen beginning in Jerusalem. In an orderly fashion, they would continue preaching and teaching by going into Judea, the province in which Jerusalem was located. They would then move northward to Samaria and continue onward until the Gospel had been taken to the ends of the earth. Just thirty years after Pentecost, Paul testified that the Gospel “was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I Paul, was made a minister” (Col. 1:23).

“And when He had spoken these things, while they were looking, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked intently toward Heaven as He ascended, behold, two men stood by them in white clothing. They said: ‘Men of Galilee. Why do you stand gazing up into the sky? This same Jesus who was taken up from you into Heaven shall so come in the same manner that you have seen Him go into Heaven?’ Then they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, which is a sabbath day’s journey from Jerusalem” (verses 9-12).

The eleven apostles (Judas had committed suicide as we shall soon learn) were led by Jesus from the place where they were staying to the Mount of Olives. This is on the eastern side of Jerusalem on the way toward the village of Bethany where Jesus’ dear friends, Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived. In Luke’s first treatise to Theophilus, he tells us that during the final week leading up to the cross “...in the daytime Jesus was teaching in the temple, but at night He went out and stayed in the mountain called Olivet” (Luke 21:37,38: NKJV). The Garden of Gethsemane was on the Mount of Olives. Jesus, it seems, often went there to pray and was there with His disciples on the very night He was arrested (Mark 14:32-50). A sabbath day’s journey was about two thousand cubits which is approximately 3,000 feet or three fifths of a mile (Unger, p. 842).

Jesus led His eleven faithful apostles to what may have been a favorite spot of His. While He was talking to them He began to ascend into the clouds. Eventually a cloud obscured Him from their sight. They watched intently as He rose in the sky. The two men standing by were obviously angels. They asked the astonished apostles why they were gazing so intently at the sky and stated plainly that Jesus’ return in glory one day will be in the clouds (1 Thess. 4:16-18; Rev. 1:7). Daniel 7:13,14 appears to be a prophetic picture from Heaven’s viewpoint of the ascension of Jesus. After Jesus’ ascension, the apostles returned to Jerusalem.

“And when they had entered, they went to the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James and John, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew,

Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas the brother of James. They were all continuing steadfastly with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brothers” (verses 13,14).

This is the last listing of the names of the apostles in the New Testament. Previously, they were listed in Matthew 10:1-4; Mark 3:14-19; and Luke 6:12-16. The name of Judas Iscariot has been omitted from this list. We shall learn the reason shortly. Peter’s name heads the list. His given name was actually Simon. The name “Peter” (from Petros meaning a small stone in Greek), was given to Him by Jesus (John 1:40-42). Peter was outspoken and a natural leader among men. It is he who first confessed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God at Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:13-19). Jesus made a play on words when He said, “You are Peter (a small stone), but upon this rock (a massive stone, a ledge ie. the truth Peter had just confessed), I will build My church” (Vine, Vol. 3, p. 302).

Andrew, Peter’s brother, brought him to Christ (John 1:40-42). James, the son of Zebedee, was the older brother of John. They were fishermen and along with their father, Zebedee, were business partners with Peter and Andrew (Luke 5:10). Peter, Andrew, James and John were the first four of the apostles to be called by Jesus (Matthew 4:18-22).

James and John were brothers. Their mother was Salome (Matt. 20:20-28; Mark 15:40,41). It is believed James was the older of the two since his name is always listed before John’s. James was the first one of the apostles to be killed for his faith (Acts 12:1,2). John, commonly believed to be the youngest of all Jesus’ apostles, was the author of five books of the New Testament (John’s Gospel; 1, 2, 3 John; Revelation). He is also thought to be the only one of the apostles who died a natural death. John refers to himself in the Gospel of John as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” which indicates he had a very close friendship with our Lord. Jesus entrusted His mother to John’s care as He was dying on the cross (John 13:23; 19:25-27).

Philip was from Bethsaida, the hometown of Peter and Andrew (John 1:43,44; 12:21). Jesus called Philip to be His disciple (John 1:43,44). He was a soul winner from the start for he brought his friend, Nathanael, to the Lord (John 1:45-51). Philip, the apostle, must not be confused with Philip, the evangelist, who was one of the seven chosen to serve the daily distribution of food to the widows in the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:1-6). He later preached the Gospel in Samaria (Acts 8:5-12), and was sent by the angel of the Lord to preach the Gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8: 26-40). He located with the church in

Caesarea where he married and became the father of four virgin daughters who had the gift of prophecy (Acts 8:40; 21:8,9).

Bartholomew is the same as Nathanael about whom we have already spoken. "... the consensus among the best and most reliable commentators is that the Nathanael mentioned by John (1:45-51; 21:2) is the Bartholomew spoken of in the lists of the apostles in the Acts and the other three gospels (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14; and Acts 1:13.... Bar-Tolmai, then, corresponding to Bartholmew, was Nathanael's surname" (Lockyear, All the Apostles, p. 56).

Thomas is always thought of as "the doubting apostle." He was not present when Jesus appeared to the gathering of the apostles on the day of His resurrection. When the apostles told Thomas "We have seen the Lord," he was doubtful and said he would not believe unless he could see the print of the nails in His hands and feel the wound in Jesus' side where the Roman soldier had thrust his spear (John 20:19-25). The following Sunday, the apostles assembled again and Thomas was present. Jesus stood in their midst and invited Thomas to examine the evidence. Thomas confessed: "My Lord and my God" (John 20:26-29)!

Matthew was a publican (tax collector) who worked for the Romans who ruled the Jews in Jesus' day. These tax collectors were especially odious to the Jews for two reasons: (1) The Romans oppressed the Jews; (2) The publicans often enriched themselves by collecting more than required. Matthew was also know as Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27,28). Jesus called Matthew to be His follower while he was at work on his job. He simply said to him: "Follow Me. And he arose and followed Him" (Matt. 9:9; Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27, 28).

James, the son of Alphaeus is also known as James, the less. This may refer to his height. He may have been short in stature. "The less" can also mean "one who is younger." His name is not found anywhere in the New Testament except in the lists of the apostles. He may have accomplished great things for the Lord in some part of the world, but we will have to wait until we meet him in that upper and better land to know his story.

Simon the Zealot belonged to a group of Jewish revolutionaries whose aim was to overthrow Roman rule. By training, Simon, as a Zealot, would be the natural enemy of a tax collector such as Matthew who was in the employ of the hated Romans. We know nothing further about this Simon. He is only mentioned in the New Testament in the lists of apostles. History records nothing of his work. We may assume he faithfully served the Lord until death.

Judas, the brother of James (or Judas, not Iscariot), is believed to be the one who is also known as Thaddeus and as Lebbaeus (Luke 6:16; John 14:22; Matt. 10:3). This apostle has one sentence he spoke recorded in the New Testament. "Lord, how is it that You will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" (John 14:23).

Also present with the eleven apostles were the women who followed Jesus: Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the Lord's brothers in the flesh. Some of them such as Mary Magdalene had been healed by Jesus of various infirmities and evil spirits. Others such as Joanna and Susana "provided for Him from their substance" (Luke 8:3). The brothers of Jesus were actually His half-brothers for they were the sons of Mary and Joseph. Mary was the mother of Jesus, but His Father was God (Luke 1:26-35; John 3:16 -KJV). The brothers of Jesus did not believe in Him during His ministry (John 7:5). However, they became believers as a result of His appearances following His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7). While waiting on the Lord to fulfill His promise, they "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication."

"And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of individuals together were about an hundred and twenty), 'Men and brethren, it was necessary that this Scripture be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit by the mouth of David spoke before concerning Judas who was guide to those who took Jesus for he was counted among us and had received part of this ministry" (verses 15-17).

There were about a hundred and twenty members of the little group of faithful disciples who gathered together in Jerusalem in the days following the Lord's ascension back to Heaven. Peter, the natural leader among them, arose and addressed them. He referred them to Psalm 41:9: "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who did eat of my bread, has lifted up his heel against Me." Peter explained this had reference to Judas' betrayal of Jesus. As one old time preacher aptly observed: "When one inspired man quotes another inspired man and says 'This is that, you can't get any thatter than that!'" Peter explained that this was a prophecy of Judas' betrayal of the Lord. Therefore, there was a need to replace Judas as one of the twelve apostles.

"Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his intestines gushed out. And it was known to all the residents of Jerusalem in so much as that field is now called in their common language, Akeldama, which means 'the field of blood'" (verses 18, 19).

Jesus had chosen Judas Iscariot as one of His apostles. Judas must have been a sincere disciple at the time. However, Satan put it in his mind to betray the Lord. Luke records that Satan entered the heart of Judas to tempt him to make a deal with the chief priests who were seeking a way to kill Jesus without stirring up the people (Luke 22:1-6). When Judas saw that Jesus was condemned to die, he repented and confessed he had betrayed innocent blood. He tried to return the blood money to the chief priests who had paid him to betray the Lord. When the priests refused to take the money, Judas threw it down and went out and hanged himself. The hypocritical priests would not put the money back in the treasury for they knew it had been used to bring about the death of an innocent man. Instead, they used the money to buy the potter's field for a cemetery in which to bury dead foreigners (Matt. 27:1-10).

At first glance, Luke's account in Acts of the death of Judas seems to contradict Matthew's account, but actually the accounts are the same. Matthew simply adds additional detail. J. W. McGarvey explains: "...the common method of reconciling Luke's account with that of Matthew is undoubtedly correct. We must suppose them both to be true, and combine the separate statements. The whole affair stands thus: 'He went out and hanged himself;' and by the breaking either the limb on which he hung, or the cord, 'falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out'" (McGarvey, p. 21).

The manner of Judas' death became known throughout Jerusalem. The field bought by the chief priests in which to bury foreigners appears to be the very field where Judas hanged himself. The ignominious death of Judas seems to have become widely known. As a result the people called the place where it occurred "the field of blood" because it was bought with blood money. In Aramaic "Aceldema" means means "field of blood."

"For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell in it, and let another take his overseership'" (verse 20).

Peter now proposes that a replacement must be found to fill the vacancy among the apostles left by the apostasy and death of Judas. He finds Scriptural support for this in Psalm 109 in which David is calling on God to punish evil men. David says of the evil man: "Let his days be few; and let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow" (Psa. 109:8,9). Just as an evildoer needs to be replaced, so someone righteous must be chosen to replace the traitor, Judas Iscariot.

“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 appointed to be a witness with us of His resurrection” (verses 21, 22).

Peter is doubtless speaking by inspiration for the appointing of a replacement for an apostle was a matter of the greatest importance. He laid down the qualifications. First, he had to be a man. He was to be chosen from the men {Greek: andron from aner: males as distinguished from females}. There were no female apostles. Second, he had to be among the followers of Jesus from the time of John’s ministry until the time that Jesus returned to Heaven. Third, he had to be a witness of the resurrected Lord. This means he must have known Jesus in the flesh and had seen Him after He was raised from the dead. A witness is one who has seen and heard and can bear testimony based on his firsthand knowledge (cf. Acts 22:14,15). There is no one living today who is qualified to be an apostle for no man living today has seen the resurrected Lord!

“And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabbas who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, ‘You, Lord, who knows the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen that he may take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas fell by transgression, that he might go to his own place. And they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles” (verses 23-26).

The men among the one hundred and twenty disciples who possessed the stated qualifications were set before the group. Then the Lord Himself chose which one was most suitable. This was done by prayer and the casting of lots. They first prayed the Lord would make His will known through the casting of the lots. Proverbs 16:33 says: “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.” The Lord selected the one of the two men He knew was best. The lot fell to Matthias. He was counted with the eleven apostles! The whole process makes it clear that Matthias was a full-fledged apostle in every way and not a whit behind any of the others. This way of selecting church officials is not given as a method for appointing church leaders today, but is confined to the apostolic age when miracles prevailed.

Some writers question whether Matthias was really an apostle. They suggest Peter was overly zealous and acting on his own in the matter. Many of them consider Paul to have been the twelfth apostle and the true replacement

for Judas. However, there is no reason to doubt that Matthias was “numbered with the eleven apostles.” Luke was writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He plainly stated that Matthias was added to the number, thereby bringing the number up to twelve again. Paul’s apostleship was a special case. He himself indicated this when he wrote of the Lord’s appearance to him: “After that, He was seen of me also, as one born out of due time” (1 Cor. 15:8). Nothing in this context indicates that Peter was not acting on the Lord’s authority. They selected two men who met the qualifications. They prayed to God and the result of the casting of the lots was guided by Him.

Review Questions

1. Why did Jesus appear to His apostles and those who knew Him best?
2. In which three ways were the apostles qualified to be Jesus’ witnesses?
4. What was “promise of the Father” that the apostles were soon to receive?
5. Name and describe the baptisms mentioned in Acts, chapters 1 and 2.
6. How many baptisms are there today? How long will it continue?
7. What kind of kingdom were the apostles expecting Jesus to set up?
8. Prove the church of Christ is not a substitute for the kingdom.
9. Why is it blasphemous for men to set dates for the Lord’s return?
10. T - F: Paul said the Gospel had been preached to every creature.
11. Where in the New Testament are the apostles named together?
12. Who was chosen to replace Judas? How was he selected him?
13. Why did the priests refuse to take the money they had given to Judas?
14. Why was it wrong for them to put it back in the treasury?
15. What did the priests do with the blood money they had paid to Judas?
16. Reconcile Matthew’s account of the death of Judas with Luke’s account.
17. Are the two accounts contradictory?

Chapter 2:

THE BIRTHDAY OF THE CHURCH

“And when the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in the same place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven like the sound of a strong, violent wind. This sound filled the whole house where they were sitting” (verses 1,2).

The day of Pentecost always came fifty days after the Passover. The word “Pentecost” is from Greek and means “fiftieth.” It was one of the three major Jewish festivals which required all male Jews from twelve years old upward to present themselves at the temple in Jerusalem (Ex. 23:14-17). “The festival is called (1) the Feast of Weeks (Ex. 34:22; Deut. 16:10,16; 2 Chron. 8:13), because it was celebrated seven complete weeks, or fifty days after the Passover (Lev. 23:15,16); (2) the Feast of the Harvest (Ex. 23:16), because it concluded the harvest of the later grains; and (3) the Feast of the First-fruits (Num. 28:26), because the first loaves made from the new grain were then offered on the altar (Lev. 23:17)” {Unger, p. 414}.

Friday was the day of preparation for Pentecost. The count for the fifty days began “from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete; even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall you number fifty days; and you shall offer a new grain offering unto the Lord” (Lev. 23:15,16). The sabbath was the seventh day (Saturday). Therefore, the “morrow after the seventh sabbath” would be Sunday, the first day of the week. The coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles was on the first day of the week! This was the day Christ arose from the dead (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1,2; Luke 24:1 ff; John 20:1ff). The church began on this day! It is not surprising then that the church met regularly upon the first day of the week to worship the risen Lord and to remember His death, burial and resurrection by which we are saved (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; 16:2).

“The day was fully come” simply means it was daylight. The apostles were no longer in the upper room where they had eaten the Passover and where they had been staying. The events that follow indicate they were in a place that was more public and contained room for a great many people, for three thousand of those present became believers on that day. Most likely, the place was one of the thirty rooms around the temple court, which were referred to by the Jews as “houses.” This would also explain the thousands of people who were within hearing distance of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles. There would be many in the temple early on this morning of the feast of Pentecost.

Without warning, a great noise came from the sky. The noise sounded like

a strong, violent wind. The sound filled the entire room where the apostles were gathered. Probably the sound was deafening, like the sound of a fast moving train or a powerful jet aircraft beginning its take off?

“And there appeared to them divided tongues similar to fire, and it rested on each of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other languages as the Spirit gave them the ability” (verses 3, 4).

Upon whom did the Holy Spirit come? Many argue that the Holy Spirit came upon the one hundred and twenty disciples. This would include the twelve apostles, Mary, the mother of Jesus, the half brothers of Jesus according to the flesh, and the women who were also followers of Him during His earthly ministry. However, this ignores the context. We can answer the question easily by asking a question: “To whom did Jesus promise the baptism of the Holy Spirit?” Jesus promised His apostles at the Last Supper that the Father would give them “another Comforter” when He left them. He identified Him as “the Spirit of Truth” (John 14:16-18). This Comforter would “teach them all things, and bring all things to their remembrance that He had taught them” (John 14:26). This Comforter (the Holy Spirit) would also testify of Him (John 15:26). Through the the apostles He would “reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:7-11). He would not glorify Himself, but He would glorify Jesus (John 16:13,14; See also Luke 24:44-49).

In Acts, chapter one, Jesus reminded His apostles of “the promise of the Father” and said to them, “For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (v. 5). He further said to the apostles: “You shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (v. 8). The apostles watched Him ascend into Heaven, heard the promise of the angels that He would come again in the clouds, and then returned to Jerusalem.

Chapter one ends with the Lord having appointed an apostle to take the place of Judas Iscariot. “They cast their lots and the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles” (v. 26). There was no chapter division in the original Greek text. Verse one of chapter two tells us, “They were all together in one place.” To whom does “they” refer? “They” is a plural pronoun. Grammatically, a pronoun refers back to the nearest noun. This is called its antecedent. The antecedent of “they” can only be “apostles” (1:26; 2:1) Therefore, “they” in Acts 2:1 can only mean the apostles to whom the promise had been made by Jesus! Only the apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost!

The divided tongues looked like fire. They rested upon each of the apostles,

The apostles then began speaking in languages that they had not learned as the Holy Spirit gave them the ability. The Greek word translated “tongues” in the King James Version is a form of “Glossa.” It means “a tongue, i.e. the language used by a particular people in distinction from that of other nations: Acts 2:11.” (Thayer, p. 118). The verses which follow make it very clear that actual languages spoken by men are meant. It does not refer to gibberish, or some supposed supernatural prayer language!

“And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under the heaven. Now when the news of this had spread, a large crowd of people assembled and were perplexed because each one of them heard the apostles speak in his own native language. They were amazed and wondered and said to one another, ‘Look, are not all those who are speaking from Galilee? How then do we hear them speaking in our own native languages: Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, and Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the district of Libya around Cyrene, and foreigners from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, people from Crete and Arabians. We hear them telling in our own native language the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and perplexed. They spoke to one another saying, ‘What does this mean?’ But others mocked and said: ‘These men are full of new wine’” (verses 5-13).

During the three great feasts each year, Jews came to Jerusalem, not only from Judea and Galilee, but from many other countries as well. The Jews had been scattered over the world in the various captivities. Some had returned to live in their homeland, but many had not. Also many Jews had also scattered to different parts of the world in order to carry on their trades and businesses. There were some fifteen or sixteen different nations mentioned here including those of Judea and Galilee. The phrase “every nation under heaven” is a figure of speech called an “hyperbole.” An hyperbole is an “exaggeration for the sake of emphasis” (Dungan, pp. 320, 321).

Some were amazed and confused and wondered what all of this meant. Others mocked. It seems there are always scoffers in every crowd. They said: “These men are drunk on new wine.” The word for wine in the Greek here is “gleukos” from which the English word “glucose” comes. “The verdict was given in a jesting spirit, but it revealed an underlying attitude of disbelief, for the apostles were speaking of the mighty deeds of God. Luke caught the frame of mind by using the word ‘mocking’” (Harrison, p. 55).

“But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them: ‘You men of Judea, and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to my words, for these men are not intoxicated as you suppose for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘And it shall come to pass in the last days,’ God says, ‘I will pour out My Spirit upon all mankind, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams, and even on My male and My female slaves I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy, and I will show wonders in the sky above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before that great and notable day of the Lord shall come. And it shall come to pass that whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved’” (verses 14-21).

Jesus had given Peter the “keys of the kingdom” at Caesarea Philippi when Peter confessed, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” The Lord had replied: “Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in Heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter (Petros: a stone) and upon this rock (petra: a cliff, bedrock), I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in Heaven” (Matt. 16:16-19: NASB). Keys are used to unlock and open. Peter had been given the privilege of opening the doors to the kingdom of Heaven, which is the church of Christ, by telling men what they must do to be saved, and thereby be added to the church which was to begin that very day.

As the spokesman for the apostles on this occasion, Peter began his sermon by telling the great crowd that the taunt of the scoffers that the apostles were drunk could not be true. It was early in the morning, much too early for one to have begun drinking and reached the point of intoxication. Instead, what the crowd of people had just witnessed was the fulfillment of a prophecy given more than eight hundred years before this time.

Joel was a prophet of God whose ministry was to the kingdom of Judah during the days when the high priest, Jehoida, served as regent for the young king, Joash, until he came of age. This would date the book of Joel about 830 B.C. (Archer, p. 304; Unger, p. 696). “The book tells of a devastating locust plague followed by a drought. Joel proclaimed this was God’s judgment upon Judah for her sins” (Rutherford, p. 87). The prophet segued from the locust

plague to a future time, another day of the Lord, when God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh.

“All flesh” means “all mankind,” both Jews and Gentiles. The Jews received the baptism of the Holy Spirit on this occasion when the Spirit came upon the apostles. The Gentiles would receive the Spirit a few years later when the household of Cornelius was baptized in the Spirit as the first-fruits of the great harvest of Gentiles who have come to Christ since that time (Acts 10:1-11:18; see the comments on this passage). The apostles had the ability to confer miraculous gifts of the Spirit such as healing, prophesying, tongues, etc. on other Christians (Acts 8:12-22; 19:6; Rom. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:6). Both men and women received the gift of prophecy (1 Cor. 11:1-5), but the women must have exercised this gift in a gathering of women only, for they were forbidden to speak in the general assembly of all the saints (1 Cor. 14:34,35; 1 Tim. 2:8-15).

“Wonders in heaven and earth” is apocalyptic language which was used to describe a momentous happening. Just as the locust plague on Judah was a “day of the Lord” for Judah when they were punished for their sins so the day of Pentecost was a day of the Lord when another great and momentous event was happening. Joel’s prophecy of the “day of the Lord” was a prophecy of the events of the first Pentecost after the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of the Lord. Note Joel 2:32: “And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered (saved): for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance as the Lord has said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call” (Joel 2:32). This was fulfilled on that Pentecost day when Peter preached the crucified, resurrected Lord and told the sinners who cried out “What shall we do?” (or “What must we do to be saved from our sins?”). These things all happened on Mt. Zion where the temple was located in the city of Jerusalem. It was the last age of God’s revelation to mankind (Heb. 1:1,2).

“You 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 your midst, as you yourselves also know, was delivered up by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God. You have taken Him unlawfully and put Him to death by crucifixion. God has raised Him from the dead for it was impossible that He should be held by death for David says concerning Him: ‘I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore, my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh will also rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will you allow your Holy One to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence” (verses 22-28).

Peter has answered the mockers and refuted their taunt that he and his fellow apostles were drunk. What the crowds had just witnessed was foretold by the Old Testament prophet, Joel (Joel 2:28-32). Peter now continued his speech by pointing out that Jesus of Nazareth was attested by God by the various miracles He worked in the presence of many witnesses on numerous occasions. These miracles were well known by all the people of Israel and could not honestly be denied. Peter used three different words to describe the miracles of Jesus. "Miracles" is from the Greek "dunamis" and refers to powerful works that demonstrated supernatural strength. "Wonders" is from the Greek "terata" and describes the reaction of the people who witnessed them. They were amazed or awestruck. "Signs" is from the Greek "semaino." "They are called signs because they were designed to present evidence to convince people concerning Jesus' person and message" (Reece, p. 63).

In spite of the excellent credentials Jesus had in the miracles He worked, the unbelief and jealousy of the Jewish religious establishment prompted them to deliver Him up to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, who alone had the authority to pronounce the death sentence of crucifixion. Both Pilate and the Jewish Sanhedrin were guilty of Jesus' murder for "by wicked hands Jesus was crucified and slain." However, it was according to God's will that Jesus should be crucified because He had to die as the offering for man's sins (Matt. 16:21; John 1:29; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24, 25). This was God's plan from the very foundation of the world (Isa. 53:1-13; Rev. 13:8).

God also raised Jesus' from the dead. The grave could not long hold the mighty Son of God. Peter is going to present the Scriptural proof that the Lord's resurrection was prophesied in the Old Testament. Many modern theologians and worldly scholars essentially deny the resurrection of Christ. One made the false statement: "The resurrection of Christ was not prophesied in the Old Testament. It is completely a New Testament doctrine." Obviously, this self-proclaimed scholar had not read Psalm 16:8-11 or Acts 2:25-28. If he had read them, he either did not understand them, or else he did not believe them.

Peter argued that David could not have been speaking of himself for it was well known that he died and was buried. He remained buried for his tomb was still in Jerusalem for all to see. David, however, was a prophet of God. When he wrote the words of Psalm 16, he was not speaking of himself. He was speaking of the Christ, his descendant according to the flesh. God had sworn an oath to David that the Christ would come from David's descendants and would sit on David's throne (2 Sam. 7:12,13; Psa. 89:3,4; Luke 1:30-33).

Peter, an inspired man, quoted from David, another inspired man (2 Sam. 23:2). David rejoiced when he was permitted to reveal the resurrection of his

descendant according to the flesh, the Christ (2 Sam. 7:12,13; Luke 1:31-33). God would not leave His soul in Hades, nor allow His body to decompose. Jesus was buried on Friday afternoon, spent Saturday (the sabbath) in the tomb but the following day (Sunday) He arose from the grave. Jesus' body was not in the tomb long enough to return to the dust (cf. John 11:39).

The King James Version of the Bible translated the Greek words "Hades" and "Gehenna" as "Hell. However, this is a mistake! Gehenna is used twelve times in the New Testament. Eleven of the twelve times it is found in the Gospels and is spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus used Gehenna to refer to a place of everlasting fire (Matt. 18:8,9; Mark 9:43-48). In each of the verses in Mark 9:43-48, Hell is described as "the fire that never shall be quenched," or "Hell fire." Jesus also called Gehenna "the place where the worm does not die" (See also Matt. 5:22; 10:28; Luke 12:5; James 3:6).

In Matthew 23, Jesus upbraided the scribes and the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. In verse 23, the Lord said: "You serpents, you generation of vipers, how can you escape the condemnation of Hell (Greek: Gehenna)?" In Jesus' parable of the sheep and goats, the Lord describes the great Judgment that will take place at His second coming (Matt. 25:31-46). The word "Hell" (Gehenna) is not used, but it is vividly described: "Then shall He say to them on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels (v. 41).'" In verse 46, the Lord concluded by saying: "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."

"Hades" is a Greek word that is not translated, but transliterated (the Greek form is changed into English to make an English word). Hades does not refer to eternal punishment! It is the realm of the dead, the place the spirits of the dead go to await the resurrection and Judgment. At the end of all earthly things, when the dead are raised and the Judgment takes place, death and Hades will be thrown into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:12).

The account of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31 clearly shows the difference between Hell (Gehenna) and Hades ('ades). A rich man lived abundantly and selfishly. A poor beggar lay each day at his door hoping to be fed from the scraps that were thrown out from the rich man's latest feast. Apparently the rich man took no notice of the needs of the beggar who was named Lazarus. Lazarus died and "was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom." In time, the rich man also died. He opened his eyes in a place of fire and torment. He saw Lazarus afar off in "Abraham's bosom." He begged Abraham to send Lazarus over to dip his finger in water and cool his tongue for he was in torment. Abraham told him it could not be done. They were separated by a great gulf and none could cross over from one side to the other.

The (formerly) rich man then begged Abraham to send Lazarus back to the earth to his five brothers so they would repent and not come to the place where he was. Abraham told him they had the Scriptures to warn them. The (formerly) rich man was insistent. He said, “No, father Abraham, they will repent if someone comes to them from the dead.” Abraham replied, “If they will not hear the Scriptures, neither will they repent if someone comes to them from the dead.”

The King James Version wrongly translates “Hades” here as “Hell,” thereby confusing the realm of the spirits of the dead awaiting resurrection and judgment with the place of eternal punishment for the wicked following judgment. Most of the major modern translations have correctly translated the word “hades” except for the New International Version. For many years the NIV still rendered “hades” as “Hell” thus confusing what happens to the spirits of the dead immediately following death with the eternal punishment that follows the Judgment. A later revision has corrected this error.

“Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David who is dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet and being aware that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of his fleshly descendants, He would raise up the Anointed One to sit on his throne, he foreseeing this spoke of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh decompose. This Jesus God has raised up. We are all witnesses of this. Therefore, being exalted by the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this which you now see and hear. David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says: ‘The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at My right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’ Therefore, let all the house of Israel know with assurance that God has made this same Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (verses 29-36).

The apostle Peter, speaking with confidence, continued his speech. The Jews knew and accepted that the Christ (Hebrew “Messiah” meaning “Anointed One”) would come of the lineage of David (2 Sam. 7:12,13; Psa. 89:3,4; 132:11; Luke 1:30-33). David had been dead for approximately one thousand years. His tomb was in Jerusalem and was well known to all the Jews: “David’s tomb was on the south side of Mount Zion....David’s was the only tomb inside the walls of Jerusalem” (Reece, p. 69). Since David had long been dead and his tomb remained until that time, he obviously was not speaking of himself in Psalm 16. He was a prophet of God. He knew God had sworn to him with an oath that He would raise up the Christ from his descendants. Psalm 16 was a prophecy that

was fulfilled when God raised the crucified Jesus from the dead. The soul (spirit) of Jesus was not left in Hades, (the realm where the spirits of the dead go to await the resurrection and the Judgment). Hades has two “compartments: Paradise: where the righteous dead go (also called Abraham’s bosom by the Jews) and a place of torment where the spirits of the wicked dead go. See Luke 16:19-31; 23:43; 2 Pet 2:4; Jude, verse 6).

When Jesus had ascended to Heaven and taken His place at the right hand of God’s throne, He then sent the promised Holy Spirit upon His apostles to equip them for their work as the ambassadors of His kingdom. The audience who heard Peter’s sermon learned that the Jesus whom they had crucified during the Passover had been raised from the dead, ascended back to Heaven, and taken His place at the right hand of God’s throne. He was God’s Anointed One for whom Israel had been waiting for many long centuries. It was He who had sent the Holy Spirit upon His apostles to enable them to speak in languages they had not learned.

“Therefore, let all the house of Israel know without doubt that this same Jesus whom you crucified, God has made both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart. They cried out: ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them: ‘Repent and be immersed each one of you by the authority of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you shall receive the gift which the Holy Spirit gives. For the promise is to you and your children and to all who are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.’ And with many other words Peter continued to bear witness and to exhort them saying: ‘Save yourselves from this perverse generation’” (verses 37-40).

Peter’s sermon on Pentecost has been called “the first Gospel sermon.” It was the first recorded sermon about the crucified, resurrected, ascended Lord and His plan of salvation for lost mankind. It was the first time that the “keys of the kingdom” were used to tell believers who had heard the Gospel proclaimed what they must do in order to enjoy its benefits (Matt. 16:18,19; Mark 16:15,16). It was the beginning of Christ’s church upon this earth since those who obeyed the Gospel were thereby added by the Lord to His church (Acts 2:47).

The Scriptures foretelling the coming of His kingdom were fulfilled on this day. It was “In the last days” (Joel 2:28-32; Isa. 2:2,3). It was during the days of the fourth world empire in the succession of empires that Daniel foretold beginning with Babylon (Daniel 2:31-44). It began in Jerusalem (Joel 2:32; Isa. 2:3). The Spirit of God was poured out as prophesied by Joel (Joel 2:28,29). Salvation from sin was made available to those “who called on the name of the

Lord” (Joel 2:32; Acts 22:16). This was the beginning of the Word of the Lord going forth from Jerusalem to the whole world (Isa. 2:3; Acts 1:8; 8:4; Col. 1:23).

Many of the Jews (about three thousand of them) were pierced to the heart by the message Peter preached. It is likely that some, perhaps many of them, had been in the crowd when Pilate asked: “What then shall I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?” (Matt. 27:22; John 19:13-16) and had joined with the others in calling for Jesus to be crucified. It is not surprising that when they became convinced Jesus was the Christ, and remembered they had cried out for Him to be crucified and a murderer, Barabbas, to be released in His place, that they were pierced to the heart!

Peter is now speaking to a multitude of believers. They had asked: “What shall we do?” This is an abbreviated form of the greatest question anyone could ever ask: “What must I do to be saved?” They understood that Jesus was the Christ, their Savior and they believed in Him. Now they want to know what to do to be saved from their sins. Peter plainly tells them: “Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift the Holy Spirit gives, for the promise is to you and to your children and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

“‘Let each one of you’ represents the change of the verbs in the Greek. ‘Repent’ is plural, while ‘Let each one of you be baptized’ is singular. There is also a change from the second to the third person. The change implies a break in the thought. The first thing you are to do when you are convicted of your sins is to make a radical and complete change. This is done in repentance, and is to be done by all. The next thing to be done is an individual thing. ‘Let each one of you be baptized....’” (Reece, p. 74).

We must have a clear understanding of what baptism is because the religious world is not united on either the form of baptism or its purpose. The word for “baptize” (baptidzo) comes from the Koine Greek language in which the New Testament was originally written. In the verb form it means “to dip, plunge, or submerge.” The noun form (baptisma) describes the process of immersion, submersion and emergence. A “baptist” (baptistes) is simply one who baptizes. It only occurs in the New Testament in reference to John who baptized Jesus (Vine, pp. 96,97). There are different Greek words for sprinkling and pouring, alternate forms of “baptism” which are widely used today but do not conform to the New Testament definition of baptism. Sprinkling in Koine Greek is from the word “rhantidzo” (Vine, Vol. 4, p. 69). Pouring in Koine Greek is from the word “cheo” to pour, or “katacheo,” to pour down. Sprinkling or pouring water upon the candidate for baptism is practiced by some denominations, but it is not according to the teaching of the New Testament (Vine, Vol. III, pp. 195,196)!

One does not need to be a scholar in Koine Greek, however, to understand the correct form of baptism. Many references in the New Testament make it very clear that Scriptural baptism was neither sprinkling nor pouring. It always makes it plain that the baptism of the Great Commission is an immersion in water! In fact, baptism requires “much water” (John 3:23). Therefore, baptism was always done in bodies of water sufficiently large enough to immerse the candidate for baptism. John baptized in the Jordan River and this is where Jesus was baptized (Matt. 3:13-16). Baptism requires a “going down into the water” and a “coming up out of the water.” This is plainly seen in the baptism of the Queen’s treasurer from Ethiopia (Acts 8:36-39).

Baptism is also described in the New Testament as a burial in the water and a raising up from the water. This imitates the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The apostle Paul wrote: “Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4: NKJV; see also Col. 2:12). Neither sprinkling nor pouring shows the beautiful symbolism of baptism as immersion does.

Peter plainly states the purpose for being baptized in verse 38. He said: **“Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins.”** When one hears and truly believes the Gospel, he will repent of his sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30, 31). Repentance involves a change of one’s mind toward sin (Matt. 21:28-32). This is brought about by Godly sorrow that one has sinned and a decision to turn away from all sin (Rom. 6:1,2). It also requires that wherever possible, one will make restitution for the wrong he has done (Matt. 3:8; 21:28-32). Simply stated it means that if one is a thief, he will stop stealing and return that which he has stolen (Eph. 4:28). If one is a drunkard, he will stop drinking (Eph. 5:18,19). If one is sexually immoral, he will stop having sexual relations with anyone to whom he is not Scripturally married (1 Cor. 5:9; Gal. 5:19-21; Heb. 13:4).

Many misunderstand the purpose of baptism. They correctly understand the necessity of faith, but argue that one is saved at the point of faith without any further acts of obedience. They also correctly understand man’s salvation is made possible by the grace of God, but argue that baptism is a work, and therefore has nothing to do with salvation. The Scriptures do indeed teach that we are saved by grace through faith: “For by grace you are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8,9).

God’s grace is the ground of our salvation. Man cannot save himself from his sins. God had to take the initiative. He owed man nothing for man had willfully

turned aside from His way and lived in disobedience (Rom. 3:23). However, out of His love for mankind, God devised the plan of salvation and gave His only begotten Son as the offering for our sins (John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:21-25). The sinner, however, must receive Christ, the gift of God's grace. He does this by his faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who died for His sins, was buried, and arose from the dead on the third day (1 Cor. 15:1-4; Rom. 5:1,2). The faith that saves is an obedient faith (Gal. 5:6; Heb. 5:8,9; James 2:14-26). Baptism then is a response by faith to receive God's grace. As such it is essential to one's salvation!

The purpose of baptism is plainly stated by Peter. It is "for the remission (forgiveness) of sins." Some try to get around this plain, simple statement by arguing that "for" means "because of." In other words, they argue that we are baptized because our sins have already been forgiven. An accepted rule of understanding the Bible is "Let the Scripture interpret itself." Let a plain passage of Scripture about which there is no doubt as to its meaning help you understand a passage whose meaning is disputed. The Holy Spirit has given us such a passage which clearly gives us an understanding of the meaning of "for the remission of sins." At the Passover meal, when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper (Communion), "He took the cup, and gave thanks and gave it to them, saying: 'Drink from it, all of you, for this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many **for the remission of sins**'" (Matt. 26:28: NKJV). Question: "Why did Jesus shed His blood?" Answer: "**for the remission of sins.**" Jesus did not shed His blood because our sins were already forgiven. He shed His blood so that our sins could be forgiven. The very same words are used in the Greek as in the English (Berry, p. 99). Just as Jesus shed His blood that we might have the remission (forgiveness) of our sins, we must be baptized in order to receive the remission (forgiveness) of our sins!

When one is baptized "in the name of Jesus' Christ" he is being baptized by "the authority of Jesus Christ." To do something in the name of the law is to do it by the authority of the law. To do something in the name of Jesus Christ is to do it by His authority. Paul admonished the church in Colossae: "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father" (Col. 3:17 NASB). Everything we do in obedience to the Gospel and in the work and worship of the church of Christ must be done in Jesus' name i.e. by His authority.

When we are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of our sins, we receive the gift given by the Holy Spirit. There has been much discussion in recent years about this gift of the Holy Spirit. Some believe we also receive a baptism of the Holy Spirit when we are baptized in water. Therefore, we are able to speak in tongues and do the other miracles the

apostles did. Others, including some in the church of Christ, believe we receive the Holy Spirit Himself as a gift. Therefore, the Holy Spirit personally indwells Christians, but no longer gives them miraculous power since the age of miracles was only for the formative years of the church (See Rutherford, pp. 69-75 of *The Spirit of Truth* for a fuller discussion). For those who hold this view, some believe the Spirit does help Christians in some vague way, but hesitate to say what He does or how He does it. Others will suggest things they believe the Spirit is doing as a result of the indwelling.

Those who believe in a personal indwelling of the Spirit argue that the Greek allows, and the context requires, that it is the Holy Spirit Himself who is given to the Christian as a gift.” The Living Bible Paraphrase renders the latter part of Acts 2:38 “You also receive this gift, the Holy Spirit.” The Good News Bible says “You will receive God’s gift, the Holy Spirit.” These are not actual translations, but paraphrases of what the author thinks is the meaning.

Others argue that Greek and English both allow two possible translations of the phrase “You shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (1) “You will receive the Holy Spirit Himself as a gift.” (2). “You will receive the gift which the Holy Spirit gives.” If a parent were to tell his child, “If you are good you will receive the gift of Santa Claus” he could be saying, “You will receive Santa Claus himself.” However, it is more likely that he is saying, “If you are good you will receive the gift which Santa Claus gives.”

“The word *gift* in each of the passages is the Greek noun *dorea*: ‘The gift (*dorea*) of God’ - Jno. 4:10; ‘the gift (*dorea*) of Christ - Ephesians 4:7; the ‘the gift (*dorea*) of the Holy Spirit’ - Acts 2:38: the same word, the same structure. The *gift of God* in John 4:10 to the Samaritan woman was God’s gift to her - the living water. The *gift of Christ* in Eph. 4:7 to the Ephesians was Christ’s gift to them - the blessings of grace mentioned in the text. By the same simple syntax, in the plain grammar of it, *the gift of the Holy Spirit* in Acts 2:38 was the Holy Spirit’s gift - ‘for the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all who are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.’ The Holy Spirit’s gift was all that is included within the promise in all its equivalent terms, the blessings of the Holy Spirit’s dispensation for the Jew and the Gentile” (Wallace, pp. 636, 637).

“And with many other words he earnestly testified and exhorted them saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation.’ Then they that gladly received his word were baptized, and the same day there were added to their number about three thousand souls” (verses 40,41).

Luke does not record everything that Peter said on this momentous occasion, but he recorded “all things that pertain to life and godliness” as the occasion required (2 Pet. 1:3). Surely, Peter bore witness to that which he had seen and heard during his apprenticeship under the greatest of all preachers, the Son of Almighty God, as well as relating that which the Spirit of Truth may have further revealed to Him regarding man’s salvation from his sins.

Three thousand people, Jews and proselytes from Judea, Galilee and various parts of the far-flung Roman Empire obeyed the Lord by being baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:26,27). The three thousand converts should not surprise us. They were the beginning fruit of a harvest whose seed was planted on the day that Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden and had gradually unfolded through the Patriarchal and Mosaic Ages and had culminated in the ministry of Jesus. It is a harvest that continues today and will do so until the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and in prayers” (verse 42).

This is the first account of the worship of the first Christians. Their religion was not an occasional thing with them, but a continual and regular part of their lives. The word “fellowship” comes from a Greek word which means joint participation or mutual sharing. It is translated as “communion” in 1 Cor. 10:16. It is translated as “contribution” in Rom. 15:26 and 2 Cor. 8:4. We share together in our worship when as a church we partake of the Lord’s supper (1 Cor. 11:1-23), give of our means (1 Cor. 16:2); join our voices together in the congregational singing which the Lord prescribed (Col. 3:16,17); offer up prayers to God (1 Timothy 2:1 ff.) and listen reverently to the reading and proclaiming of God’s Word (Acts 20:7). The apostles were the first preachers of the Gospel, but they were soon followed by a mighty host of others (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

“And fear came upon every soul, and many signs and wonders were done by the apostles. And all who believed were together, and shared what they had. Those who had possessions and goods sold them and shared the proceeds with others who were needy. They continued to worship in the temple every day. They ate their meals in one another’s homes with gratitude and simplicity of heart. They praised God and were held in high esteem by the general population. The Lord added those who were being saved to the church every day” (verses 43-47).

The first days of the church of Christ on earth must have seemed like Heaven on earth. The apostles supplied leadership for the body of believers. Fear, in the sense of reverence, filled the hearts of the people. The apostles performed many miracles to confirm their message was from Almighty God (Mark 16:20). Christians shared their possessions with those who were in need. Many had come to Jerusalem from distant places to keep the feast of Pentecost. Having become Christians they may have lingered longer than they otherwise would have, and in time their money and supplies began to run out. Those who lived in Jerusalem and surrounding areas came to their rescue by sharing what they had even if it meant selling their possessions to do so. They joined together in daily worship of their God and Savior. They were respected by the Jewish people generally. The fruit of their zeal, unity and good works gave them a ready hearing among all (Matt. 5:16). It is not surprising that people eagerly listened to the Gospel from such dedicated and loving people. The result was daily additions to the body of Christ which is the church of Christ (Eph. 1:22,23).

We often hear preachers in the media and in their evangelistic campaigns calling on people to “accept Christ and join the church of your choice.” There was but one church in the beginning. They were not told to “be saved and join a church.” Instead they were taught the Gospel and what they must do to be saved. When they obeyed, they were thereby (by their obedience to the Gospel plan of salvation) added to the Lord’s one and only body, the church. If we obey the Gospel today as they did in Jerusalem beginning at Pentecost, we will be added by the same Lord to the same church, the one that Jesus built (Matt. 16:16-18). It will not make us members of any denomination founded by mere men. We will be simply Christians, members of the original church of Christ.

Review Questions

1. What is the meaning of the word “Passover?”
2. How was the date of Pentecost determined?
3. Upon which day of the week did Pentecost always come?
4. What other significant Bible events occurred on the first day of the week?
5. To whom did Jesus promise they would be baptized in the Holy Spirit?
6. Prove that only the apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.
7. Prove that the “tongues” spoken on Pentecost were actual languages.

8. How did the scoffers explain the “tongues”?
9. Who made Peter the chief spokesman on Pentecost?
10. What are the “keys of the kingdom?” What were they used for?
11. Which Old Testament prophet foretold the events of Pentecost?
12. Who was included in the term “all flesh”?
13. Which Old Testament prophet specifically foretold the resurrection of Jesus?
14. Explain the difference between Hell and Hades?
15. Where did Jesus’ spirit go while His body was in the tomb?
16. Name three Old Testament prophets who specifically foretold the kingdom of Christ would come in Jerusalem in the days of the Roman Empire (or the “last days”).
17. How did Peter’s sermon affect the hearers? What question did they ask?
18. What did Peter tell them they must do?
19. What is repentance?
20. What does repentance require?
21. How many were baptized on Pentecost?
22. Prove that immersion only is true baptism?
23. Answer the argument that “for remission of sins” means “because our sins have already been remitted.”
24. When we are saved, how do we become members of the church of Christ?
25. True/False: Everything we do in worship must be done by the authority of Christ.
26. Thought question: Can a believer in Christ truly be a Christian if he/she has not been immersed in water for the remission of sins?

Chapter 3:

A GENUINE MIRACLE

“Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer which was three o’clock in the afternoon. A certain man who was lame from his mother’s womb was carried there. He was laid every day at the Beautiful Gate of the temple in order that he might ask alms of all who entered. When he saw Peter and John going into the temple he asked alms from them. Peter, along with John, fastened his eyes on the man and said, ‘Look at us!’ He paid attention to them expecting to receive something from them” (verses 1-5).

The hour of prayer was at three o’clock every afternoon. Many people would be coming to the temple at this time so it was a good time for beggars to ask for money. Those who were crippled, blind, or handicapped in various ways, often had no other means of living except by the generosity of their fellow worshippers. Many passages in both the Old and the New Testaments pronounce a blessing upon one who gives gladly and generously to the poor and needy. The wise man said: “He who gives to the poor shall not be in need, but he who hides his eyes shall have many a curse” (Prov. 28:27). In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord said: “Give to him who asks you, and from the one who would borrow from you do not turn away” (Matt. 5:42).

When the beggar saw Peter and John about to go inside, he asked for help from them. Perhaps he saw compassion on their faces which led him to believe they would be touched by his need? Peter and John looked at the man intently, and told him to pay attention. He took this as a good indication they would give him a generous offering. He did not realize he was to receive a much better gift than a few coins.

“Then Peter said: I don’t have silver or gold, but I am going to give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. He took the beggar by the hand, lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. He leaping up stood, walked and entered with the two apostles into the temple. He was leaping, walking and praising God. All the people saw him walking and praising God as he walked beside the apostles. They recognized him as the cripple who sat begging every day at the Beautiful Gate at the hour of prayer. They were amazed and wondered what had happened to him. As the crippled man who had been healed walked beside Peter and John, all the people ran to them in Solomon’s porch, greatly wondering” (verses 6-11).

Peter took the crippled man by the hand and raised him up from his sitting position. As Peter pulled him up, the beggar felt strength enter into his feet and ankles. He then leaped up and walked beside them into the temple, walking, leaping, and praising God. We can only imagine the sheer joy and exhilaration he must have felt! He did not take slow, halting steps. He showed no signs of stumbling. He did not hesitate or tremble with weakness, but he walked and leaped and praised God! He had never walked before in his life for he was crippled from the time he was born, but he did not first crawl, then take a few wobbly steps as babies do who are learning to walk for the first time, but his legs and feet were as strong as any healthy man's should be. There was none of the drama or pretense that one sees today when so-called "faith healers" supposedly heal someone miraculously.

"And when Peter saw the reaction of the crowds, he said to the people, 'You men of Israel, why are you amazed at this? Why do you look so intently at us as though we by our own power or holiness had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our ancestors, has glorified His Son, Jesus, the One you delivered up to Pilate, and denied Him when Pilate had determined to release Him. But you denied the Holy and Just One, and instead asked for a murderer to be set free. You thereby killed the Prince of Life who has been raised from the dead by God. We are witnesses of His resurrection. It is through faith in His Name that this man whom you see and are acquainted with has been made whole; yes, through faith in Him he has perfect soundness in the presence of all of you' (verses 12-18).

The apostle Peter quickly took advantage of the opportunity to give glory to God for the miracle which had just occurred. He declined to accept any credit for himself and John, his fellow apostle. The full credit for the immediate, miraculous healing of the man was attributed to the God of Israel whom they all worshipped. God had glorified Jesus, His Son, but the Jews, the very ones who were so zealous to worship God in the temple, were among those who denied Christ before Pontius Pilate who wanted to release Christ because he had found no fault in Him (Luke 23:4; 14-25). It was through faith in the name of Jesus, that is by His authority, that the lame man had been completely healed of his handicap with which he was born. It was not the faith of the lame man which healed him, but rather the miracle was done by the faith of Peter and John.

The Jewish multitude which cried out "Crucify Him," when Pilate asked, "What shall I do with Jesus?" and their rulers plotted the death of Jesus, but they did it in ignorance. They did not know the things plainly revealed by God

through His prophets that the Christ would die for their sins (Psalm 22; Isaiah 53; Luke 24:24-27; 44-48). Now all those things foretold by the prophets that the Christ should suffer for the sins of mankind and be raised again to life, had been fulfilled by Jesus.

“Repent therefore and be converted in order that your sins may be blotted out, so that there may come times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Him who was proclaimed to you, Jesus Christ, whom Heaven must indeed retain until the times of the restoration of all things which God spoke by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. For Moses said to the fathers: ‘The Lord your God will raise up to you from among your brethren a Prophet like me; you shall hear Him in all things whatever He shall say to you. And it shall come to pass that every soul who will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people’” (verses 19-23).

Repentance is correctly defined as “a change of mind toward sin, which is brought about by Godly sorrow and results in a reformation of life.” Repentance is essential to becoming a Christian. Often repentance is barely mentioned in our hurry to baptize people, but unless one has truly repented of all the past sins of which he is aware, and continues to repent when he becomes aware of his sins, he is not yet a proper candidate for baptism. One of the reasons an infant or small child is not a candidate for baptism is that he has not yet sinned, not having reached the age of accountability, and therefore, has no need of baptism (Matt. 18:1-6; Ezek. 18:20; 1 John 3:4).

“Be converted” in the King James Version is translated “turn again” in some more recent translations (ASV; ESV). In others, it is translated “return” (NASB). The purpose of repenting and being converted (or turning again, or returning) is “that your sins may be blotted out.” Peter is preaching the same Gospel in this second recorded sermon as he preached in his first (Acts 2). He is teaching the same plan of salvation here as he taught there. In Acts 2:38, he told inquirers who had been cut to the heart by the Gospel message to “Repent, and let each one of you be baptized for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (or the gift which the Holy Spirit gives).

An accepted rule of hermeneutics (the science of interpretation of human language) is that the best interpreter of Scripture is to let one Scripture explain another. Therefore, we shall do as many of the pioneers preachers did to explain what each of the elements in Acts 2:38 means and what each of the elements of Acts 3:19 means. We will let Acts 2:38 interpret Acts 3:19 and vice versa.

Acts 2:38: Repent: Be Baptized: Remission of Sins: Gift of the Holy Spirit

Acts 3:19: Repent: Be Converted: Sins Blotted Out: Seasons of Refreshing.

If one repents and is baptized for the remission of sins, he receives the gift of the Holy Spirit (which can mean the Holy Spirit Himself, or the gift that the Holy Spirit gives). Peter did not preach a different plan of salvation at the Beautiful Gate of the temple from the one he had preached on Pentecost for there is only one plan of salvation given in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:46,47). Therefore, the elements of Acts 2:38 and 3:19 must match. In both we have “repent” listed. In Acts 2:38, the next item is “for the remission of sins,” but in Acts 3:19, we have it stated as “sins blotted out.” Obviously, when one’s sins are “remitted,” they are “blotted out.” Then it logically follows that the “gift of the Holy Spirit” and “seasons of refreshing” are also equal to one another. Whatever the gift of the Holy Spirit is, it brings “seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord” (Eph. 1:3).

Let us note some relevant lessons from Acts 3 before leaving it behind. First, because there are many today who believe that miracles are still being done, and there are some charlatans who are making money (often from those who can least afford it) by claiming to work miracles, particularly miracles of healing, we shall compare this genuine miracle with many claimed miracles:

1. The healing of the man by Peter and John was spontaneous, but many of those today are pre-arranged or scheduled in advance.
2. The healing of the man at the temple was instantaneous; it happened immediately, but many of those today appear to happen gradually as the one supposed to have been healed falters, takes little steps but ends up walking and running.
3. The healing in Acts 3 was open and public to all, but many of the so-called miracles today always seem to happen at some faraway place where they cannot be easily verified, or perhaps not verified at all.
4. The miracle in Acts 3 healed a man who was not told he had to believe before the miracle could take place; he became a believer as a result of the miracle.
4. The man and his condition were well known to the many worshippers who came to the temple at the hour of prayer, but in healing sessions today it is common that someone will be “selected” from the audience who is not known to the others who are present, nor is his condition known to be genuine. Thus, there is no way one can verify if he is really ill, or lame, etc.
5. The man who was healed was known to be above 40 years old and crippled from the time of his birth (Acts 4:22) by those who witnessed his healing; therefore, there was no doubt that a genuine miracle was worked.

6. Skeptics (enemies of Christianity) would have denied the miracle if they could but the evidence was clearly overwhelming. This is not the case with the supposed “healings” shown on TV, or occur in great crusades and public church meetings.

7. Peter and John were poor men, but they never asked for money from the man who was healed nor took up a collection from the crowd of witnesses. Peter told the lame man: “Silver and gold have I none, but what I have I will give you.” Millions today claim the apostle Peter was the first Pope of the Roman Catholic Church. Modern popes live in splendor. The Vatican, headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church, is the treasury of priceless works of art. The wealthy and powerful popes of the present day are a far cry from the fishermen of Galilee who depended on the catch of fish each day and/or the generosity of fellow disciples for the daily necessities of living.

2. Neither Peter nor John claimed to have any special power within themselves to heal or work any other miracle. They owed allegiance to no one except the Lord. They healed “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth” and gave Him full credit for the mighty deeds that were done. “In the name of” signifies “by the authority of.” Paul wrote: “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to the God the Father by Him” (Col. 3:17).

3. Peter preached the Lord Jesus Christ, His deliverance to the Romans by the leaders of the Jews, the demand of the multitude for His crucifixion, and His resurrection from the grave. In other words, Peter preached the basic elements of the Gospel of Christ and he told people what to do to be saved for Acts 3:19 is a parallel passage to Acts 2:38 (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

Review Questions

1. When did Peter and John go up to the temple to pray?
2. Describe the condition of the man who was carried to the Beautiful Gate of the temple? Why was he brought there?
3. How long had the man been lame?
4. Give a Scripture from the Old Testament which pronounces a blessing on one who gives to the poor.
5. Give a command from the New Testament to give to the poor.
6. What did Peter tell the lame man about his and John’s financial condition?
7. In whose Name was the lame man healed? What does this signify?

8. Describe the change in the man when he was healed?
9. By whom was the lame man healed according to the apostle Peter?
10. Of what did Peter accuse the people who were going into the temple?
11. True/False: It was not the faith of the lame man which led to his healing.
12. Give as many Old Testament prophecies as you can find that were fulfilled in the death, burial and resurrection of the Christ.
13. True/False: The miracle was possible because of the faith of Peter and John, not the faith of the lame man.
14. List as many Old Testament prophecies of the suffering and death of Christ as you can find. Give book, chapter, and verse where they are found.
15. Show how Acts 2:38 and Acts 3:19 are parallel.
16. Contrast the healing of the man by Peter and John with the claims made by many who claim to heal miraculously today.
17. Define repentance.
18. Define "hermeneutics."
19. True/ False: Peter preached a different plan of salvation in Acts 3 from what he had preached in Acts 2.
20. Contrast the apostle Peter with the popes of Rome today.
21. Prove that Peter preached the basics of the Gospel in Acts 3.
22. True/False: Even though the lame man was healed, he had to learn to crawl before he could walk.
23. True/False: Pontius Pilate wanted to release Jesus because he found no fault in Him.
24. True/False: Children inherit sin from their parents.
25. True/False: If children are born with handicaps it always is the result of their sin or the sin of their parents.

Chapter 4: THE BEGINNING OF PERSECUTION

“And as they (Peter and John) were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees came upon them. They were very upset that the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming God had raised Jesus from the dead. They arrested the apostles and held them in custody until the next day for it was already evening. However, many of those who heard the message believed. The number of the men grew to about five thousand” (verses 1-4).

The people in the temple had crowded around Peter and John and the lame man they had just healed in the name of Jesus. This event had come to the attention of the priests, the temple police and the sect of the Sadducees. Annas, Caiaphas and the high priestly family were Sadducees. The Jewish Sanhedrin, which was the ruling council of the Jews, was dominated by the Sadducees. The Sadducees accepted only the books of the Law (Genesis through Deuteronomy) as authoritative. They denied that man had a spirit which survived the death of the body. They also did not believe in angels, spirits or the resurrection from the dead. The Pharisees accepted all of these things denied by the Sadducees (Acts 23:6-8). The Sadducees dominated the office of high priest for about 200 years before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (Reece, pp. 198,199; also New Analytical Bible, {dictionary}, p. 169). They were “grieved” (KJV) or “greatly disturbed” (NASB) that Peter and John were teaching the people, and especially that they were preaching that Jesus had been raised from the dead. They arrested them and put them in jail overnight.

Many of those who had witnessed the healing of the lame man in the temple, and perhaps others whom they had told, had become believers in Christ and were added to the church just as the 3,000 had been on Pentecost Day (Acts 2:38, 41, 47). The number of the men (Greek: males) now numbered 5,000 (Reece, pp. 173, 174). Most likely, a similar number of women also obeyed the Gospel. It was the custom to count only the men in those days. The church was growing rapidly! The healing of the lame man greatly accelerated the growth of the church. Thousands had become Christians in a relatively short period time since Pentecost.

“It came about on the following day that the rulers, elders, and scribes at Jerusalem with Annas, the high priest, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and other members of the high priestly family assembled together. Having placed Peter and John in the midst of them, they inquired of them: ‘By what power, or by whose authority did you do this?’ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: ‘Rulers of the people and

elders of Israel, if we are this day examined concerning a good work done to this infirm man by which he was healed, may it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of (by the authority of) Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands before you whole. This is the Stone which the builders rejected who has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no other, for there is no other Name under Heaven which is given among men by which we must be saved” (verses 5-12).

The rulers of the Jews, members of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews, led by the acting high priest and his family, had condemned Jesus to death and then put pressure on Pilate, the Roman governor, to condemn Jesus to be executed by crucifixion. The crowd of people was manipulated to call out for Jesus to be crucified when Pilate sought to release Him because he had found no evidence of wrongdoing by Him. They were all complicit in the death of the sinless Son of God.

The fact that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and was boldly proclaimed by the apostles to be the Son of God, angered these rulers of the people. If Jesus had indeed been raised from the dead, then He was truly the Son of God, the Christ, and therefore they had His blood on their hands for they had brought about His death! This they could not allow! Peter strongly made the point that Jesus was the Christ by quoting Psalm 118:22 and applying it to Him (cf. 1 Pet. 2:4-6; Eph. 2:20).

Peter’s inspired statement regarding Jesus, the Christ, that “There is salvation in no other” is widely disputed today by scholars and theologians including many who profess to be Christians. The Scriptures, however make it plain that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, man’s only Savior! Please note just two passages out of many which could be quoted: “Jesus said to him: ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:11,12).

“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and they noted the fact that they had been with Jesus, and seeing the man who was standing with them, they could say nothing against them” (verses 13,14).

Perhaps they were surprised when Peter and John faced them unafraid? They were probably used to having men cower before them in fear for they were

the highest governing body of Jews in the land. They observed, perhaps from their speech, dress, and mannerisms, that Peter and John did not come from the cultured, educated class of the Jews. It was apparent they had not been trained in the schools of the rabbis. They also recognized these two men had been disciples of Jesus during His ministry. Too, they saw the man who had been healed standing with them. No doubt he was a familiar figure in the temple so he would have been known to them as well as to the faithful worshippers. They all knew he had been lame from his birth. The man obviously had been healed of his life-long disability and was now standing in their presence. That a genuine miracle had taken place was apparent to everyone, and it could not be denied!

“When they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves. They said: ‘What shall we do to these men? Truly, a notable miracle has been done by them and is visible to everyone who lives in Jerusalem, and we simply cannot deny it. But to keep it from spreading further among the people, let us threaten them that from now on they must not speak to any man in the name of Jesus’” (verses 15-17).

The prisoners were likely taken by the temple guard to a nearby room where they waited to be summoned again. The Council of Israel was in a quandary. “What are we going to do?” they reasoned among themselves. “How can we punish these men for it is plain that a miracle has been performed by them?” They agreed that the only thing they could do to keep it from spreading further was to threaten the men, and demand that the apostles no longer even speak of Jesus or teach in His Name.

“They called them, and demanded that they no longer speak at all or teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, ‘Whether or not it is right in the sight of God to listen to you, more than God, you can judge because we cannot do otherwise than speak the things we have seen and heard’” (verses 18-20).

God’s people are taught to obey the laws of the land and submit to the government (Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:11-17). However, there is one exception to this. When the government demands of Christians that they disobey God’s law, then we must disobey the government in order to obey God. God must always come first! No law made by any government of men in this world is greater than any of the laws of God given in His Word. “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29)!

Peter and John spoke by the authority of the Holy Spirit. Before Jesus had sent His apostles out on the limited commission, He told them that they would be brought before government officials, but they were to “give no thought as to how to answer them: for it shall be given you in that same hour how or what you shall speak, for it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you” (Matt. 10:18-20).

“So when they had further threatened them, they let them go for they found no way that they could punish them for they were afraid of the people since all men gave glory to God for the miracle which had been done. The man was more than forty years old upon whom the miraculous healing had been done” (verses 21-22).

All the Sanhedrin dared to do was make threats against Peter and John if they preached Jesus and the resurrection. They did not dare to harm them for many people who knew the healed man had witnessed the miracle. These people knew he had been lame from birth and had been so all of his life. Now he was able to walk, run and jump. It could not be denied! The rulers dared not go against the overwhelming majority, nor could they find any way to discredit it. How different are the so-called miracles today which are supposedly worked by preachers who usually profit greatly from their chicanery (Cf. 1 Cor. 13:8-13).

“And being released, they went to their companions and reported all that they chief priests and elders had said to them. When they heard this, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord and prayed: ‘Lord, You are God who made heaven and earth and the sea and everything that is in them. By the mouth of your holy servant, David, You have said: ‘Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine useless things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Anointed. For truly against Your holy Child, Jesus, whom you have anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and also the people of Israel were gathered in order to carry out what your hand and counsel had already determined to be done’” (verses 23-28).

After being released, they assembled with their companions, their fellow apostles, and reported all that the Jewish leaders had told them. Then a prayer meeting was held among them. The early Christians were given to prayer. We would do well to follow their example today. Instead of being discouraged at the treatment they had received, the apostles prayed. The prayer was addressed to God the Father, the Creator of the heavens, earth and seas and everything that is in them. Most likely one of the Twelve led the prayer and the rest expressed

their agreement by saying “amen” (1 Cor. 14:16). It is not so stated in this place, but it was the common practice that prayers were addressed to God, the Father, as Jesus Himself had taught His followers in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:9; John 16:23,24). They were offered in the name of (by the authority of) the Son of God, who is the one Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5).

In the prayer, the first two verses of the second psalm were quoted. The second psalm, written by David, an ancestor of the Christ, is clearly Messianic. It is a prophecy of the Christ, and the apostles so understood it and applied it. King Herod and Pontius Pilate, both of whom held office by the good graces of pagan Rome, were involved in Jesus’ trials, condemnation and crucifixion. The Jewish rulers condemned Jesus. Jesus also appeared briefly before Herod. Pontius Pilate gave in to the Jewish mob who were aroused by the Jewish Council to demand Jesus’ crucifixion, and the actual crucifixion was carried out by soldiers of Imperial Rome under the command of Pilate, the Roman governor. However, in condemning the Christ to be killed, they were unwittingly fulfilling prophecies that were made long before their time (Isa. 53; Psa. 22; Gal. 4:4,5). All of this was a part of God’s plan to redeem lost mankind from their sins (Eph. 1:3-7). Jesus is said to be “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). This simply means that it was part of God’s eternal plan that Jesus must die as the sacrifice for man’s sins (see also Eph. 3:8-11; 1 Pet. 2:21-25).

“And now, Lord, look upon their threatenings, and give Your bondservants boldness to speak Your Word by reaching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done by the authority of Your holy Child, Jesus.’ And when they had prayed, the place where they assembled was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the Word of God with boldness” (verses 29-31).

Some of those of the Pentecostal sects teach this was a second baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures do not refer to it as a baptism of the Holy Spirit, but even if we were to grant that it was the case, only the apostles are involved. It does not state or suggest that the whole church received the baptism of the Spirit, which was never promised to the whole church, but to the apostles (Luke 24:33-49; Acts 1:4-8).

“And the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul. None of them said that his possessions were his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power, the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of Jesus, and great favor was upon them all. No one among them lacked anything he needed for those who owned houses or land were selling them and bringing the money and laying it at the feet of the

apostles. The money was distributed to those who were in need” (verses 32-35).

The church at Jerusalem was in a unique position in its early days. Jews came from many different nations to attend the Feast of Pentecost. No doubt many of the three thousand souls converted to Christ on Pentecost Day were residents of foreign nations and faraway cities and were only temporary residents in Jerusalem. It is also very likely that considerable numbers of those converted would want to stay for a time to enjoy the fellowship of their new brothers and sisters in Christ and to be further taught and strengthened in their new found faith. In time, the provisions they had brought with them would be exhausted. The generous Christians in Jerusalem responded to their need and sold houses and lands in order to provide for the needs of their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Some have argued that the early church practiced communism. Rather than the economic/political system of Communism as we know it today where everything is owned and controlled by the central government, we have here a group of compassionate Christians sharing their worldly goods with members of their spiritual family. Christians today respond generously to the physical needs of their fellow Christians and indeed to all men (Gal. 6:10). The compassion that the Savior showed for the hungry, sick, lame, blind, down-trodden, poor and grieving must be imitated by those who would follow Him today. A church that lacks compassion is not a true church of Christ. A professed believer who is hard-hearted and tightfisted is not a true Christian (James 1:27) . We will be judged at the Last Day on our attitude toward our needy neighbors, both near and far (Matt. 25:31-46). When we see someone in need, we must not pass by on the other side (Luke 10:25-37).

“And Joseph who was given the surname of Barnabas (which means ‘son of encouragement’) by the apostles, a Levite who was born on the island of Cypress, had a field, and sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (verses 35-37).

The inspired writer, Luke, then relates a specific example of a Christian at Jerusalem who sold his land and gave the money to the church to help the needy. This is our first introduction to Barnabas who played a large role in the first century church. “Joseph” was his birth name. “Barnabas” was what we would call a “nickname” today. It was an additional name which is based on some characteristic of the person to whom it is given (cf. John 1:40-42). We shall soon see that Barnabas was an encourager of others. He vouched for Saul following his conversion when the church at Jerusalem was afraid to accept him

(Acts 9:26-28). He was later chosen by the Holy Spirit to accompany Saul (now known as Paul) on his first missionary journey (Acts 13: 1-3).

Review Questions

1. What were the differences between the beliefs of the Sadducees and the Pharisees?
2. Which sect of the Jews held the office of high priest for 200 years prior to A.D. 70?
3. When Peter and John appeared before the Jewish Council, which one was the spokesman?
4. What was another name by which the Jewish Council was known?
5. Why were the rulers angry that the apostles preached the resurrection of Jesus?
6. Quote two passages from the New Testament that claim Jesus is man's only Savior from his sins and the only way to Heaven?
7. What did the rulers of the Jews realize about the apostles when Peter and John were brought before them?
8. When Peter and John told the Council, "We cannot do otherwise but speak the things we have seen and heard," what did the Council do?
9. By whose authority did Peter and John speak?
10. Where did Peter and John go when they were released?
11. How old was the lame man when he was healed by the apostles?
12. How long had the man been lame?
13. True/False: The lame man immediately began to walk and leap when he was healed.
14. What is the one exception to God's law that Christians must respect and obey the government of the land in which they dwell?
15. True/False: The rulers denied that the lame man had been healed.

Chapter Five:

DIVINE DISCIPLINE

The work of the church is three-fold according to the New Testament pattern. It can be set forth simply as (1) Evangelism: the work of taking the Gospel to the lost; (2) Edification: building up the saved by teaching, worship and fellowship; (3) Benevolence: helping those in need as we have opportunity. The church of Christ at Jerusalem was a model in all three of these areas. Later, the saints in Jerusalem became the recipient of benevolence from the Gentile congregations when a need arose among them (Acts 11:27-30; Gal. 2:10; Acts 24:17; 1 Cor. 16:1,2; 2 Cor. 8 & 9).

The first challenge occurred in the early days of the church. The widows of the congregation were cared for by the congregation. Money was supplied for this by the generosity of the Christians who were blessed with the financial means to do so. Men, such as Joseph who was nicknamed Barnabas, sold a property and gave the proceeds to the church. It is very likely that Joseph was highly praised for his generous deed.

“A certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a property, but kept back part of the money received. Sapphira was also a party to this deception. Ananias brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles’ feet. Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Was it not yours before you sold it? And after you sold it, was it not under your control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men. You have lied to God!’” (verses 1-4)!

It appears that Ananias and Sapphira wanted to receive the kind of praise that Joseph (Barnabas) may have received for his generous gift. Together they made the decision to hold back secretly some of the money for themselves, but represent their gift as being the entire price of the land. Therefore, the praise they received would be greater. They would receive credit for a much greater sacrifice than they really were making. However, they made the mistake of thinking they could lie to God and get away with it.

Peter said to the deceitful disciple, “Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?” Did Ananias actually think he could deceive the Spirit of Truth God sent to His disciples to guide them into all truth (John 16:13)? Peter rightly placed the origin of the lie where it belonged. It was from Satan, a liar and the father of liars, of which Ananias was one, who tempted him to make this plan with his wife that they might receive the greater praise for their gift (John 8:44). Peter reminded Ananias that the money was his and he could rightly have

kept some of it for his own use, but he actually thought he could lie to the Holy Spirit and get away with it. Peter then drove home the severity of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira when he said “You have not lied to men, but to God!”

Their pretense was a lie! When Ananias and Sapphira attempted to lie to the Holy Spirit, they were lying to God, for the Holy Spirit is Divine, one of the three Persons of the Godhead (Trinity) along with God the Father and Jesus the Christ. There is but one God (Greek: Theos, i.e. Divine Nature). However, there are three Persons who possess the Divine Nature: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:16,17; 28:19, 20; 2 Cor. 13:14; also Rutherford, *The Spirit of Truth*, pp. 1-3).

“And when Ananias heard these words, he fell down and gave up the spirit. Great fear came over all those who heard about it. Then the younger men arose, wrapped up the dead body of Ananias, and carried it out and buried it. About three hours later, Sapphira also came in. She did not know what had happened. Peter said to her: ‘Tell me, did you sell the land for so much?’ She replied: ‘Yes, for so much.’ Then Peter said to her, ‘Why have you agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? The feet of those who buried your husband are at the door. They will also carry you out.’ Then she fell down immediately, and gave up the spirit and the younger men came in, and finding her dead body, carried her out and buried her beside her husband” (verses 5-10).

God’s judgment was swift and sure! He could not allow someone to lie to Him in such a public and flagrant manner and get away with it. One of the seven things God hates is a lying tongue (Proverbs 6:16-19). One of the Ten Commandments given to Israel was, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16). The New Testament condemns lying, deceit and falsehoods as strongly as does the Old Testament. The apostle Paul wrote: “Do not lie to one another, seeing you have put off the old man with his deeds” (Col. 3:9). Among those who will not enter Heaven, but will be “cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone which is the second death” are all liars (Rev. 21:8, 27). Nothing can be hidden from God (Heb. 4:13). He sees all and knows all!

Three hours after the death and burial of her husband, Sapphira came into the assembly of the Christians. Where she had been, or what she was doing is not revealed, but she had not yet learned of her husband’s death. Peter, in the interest of justice, asked Sapphira directly if they had sold the land for so much (the amount that Ananias had falsely said) and she agreed that they had. When she lied, she was immediately stricken dead by God. The young men who

shortly before had buried her husband then took her out and buried her beside him.

“Then great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all those who heard of these things. And many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all with one accord in Solomon’s porch. Of the rest no one dared to join them; but the people magnified them, and more believers were added to the Lord, both men and women” (verses 11-14).

Peter did not kill Ananias and Sapphira, nor did he order their death. This was a case of Divine discipline which was carried out immediately and publicly that all might see and fear. It had the desired effect. Discipline is a deterrent to bad behavior. Our God is a God who is long-suffering, loving, merciful and kind, but He is also righteous and just. Parents who truly love their children will discipline them for their own good. Does not God, our Heavenly Father, even do the same? “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:28,29).

The world as a whole has strayed from God. However, there is still some respect for God and for truth and righteousness in the world. Nobody respects a hypocrite, even those in the world. Church discipline, done in the right spirit and for the right purpose will win the admiration, and perhaps even the appreciation of worldly people who expect Christians to live up to the high standard they profess. A church that carries out Biblical discipline consistently and fairly will gain the respect of its community. This will attract people who truly want to do what is right and be pleasing to God. It is not surprising that large numbers of men and women became believers and were added to the Lord through obedience to the Gospel (Rom. 6:1-18). Scriptural church discipline, carried out in a consistent and loving spirit, will have the same effect today!

Note that it was “through the hands of the apostles that signs and wonders were done among the people” (v. 12). The apostles are the only ones who have worked miracles up to this point. No mention has yet been made of the apostles laying hands on anyone else to give them the ability to work miracles. However, in the next chapter we will learn of seven men who were chosen by the congregation to be in charge of the daily distribution of food to the needy widows. When they were appointed, the apostles laid hands on them. Apparently, this was to confer on them the ability to work miracles for we soon learn that two of them, Stephen and Philip, were performing signs and wonders (Acts 6:5,6, 8; 8:4-7).

“The people brought the sick out into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches that at least the shadow of Peter might fall on some of them as he passed by. Also great crowds gathered around the apostles. They came from the cities surrounding Jerusalem. They brought those who were sick and tormented by evils spirits, and they were all healed (verses 15,16).

The apostles attracted great attention in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas by the miraculous healing of the sick, the demon possessed, the lame, etc. (Mark 16:17-20). Many in the area heard about this and brought their sick and afflicted to Jerusalem to be healed by them. Some even placed their sick along the streets where Peter, the most prominent of the apostles at this time, might pass hoping that merely having his shadow on them as he passed would heal them. Luke tells us they were all healed. This is unlike the so called “faith healers” of today who have people brought to be healed, but they are unable to do so. In such cases the self-appointed healers claim they failed because the person to be healed did not have enough faith. Jesus and the apostles healed the sick, raised the dead, gave sight to the blind, cast demons out of people, etc. but never failed, nor did they require the sick, blind, or dead person to have faith in order to be healed. The healers were the ones who needed faith in order to heal others (cf. Matt. 17:14-21).

“At this time, the high priest and his companions who were Sadducees were very angry. They laid hands on the apostles and put them in prison. However, an angel of the Lord came at night and opened the doors of the prison and released them. He told them to ‘Go, and stand in the temple and speak to them the words of life.’ When they heard this, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. When the high priest and his companions came, and the Sanhedrin had assembled, officers were sent to the prison to bring the apostles to them. But when the officers came to the prison, they did not find the apostles. They reported that they found the prison doors locked, and when they opened them, no one was inside” (verses 17-23).

The high priest and the sect of the Sadducees, who were the leading members of the Sanhedrin, were very angry at the apostles. They had commanded them not to preach any more in the name of Jesus, but the apostles had continued to preach in His name and to empathize that God had raised Him from the dead. This very message was contrary to the doctrine of the Sadducees who denied that the dead would be raised. It also angered them because it held them responsible for the murder of Jesus who was the Christ.

The Sanhedrin had warned the apostles to stop preaching in the name of Jesus, but they refused to do so.

“Now the captain of the temple police and the chief priests were very perplexed. They wondered what was going on. Then someone came to them with the news that the men they had put in jail were in the temple teaching the people. Then the officials brought the apostles to the council without doing any violence to them. They were afraid the people might stone them if they harmed the apostles. When the apostles were brought before the Sanhedrin, the high priest said: ‘Did not we strictly tell you not to teach in this Name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you want to make us responsible for the blood of this Man’” (verses 24-28).

The high priest and members of the ruling council were very confused. The officials took the apostles from the temple to the meeting place of the Sanhedrin, but they did no violence to them for they were afraid the people might stone them. When they were brought before the Sanhedrin, the high priest demanded: ‘Did we not command you not to teach in the Name of Jesus? But you have filled Jerusalem with His teaching! Now you are trying to make us responsible for His death!’

“Then Peter and the other apostles replied: ‘We must obey God, rather than men!’ The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you murdered by crucifixion. But God raised Him up to His own right hand, to be a Prince and a Savior, and to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. We are witnesses of these matters, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to all those who obey Him. When they heard this they were furious, and consulted together how to kill the apostles” (verses 29-33).

The apostle Peter had denied the Lord three times, but now he is as bold as a lion. He was acting as the spokesman for all the apostles when he said: “We must obey God rather than men!” God must always come first. Our first allegiance is to Him. Christians must obey the laws of the land in which they live. However, if there is a law which is contrary to God’s will, God’s will always takes priority. His will must be obeyed even if we have to break the law of the land to do it. Wives are under the authority of their husbands and must obey them (Eph. 5:22-24). But if a husband commands his wife to do anything which is contrary to God’s will, God must be obeyed even if it means disobeying the husband. Children must obey their parents (Eph. 6:1-3). However, if parents

demand their children do something which is clearly against God's will, then the children must disobey their parents in order to obey God. Obedience to God's will always come first!

The apostles continued their defense by plainly affirming that God had raised Jesus from the dead after the lawless Jews in association with the Romans had crucified Him. God raised Jesus up to make Him a prince and a Savior. He is a prince because He ascended to Heaven and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Col. 3:1; 1 Tim. 3:16). From His throne in Heaven, Jesus rules over His kingdom, which is the church (Col. 1:18; 3:1).

Jesus is man's only Savior! He paid the price for man's sins by His suffering on the cross (Rom. 5:6-10; 2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 1:7). The forgiveness of our sins is possible only through Him. This is the key point where all the other world religions fail. They do not have an adequate atonement for man's sins. There is little grace and no forgiveness in Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Shintoism, Paganism (whether old or new), etc. Only by the pure blood of the sinless Son of God shed on the cross can lost man ever receive forgiveness for even the least sin (John 8:24; Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:11,12).

The apostles were witnesses to Jesus, the Christ. They had lived with Him for three years. They had eaten, slept, and traveled with Him. They had heard His wonderful teaching and seen with their own eyes His many amazing miracles. They had watched Him die on the cross and for forty days after His resurrection, they had seen and heard Him, felt the print of the nails in His hands and side, and finally had watched spellbound as He ascended upward in the clouds. They heard the angels proclaim: "This same Jesus whom you behold going into Heaven shall so come in the same manner as you have seen Him go."

Not only could the apostles testify to Jesus, but through them and their teaching the Holy Spirit also testifies of Jesus. On the very night of His betrayal, the Lord promised the apostles He would send them another Comforter (John 14:16-18). This Comforter (the Holy Spirit) would "teach them all things and bring to their remembrance all that He had taught them" (John 14:26). This Spirit would testify of Him (15:26). Through the apostles He would "reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness and of judgment" (John 16:7-11). He would guide the apostles into all truth (and through them and their inspired written Word, guide us also). The Spirit would also glorify Him. The Holy Spirit does this through the Scriptures which He has inspired (John 16:13,14; Mark 16:17,18).

The high priest and the Sadducees and the other members of the Sanhedrin were furious at the words of the apostles. They had, in effect, been

told they had murdered God's Son, the Christ. In their deep anger and hatred they determined they must kill the apostles to stop their testimony.

“But there stood up in the Sanhedrin a Pharisee named Gamaliel. He was a teacher of the Law, and was held in high honor by all the people. He ordered that the apostles be put outside for a little while. Then he said to the council: ‘You men of Israel, be careful what you are about to do to these men for before our time Theudas rose up, pretending to be somebody important. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him, but he was put to death, and all those who followed him were scattered and it came to nothing. After him arose Judas of Galilee in the days of the enrollment. He drew away many people after him, but he was destroyed and all those who followed him were dispersed. Now I say, back off from these men and let them alone because if this counsel or work is of men, it will be overthrown, but if it is of God you will not be able to overthrow them lest you be found fighting against God.’ All the council of the Sanhedrin were persuaded by Gamaliel. They called the apostles and had them beaten and commanded them not to speak again in the name of Jesus. Then they let them go” (verses 34-40).

Gamaliel was a famous teacher of the Law of Moses. The apostle Paul as a young man had studied under him (Acts 22:3). Gamaliel was the grandson of the famed Hillel who was regarded as one of the greatest scholars of his day. Even though he was a Pharisee and part of the minority party in the Sanhedrin, Gamaliel was known as a moderate man, and recognized for his good judgment. Therefore, the others paid close attention to what he had to say.

Gamaliel began by reminding them of the history of their recent past. He began with a man named Theudas who had led a revolt against Rome and was followed by about 400 men. Josephus, the Jewish historian, speaks of a man named Theudas” who led a revolt. According to Josephus, Theudas led a large number of people to the Jordan River. He claimed to be a prophet and said he was going to divide the waters and lead them over. However, the Roman procurator made a surprise attack and many of Theudas’ followers were killed and his insurrection failed. Some commentators doubt this was the Theudas mentioned by Gamaliel for he lived ten or fifteen years after the events of Acts chapter five (Reece, p. 224). There were a number of Jewish men, however, who led periodic insurrections against Roman rule. Theudas was a fairly common name among the Jews so it is likely there was another Theudas and it is to him that Gamaliel refers. A man named Judas who led a revolt is mentioned by Josephus. He led a group of insurrectionists in the days of the enrollment or census. This occurred in A.D. 6. It is not the same enrollment

mentioned by Luke in chapter two of his Gospel. “Judas considered payment of taxes to Rome as treason....” This Judas was the founder of the Zealots, a religious/political party that was prominent during Jesus’ day and later began the revolt against Rome that led to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (Ash, p. 92). Judas’ revolt also failed.

Gamaliel now made his point. These movements to throw off the yoke of Rome had failed. Therefore, these efforts must not have been blessed of God so they came to nothing. He urged the Sanhedrin to be careful. If the Christian “movement” was not of God it would die in time. If it was of God and they continued to oppose it, they would be found fighting against God. The Sanhedrin accepted his conclusion. After flogging the apostles, they once again commanded them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

“And they departed from the council, rejoicing that they were worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus. Daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease to teach and preach Jesus the Christ” (verses 41,42).

The early church could not be discouraged, defeated, or destroyed! Their courage was increased by threats and beatings. Their faith grew stronger when persecution persisted. The more they were opposed, the greater grew their zeal to extend the faith. Tertullian, a Christian leader who lived from 155 to 223 and suffered through several periods of persecutions, stated that Rome’s persecution would never destroy the church: “We multiply whenever we are mown down by you; the blood of Christians is seed” (Mattox, p. 83)!

Review Questions

1. What is the New Testament pattern for the work of the church?
2. Define evangelism in regard to the work of the church.
3. Define edification in regard to the work of the church.
4. Define benevolence in regard to the work of the church.
5. Where did the early church get the money for benevolence?
6. Name a Christian who sold his property and gave the proceeds to the church.

7. Who were the husband and wife who sold land, kept part of the proceeds and gave the rest to the church, but represented what they gave as being the whole amount received from the sale? Why did they do this?
8. To whom did Ananias and Sapphira lie?
9. Who is a liar and father of all liars? Give Scripture for your answer.
10. What effect did the death of Ananias and Sapphira have on the church and on all heard who heard about it?
11. True/ False: Discipline is a deterrent to bad behavior.
12. True/False: A church that carries out Biblical discipline will gain the respect of the community.
13. Why was the preaching of the apostles offensive to the Sadducees?
14. Why did the temple police bring the apostles back without violence?
15. When the apostles were charged not to teach in the name of Jesus, what did they reply?
16. True/False: Must Christians obey all the laws of the land? Is there ever an exception to this?
17. God raised up Jesus to make Him a _____ and a _____.
18. True/False: All the world religions except Christianity have an adequate sacrifice for man's sins.
19. Who spoke to the Council and persuaded them not to kill the apostles?
20. What did he say to persuade the Council not to kill the apostles?
21. What do we know about Gamaliel?
22. Who said: "We multiply whenever we are mown down by you; the blood of Christians is seed."
23. Discussion Question: Is there persecution against Christians in the world today? Is there a possibility that Christians could be physically persecuted in our nation?

Chapter 6:

SEVEN SERVANTS SELECTED

“Now in those days when the disciples were greatly increasing, there arose a complaint of the Greek speaking Jews against the Hebrew speaking Jews, because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food to the widows” (verse 1).

God has always been concerned for the suffering of the poor. Many Old Testament passages commanded God’s people to help widows, orphans and foreigners living among His people (Deut. 14:28,29; 24:19-22; 26:12,13; Prov. 14:21; Zech. 7:10). Jesus had compassion on those who were ill, possessed with demons, blind, lame and hungry as well as the poor in general. His miracles were done in order to help those in need regardless of their nationality, race, or religion. Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan shows that God loves all men, and wants His people to show their love by helping others (Luke 10:25-37). At the Last Day, He will judge us as to whether or not we have fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, clothed the naked, and visited the sick and those in prison (Matthew 25:31-46).

James, the half-brother of the Lord according to the flesh, stated: “Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to visit the orphans and the widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). Paul commanded the churches of Galatia “... so them as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10: ESV).

The early church under the direct teaching of the apostles practiced benevolence. They first began with the needs of the Jerusalem church. Later, when there was further need, help came from mostly Gentile churches founded by Paul and his co-workers (Acts 11:27-30; 24:17; 1 Cor. 16:1,2; 2 Cor. 8 & 9).

Through the ages, believers in Jesus have shown compassion to the poor, the sick, and the helpless by building hospitals and providing homes for the aged, widows and orphan children. Churches have also given generously to help those who are victims of war, storms, fires and other misfortunes of life.

Widows were a special concern of the early church. If a man died leaving a wife and children, it would be very difficult for them to live. Unscrupulous people, even religious leaders, often took advantage of widows to swindle them out of the little they had. The Lord strongly condemned the scribes and the Pharisees of His day for this very reason (Matt. 23:14). The churches in the days of the apostles also took care of widows who were “widows indeed,” that is,

widows who were no longer of marriageable age, and had no children or grandchildren to look after their needs (1 Timothy 5:3-16).

Apparently there were many widows among the saints in Jerusalem. The church generously provided a daily distribution of food to them. The Jerusalem church was made up of two classes of Jews. There were the native Jews who were born in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas. They spoke the Hebrew language (Aramaic, a dialect of Hebrew, was commonly used). Their culture and traditions were strictly Jewish and their lives as Jews had centered around the temple and the various Jewish feasts. There were also many Jews who had been carried away to other lands in the various captivities of the Jews. Many of them had remained in the lands of their captivity. They only visited Jerusalem on the occasions of Jewish holy days such as Passover and Pentecost. Since Greek was the universal language spoken throughout the Roman Empire, these Jews spoke Greek. Their culture was also greatly influenced by the Greek and Roman culture. Many of both classes of Jews obeyed the Gospel and were added to the church.

For some reason, the Greek speaking widows in the church were being neglected or overlooked in the daily distribution of food. They made a complaint to the apostles about the matter. We do not read of elders in the church at Jerusalem until some years later (Acts 11:30). The twelve apostles were all still at Jerusalem and provided the leadership for the church at this time.

“Then the Twelve called the congregation of the disciples together and said: ‘It is not good for us to leave the preaching of God’s Word to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, look out among you and find seven men of good reputation who are full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this work, but we will continue to give our time to the ministry of preaching God’s Word and to prayer’” (verses 2-4).

The apostles called the body of believers together and told them to choose seven men that the apostles could put in charge of the daily distribution. They gave the qualifications these men must have. They must be men of good reputation and filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom. For a leader to be trusted by those he serves, he must be one who has set a good example by his life and therefore is one in whom the congregation has confidence.

These seven servants must also be “full of the Holy Spirit.” In his letter to the church at Ephesus, the apostle Paul commanded the Christians: “Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit...” (Eph. 5:18: ESV). A parallel passage is Colossians 3:16,17. One passage explains the

other. In Ephesians, Paul says “Be filled with the Spirit.” In the Colossians parallel, Paul says, “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly...” (Col. 3:16). He is saying the same thing to both churches. One is filled with the Spirit when he is filled with the Word of God, which has been revealed by the Holy Spirit to men who were inspired to write it down for all generations to come.

To be filled with wisdom is to have the good judgment and common sense to carry out the work in an organized and practical manner. James said: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously, without reproach, and it will be given him” (James 1:5: NASB). A young missionary was struggling to adjust to the foreign land where he had come to live in order to teach the Gospel to the people. He found it difficult to understand them and their culture. The missionary began praying to God for wisdom. He suffered hardships and difficulties, but learned from every one of them. He then realized that God was giving him wisdom by these difficult experiences.

The apostles could have taken on the responsibility of caring for the widows in the daily distribution of food. However, they had a higher calling. They were the ambassadors of Christ on earth (Matt. 19:28; 2 Cor. 5:20). Their job was to proclaim the Gospel and work miracles to confirm the message was from God. Prayer was an essential part of their work. It must also be an important part of the work of every preacher of the Gospel and every elder in God’s church. Today, we too often underestimate the importance and power of prayer in doing the work of the Lord.

“And the saying pleased the whole church, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a convert to the Jewish faith who had come from Antioch. The church brought these good men to the apostles. When the apostles had prayed, they laid hands on the seven men” (verses 5,6).

The inspired command of the apostles to the congregation was satisfactory to all. The apostles gave the qualifications for the men needed to do the work. They left it up to the congregation to find the men who had these specific qualifications, and were therefore best suited for the work. The apostles appointed them to the work in a very simple ceremony. They prayed and laid hands on the them. Laying hands on someone was a common practice of appointing a person to a certain work or privilege. Later, we will learn about the Holy Spirit choosing Barnabas and Saul to go out on the first missionary journey. The church fasted and prayed, and laid hands on the ones they were appointing to the task (Acts 13:1-3). In addition to this, the laying on of hands

was also practiced by the apostles in conveying the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit to other Christians. Please notice that up to this time the signs, wonders and miracles were done only by the apostles. No mention has been made of anyone other than the apostles working miracles! Later, we shall see the apostles gave miraculous gifts to certain others (Acts 8:14-21; 19:1-7; Rom. 1:11; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). Stephen and Philip, two of the seven upon whom hands were laid, are later found working miracles (Acts 6:8; 8:6,7).

Paul's inspired advice to Timothy on how to conduct things in the church of God is found in the two letters written to Timothy. In the first letter, Paul gave the qualifications for elders and deacons (1 Tim. 3). He also warned of the danger of being too hasty in choosing someone for the important work of either an elder or a deacon. He advised: "Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep yourself pure" (1 Tim. 5:22).

There is no better pattern to follow in appointing officers for the church today than the apostolic example found here. The apostles by inspiration gave the qualifications for the men needed to do the job. God has given the qualifications for both elders and deacons in His Word (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9). Wise elders will see that the congregation is well taught regarding the qualifications and work of elders. Then they will seek the participation of the members in setting forth men that they may appoint to these important offices.

Were these seven men who were appointed to a particular ministry or service in the church the first deacons in the church? The Bible does not call them deacons though some of the man-made headings at the top of verses in some editions of the Bible refer to "the appointment of the first deacons." We must remember that the heading at the tops of pages and of chapters are summaries written by men and are not part of the inspired Word.

The work to which the seven were appointed is referred to by the Greek word "diakonos" (verses 1,2,14). This word simply means one who serves. It is not used for slaves, but for those who perform acts of service to others, whether male or female. It is often used of preachers (ministers of the Word). In the context here "diakonos" is simply used for those who perform a service, and does not denote the office of deacons in the church (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8-13). However, when "diakonos" is used of a distinct office, it can be seen because it is used alongside elders as in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Philippians 1:1. In these passages, the Greek "diakonos" is not translated, but rather it is transliterated. This means that the Greek word is made into an English word without being translated. The translators of the Bible into English did this to let us know that here the word "diakonos" refers to a special office and not to servants in

general. Special qualifications are given for this office just as they were given for the office of elders or overseers.

“And the Word of God increased, and the number of the disciples increased in Jerusalem greatly, and a great number of the Jewish priests were obedient to the faith” (verse 7).

The church grows when all of the members work together in unity. Among those who heard and obeyed the Gospel, and were by this means added by the Lord to the church of Christ, were many of the Jewish priests who served in the temple. They had heard the preaching of the Gospel in the temple. They had seen the miracles worked by the apostles. No doubt, they had noticed also the zeal and courage of the apostles who were arrested and beaten for their faith.

Luke says these priests were “obedient to the faith.” The word “faith” is often used to describe the act of believing in the Lord (John 3:16; Mark 16:16; Acts 18:8; etc.). It is also sometimes used for that which must be believed in order to become a Christian. This is the way it is used in Jude, verse 3, when the Christians are exhorted to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” Here it refers to the doctrine of Christ, the facts which must be believed in order to be saved. The priests believed in the Gospel, the doctrine of Christ, and as a result they obeyed it and were saved. We must not only hear the Gospel, and believe it in our hearts, but we must also obey it by confessing our faith in Jesus as the Christ, God’s Son (Rom. 10:10); repenting of all our past sins (Acts 2:38) and being baptized for the forgiveness of our sins (Romans 6:3-18). This is obeying the doctrine of Christ (Rom. 6:17).

“And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people” (verse 8).

Stephen, one of the seven servants who had been appointed to oversee the daily distribution of food to the widows, is now singled out by the Holy Spirit for special attention. His qualifications to be one of the seven were to be “full of faith and the Holy Spirit.” Here we are told he was “full of faith and power.” The seven had hands laid on them by the apostles when they appointed them to the task of serving the widows. Obviously, it was through this laying on of hands that Stephen received the ability to work miracles. This is the first time anyone other than the apostles is mentioned as having the ability to work miracles. In chapter eight, we will see another of the seven, Philip, also worked signs and wonders. If the “gift of the Holy Spirit” in Acts 2:38 was the ability to work signs, wonders and miracles as some contend, is it not strange that no one other than the apostles is said to have worked miracles before this time?

“Then there arose certain ones of the synagogue of the Freedmen, and of the Cyrenians, and the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia, and of Asia, and argued with Stephen, but they could not stand against the wisdom and Spirit by which he spoke” (verses 9,10).

Stephen was a zealous advocate of the Gospel. He entered into the synagogues of the Jews who were not native born, but had come from various parts of the Roman Empire. They now made their home in Jerusalem. They would have been classified among the Hellenists, or Greek speaking Jews. These Jews maintained different synagogues from the Hebrew synagogues where the native born Jews worshipped. It is debated whether there was one synagogue where all the Greek speaking Jews worshipped or one for each of the groups mentioned. Most likely, each national group had its own synagogue.

The ancestors of the Freedmen (Libertines: KJV) were those who had been in slavery to the Romans, but had been given their freedom. Cyrene was in North Africa halfway between Alexandria and Carthage. One fourth of the population of this city was made up of Jews. Alexandria was built by Alexander the Great. It served as the Roman capital of Egypt. There was a very large Jewish population there. The Jews had great influence in the city. The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament in Greek was translated by scholars in Alexandria. Cilicia was in the Southeast of Asia Minor (now Turkey). The area is known to have had a large Jewish population in the first century. The apostle Paul was from Tarsus in Cilicia. Asia does not refer to the continent which bears that name in modern times. It was a province of the Roman Empire in western Asia Minor. Ephesus was its capital (Boles, pp. 97, 98; also see Baker's Bible Atlas).

Some writers believe that all these different nationalities shared one synagogue. Others think that each group had its own synagogue in Jerusalem. Unlike the temple which was a place of sacrifice, synagogues were simply places of worship where the emphasis was on the study of the Old Testament Scriptures. The temple and its sacrifices were dominated by Sadducees in the first century, but the scribes and Pharisees were more prominent in the synagogues.

“Then they bribed men to swear a false oath saying, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.’ And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes. They came upon Stephen, captured him and brought him before the Council. They brought in false witnesses who claimed: ‘This man does not stop speaking blasphemous words against the temple and the Law. We have heard him

say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and change the customs which Moses delivered to us” (verses 11-14).

Leaders in these synagogues disputed what Stephen had to say, but they were not able to overcome his arguments. They followed the same cowardly practice the Jewish Council had followed in condemning Jesus. When they could not find any wrongdoing in Stephen, or overcome him in debate, they bribed false witnesses to testify against him. These false witnesses claimed Stephen was guilty of blaspheming the temple, Moses, and God. The temple was a holy place for the Jews. Moses was their great lawgiver. To speak against Moses was the same as speaking against God’s Law given to Israel through Moses (Exodus 19:1- 31:18).

“And all that sat in the Council, looking steadfastly on Stephen, saw his face was like the face of an angel” (verse 15).

It is likely that Saul, who became the apostle Paul, was among those who had accused Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. Saul was from Cilicia and would have been a member of the synagogue of the Cilicians. He later confessed before a Jewish mob in Jerusalem who sought to kill him: “When the blood of Stephen, your martyr, was shed, I also stood by and consented, and held the garments of those who killed him” (Acts 22:20).

Stephen’s face was “lighted up with divine radiance” (Boles, p. 106). Looking upon him was like looking upon an angel. Moses’ face also shone when he came down from Mount Sinai after having received the Law from God (Exod. 34:29-35; 2 Cor. 3:7). Surely, the arrogant members of the Jewish ruling Council must have been struck by this. As men who had known the Scriptures all their lives, they would have surely thought of how Moses looked when he had been in the presence of God.

Review Questions

1. How did James define pure and undefiled religion?
2. For what reason did the Lord strongly condemn the scribes and the Pharisees in Matthew 23:29-33?
3. Describe “a widow indeed?”
4. What were the two classes of Jews found in the synagogues in Jerusalem?

5. When does the Bible first mention the presence of elders in the church in Jerusalem?
6. What does it mean to be “full of the Holy Spirit” or “filled with the Spirit?”
7. What reason did the apostles give for their not taking charge of the distribution of food to the widows?
8. Who gave the qualifications for those who were to be chosen to oversee the daily distribution of food to the needy widows?
9. Who chose the men to oversee this good work?
10. Who officially appointed these men to oversee this good work?
11. True/False: No mention is made in Acts of anyone else working miracles except the apostles before the time the apostles laid hands on the seven chosen to oversee the feeding of the needy widows.
12. Which two of the seven servants worked miracles after the apostles had laid hands on them?
13. Prove that the seven servants were not “deacons” in the sense of officers of the church.
14. What good result came from the way the apostles solved the problem of the feeding of the widows?
15. How does Luke describe Stephen?
16. Who was present among those who falsely charged Stephen and voted to have him stoned?
17. How did the face of Stephen appear to the members of the Jewish Council?
18. Name the seven men who were chosen to oversee the daily distribution of food to the needy widows?
19. True/False: Jesus actually said He would destroy the temple and change the customs of the Jews.
20. Define blasphemy.

“Then the high priest said, ‘Are these things so?’ And Stephen replied: ‘Brethren and fathers! Give me your attention. Our glorious God appeared to our father, Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia before he lived in Haran, and said to him: ‘Leave your country and your relatives, and go to a land that I will show you.’ Then Abraham went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. Then, after the death of his father, he moved from there also and came into the land in which you now live. God did not give him an inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on, but even when Abraham had no children, God promised to give this land to him and to his descendants after him. God told Abraham that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and they would bring them into bondage and oppress them for four hundred years. ‘And the nation to whom they will be in bondage, I will judge,’ God said, ‘and afterward they will come out and serve Me in this place’” (verses 1-8).

Stephen had been accused by the false witnesses of speaking blasphemy against the temple and the Law of Moses. They claimed they had heard him say that Jesus of Nazareth would destroy the temple and change the religious practices of the Jews which had been delivered to them by Moses. If these things were so, Stephen was guilty of blasphemy and therefore worthy of death. These accusations were false! Jesus did foretell the destruction of the temple which took place in A.D 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed (Matthew 24:1-35). However, He did not say He Himself would destroy it. Perhaps his accusers had reference to Jesus’ words in John 2:19: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” John explained the meaning of this when he said Jesus was speaking of the temple of His body (John 3:21). Regarding the accusation that Jesus would destroy the Law of Moses, the Lord Himself had plainly and publicly said: “I did not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it” (Matthew 5:17).

Stephen began his refutation of the false charges against him in a very courteous and respectful way. He addressed the Jewish Council as “Brethren and Fathers.” He then began an overall history of the Jews from the time of their common ancestor, Abraham, down to the sending of the Christ into the world. Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, was a descendant of Abraham. He was the specific ‘Seed’ of Abraham who would come to save them (cf. Galatians 3:16). Stephen began his survey in Genesis 11:26, continued it through the time of Moses, and concluded it with Solomon’s dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8).

Mesopotamia was the territory between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. “The region extends from the Persian Gulf to the mountains of Armenia, from the Iranian plateau to the Syrian Desert” (Pfeiffer, p. 360). The ancient nations of Assyria and Babylonia (Chaldea) were established in this area. Eden, where the human race originated, was in the southern end of Mesopotamia not far from where the two rivers merge before entering the Persian Gulf (See Genesis 2:8-14). Abraham’s original home was Ur of the Chaldees, a Sumerian city which had an advanced civilization including a written language, a knowledge of higher mathematics, an educational system, art, and other things that we commonly associate with civilization in our day (Pfeiffer, p. 55).

God appeared to Abraham in Ur and told him to separate himself from his relatives and go to a land he would show him. Abraham, with his father Terah, and nephew Lot, moved northward to Haran. After Terah died, Abraham and Lot moved westward toward Canaan. Abraham was moving in the direction God told him without knowing his ultimate destination (Hebrews 11:8). God promised Abraham he would give Canaan to him and to his descendants after him. First, however, Abraham’s descendants would live in a foreign land where they would be oppressed for four hundred years. They would then be freed by God (Genesis 15:13-16).

In Canaan, Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah in their old age. Isaac, in turn, became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of twelve sons, who in turn were the fathers of the twelve tribes which composed the nation of Israel. God gave circumcision, the distinguishing mark of His chosen people, to Abraham when Isaac was born (Genesis 17:10-14; 21:24).

“The patriarchs, becoming envious of their brother Joseph, sold him into slavery in Egypt. However, God was with Joseph and delivered him out of all his troubles and gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he made him the governor over Egypt and all his house. A famine came upon the lands of Canaan and Egypt, and brought great affliction to the people. Our fathers were not able to find food for their families. When Jacob heard there was grain available in Egypt he sent our fathers first. At their second visit to Egypt, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers and introduced them to Pharaoh. Joseph sent for his father Jacob and all his family to come to Egypt, about seventy-five souls. Jacob went down into Egypt and died there, and in time all the patriarchs died. They were taken back to Canaan, to Shechem, and buried in the tomb which Abraham had bought for a price of silver from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem” (verses 9-16).

Joseph's brothers were jealous of him because he was obviously his father's favorite among them. He was the son of Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel, who was now deceased (Genesis 35:16-19). Jacob openly showed his partiality for Joseph by giving him a coat of many colors. Joseph also had a dream that he and his brothers were binding sheaves of grain in the field. All of his brothers' sheaves bowed down to his. When Joseph told the dream to his brothers they hated him even more. Perhaps what caused them to hate him most was that he brought a report to his father of their bad behavior (Genesis 37:1-11). As a result of their ill will toward Joseph they sold him as a slave to a caravan going down into Egypt. To keep their father from discovering what they had done, they killed a goat, dipped Joseph's beautiful coat in its blood and brought it to Jacob. Jacob drew the conclusion they expected. He thought a wild beast had killed and eaten his son (Genesis 37:12-36).

Joseph went through many trials in Egypt, but God was with him and prospered him in all that he did. He gave Joseph the gift of telling the meaning of dreams. Pharaoh was troubled by a dream he had in which he saw seven fat cows that were eaten by seven lean and gaunt cows. He dreamed again and saw seven full heads of grain growing on one stalk. They were consumed by seven thin, withered heads that were blighted by the east wind. None of Pharaoh's wise men could interpret the dreams for him. Then the king's butler remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh how he had told the meaning of his dream.

Joseph was taken out of prison and brought to the king. He interpreted the dreams of the king saying they were the same dream, but repeated because of the severity of the drought that was coming. The seven fat cows and seven full heads of grain were seven years of great plenty that were coming. The seven thin ears and seven gaunt cows were seven years of famine that would follow the years of plenty. Joseph then advised the king to find someone wise to be put in charge of storing up extra food during the years of plenty. The king chose Joseph and made him the ruler in the land second only to himself in authority (Genesis 41:1-49).

When the years of famine came to Canaan, Jacob heard there was plenty of grain available in Egypt so he sent his sons there. They did not recognize Joseph for they likely thought he was dead long ago, but Joseph recognized them. He put them to the test. When his brothers returned at a later time to buy food again, Joseph revealed himself to them. He then sent for his father and brothers to come to Egypt to live where he could provide for them. Jacob and the patriarchs lived out their lives in Egypt. When Jacob died, his body was taken back to Canaan and buried there (Genesis 47:28-31; 49:28-50:13).

Critics claim there is a contradiction in the Bible between the Genesis account and Stephen's account in Acts. Genesis 46:26,27 tells us that sixty-six persons of Israel went down to Egypt in addition to Joseph who married in Egypt and had two sons. Therefore, the total of Jacob's family that went into Egypt was seventy. However, Acts 7:14 says: "Then Joseph sent and called his father, Jacob, and all his relatives to him, seventy-five people." The Septuagint (Greek Translation of the Old Testament made in the third century B.C.) has seventy-five. Stephen may have been quoting from it. The Hebrew Old Testament has seventy. McGarvey suggest that five of Jacob's daughters-in-law were living and Stephen includes them, thereby making seventy-five (McGarvey, p. 83).

"When the time of the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham approached, the number of Israelites grew and multiplied. This continued until there arose another Pharaoh who did not know who Joseph was. This man dealt deceitfully with our ancestors and oppressed them. He made them expose their babies so they would die. During this time, Moses was born. He was well pleasing to God. His mother nursed him for three months in his father's home. When he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter found him and raised him as her own son. Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians. He was mighty in words and deeds. When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his own people, the children of Israel. When he saw one of them mistreated, he defended and avenged the one who was wronged by striking down the Egyptian aggressor. He thought his brethren would understand that by his hand God would deliver his people, but they did not understand. The next day he saw two of them as they were fighting. He tried to reconcile them saying: 'Men, you are brothers. Why do you wrong one another?' But he who did wrong to his neighbor pushed him away and said, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Will you kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?' When Moses heard this, he fled and became a sojourner in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons" (verses 17-29).

Israel thrived in Egypt in the land of Goshen where they were given a place to live. However, the Egyptians became afraid because the Israelites were increasing so rapidly. They feared they might join themselves with Egypt's enemies and overthrow them. Therefore, they forced them to serve with hard labor. "They made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field" (Exodus 1:14). The king also commanded the Hebrew midwives to kill the male children when they were born, but allow the females to live. The midwives, however, feared God, and disobeyed the king.

When this plan failed, Pharaoh commanded all the people to cast every son born to them into the river (Exodus 1:8-22).

God hates “hands that shed innocent blood” (Prov. 6:16-19)! What blood is more innocent than that of helpless little babies who have never done any harm to anyone? How evil it is to kill such! What a price murderers of babies will pay when they stand before the Judge of all the earth to account for their evil deeds (Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 21:8)! Every year in our modern world, millions of helpless infants are murdered by abortion in the wombs of their mothers, and often at their mother’s request. What must God think of such a lack of natural affection (Rom. 1:31; 2 Tim. 3:3: KJV)?! When will civilized nations end such barbarity? How can we be civilized and continue to murder our children?!

Jochebed, the wife of a Levite named Amran, feared God. She gave birth to a baby boy and hid him for three months (Exodus 2:1-10; 6:19, 20). When she could hide him no longer, she took him to the river near the place where Pharaoh’s daughter came to bathe. She put him in a little ark of bulrushes. She placed her daughter, Miriam, at a convenient location to see what happened. When the princess of Egypt came by the baby was crying. She had compassion on him and took him to raise as her own son. Miriam approached the princess and asked, “Shall I call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women?” She received permission and she called her mother, Jochebed. Therefore, Moses, God’s appointed future leader, was saved and received the benefit of being cared for by his own mother. Doubtless, as the baby grew, Jochebed taught him of his own people and God’s plan for them. Because of his godly mother’s teaching, Moses was able to make that momentous decision to “refuse to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin” (Hebrews 11:24-26: NKJV).

Moses was blessed to have the advantage of an education in Egypt, a nation which at that time was the most advanced in the world. Because of his natural ability and the blessing of God, Moses excelled in his learning and became “mighty in words and deeds.” When he was forty years of age, Moses made a decision to take his stand with his own people. This meant turning his back on the riches, power, and ease of living in a palace with scores of servants at his beck and call. It meant giving up fame and pleasure. It also meant taking his stand with an enslaved, uneducated people with no earthly wealth, prestige or hope of advancement.

Moses went among his people thinking they would understand that God would deliver them from bondage by his hand. He saw one of his countrymen being mistreated by an Egyptian. He defended the victim and struck down the

aggressor. The next day, he saw two of the Israelites fighting with one another. He attempted to reconcile them saying, “Men, why do you wrong one another?” The wrongdoer pushed him away, saying: “Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?” When he realized what he had done was known, he fled the country. He went to the land of Midian where he lived a quiet life as a shepherd. He married and became the father of two sons. Apparently, he lived a happy, contented life for forty years.

“And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight. Coming nearer to consider it, the Lord spoke to him saying: ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Moses trembled and dared not to look at the bush. The Lord said, ‘Take the sandals off your feet for the ground on which you are standing is holy. I have seen the ill treatment of My people in Egypt and have heard their groaning and came down to deliver them. Now, come. I will send you to Egypt. This Moses, whom they refused saying, ‘Who appointed you a ruler and a judge?’ God has made a ruler and deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush. He brought them out, after he had showed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea, and in the desert forty years” (verses 30-35).

Moses was tending his sheep in the area near Mt. Sinai when he beheld a strange sight. A bush was on fire, but though it burned, it was not consumed. He drew near the bush to inspect it more closely. As he approached it, God spoke to him from the bush. The word “angel” is a transliteration of the Greek word “angelos” which simply means “messenger.” Angels are spirit beings created by God. They are of a higher order than man. They can assume human form when necessary. They are always spoken of in the masculine gender, but are sexless spirit beings who do not marry (Vine, p. 55). They are “ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation” (Hebrews 1:14: NKJV). Although the Angel of the Lord spoke, He identified Himself as “the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” God had appeared to Moses to appoint him to be the deliverer of His people from Egyptian bondage. There is much discussion about the identity of the “Angel of the Lord” as he appears in various places in the Bible. Some commentaries take the view that the Angel of the Lord is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ in a pre-incarnate form (Lenski, pp. 280, 281). Moses worked signs and wonders in Egypt, the Red Sea, and in the desert during the long journey to the Promised Land. Among these signs and wonders were the ten plagues in Egypt, the parting of the waters of the Red Sea for Israel to cross over, the closing of the waters of the

sea which resulted in the drowning of the pursuing Egyptian army, the bringing forth of water of from a rock and the provision of manna in the wilderness.

“This is the same Moses who said to the Israelites ‘The Lord God will raise up a prophet from among your brethren like me and you shall hear him.’ This is he who was with the assembly in the desert with the Angel who spoke to him on Mt. Sinai, and with our ancestors, the one who received the Living Oracles to give to us, whom our ancestors would not obey, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts turned back to Egypt, saying to Aaron, ‘Make us gods to go before us, for we do not know what has happened to this Moses who led us out of Egypt. And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the work of their hands. Then God turned from them and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets: ‘Did you offer to me slain beasts and sacrifices for forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of your god, Remphan, images which you made to worship; but I will remove you beyond Babylon’” (verses 37-43).

Moses’ prophecy that God would raise up a prophet like him is found in Deuteronomy, Moses’ final speech to the Israelites as they were preparing to cross the Jordan and enter the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). It was quoted by Peter in Acts 3:22,23 and applied to Jesus. Moses was a “type” of Christ. Both were sent by God. Both were ones through whom God’s law was given. Both were deliverers. Both were prophets. Both were mediators. Moses led the Israelites into the Promised Land. Jesus made it possible for us to enter Heaven.

It is amazing that the Israelites had witnessed the ten plagues God sent upon Egypt to persuade Pharaoh to let His people leave. They had seen the wonder of the Red Sea parting and had crossed over on dry ground with the waters being held back by the invisible power of God. They had also witnessed God’s power and provision for them in the daily gift of manna while traveling through the wilderness. They had been protected and given victory over all their enemies along the way. In spite of these many displays of God power and goodness, they still went astray and worshipped idols made by men’s hands. Their lack of faith and constant complaining is shocking! However, lest we be too hasty to judge them, should we not look at ourselves? God has bestowed blessings upon us that are far greater than any that He gave Israel, but often we do not appreciate what He has done for us, nor give thanks to Him. During the entire time that God was providing for and protecting His people as they traveled through the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land, they were

dividing the worship of God with the worship of the false idol gods of the corrupt nations round about them. They paid homage to Moloch, the god of the Amorites to whom little children were offered as sacrifices. They worshipped the sun, moon and stars including Remphan (Saturn) and other heavenly bodies. Eventually, God sent the nation of Judah into seventy years of captivity in Babylon because they would not cease their pagan worship.

“Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the testimony in the desert, just as He who spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern which he had seen. Having received it in turn, our ancestors brought it in with Joshua when the Gentiles were dispossessed as God drove them out before our ancestors until the time of David. David found favor in God’s eyes and asked that he might build a house for Him, but that honor was given to David’s son, Solomon. However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with human hands as the prophet said: ‘Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me?’ says the Lord. ‘Or what is the place where I shall rest? Has not My hand made all these things’” (verses 44-50)?

The tabernacle was a tent like structure. It was adapted for travel and was erected each time Israel encamped as they journeyed through the desert. When the Israelites led by Joshua conquered the Promised Land, it was set up at Shiloh (1 Samuel 1:3; 3:3) where it continued to have a central place in Israel’s life and worship. When David became king, he told Nathan the prophet: “I live in a house of cedar, but the ark of God resides in a tent.” Nathan told him to “Go and do all that is in your mind, for the Lord is with you” (2 Samuel 7:2,3). However, it appears that Nathan had spoken in haste without first consulting the Lord. That night God spoke to David and told him he could not build a house for Him. That privilege would be given to David’s son, Solomon (2 Samuel 7:4-17). When the temple was completed, Solomon, in his prayer of dedication said: “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built” (1 Kings 8:27: NKJV)!

Stephen had been charged with blasphemy under the Jewish law. This required the death penalty which would be carried out by stoning. The false witnesses against Stephen claimed he had said Jesus would destroy the temple and change the Law of Moses. Stephen defended himself by rehearsing the history of Israel going all the way back to Abraham. He showed that Abraham and the patriarchs who followed him worshipped God in Ur of the Chaldees, Haran in Mesopotamia, and as sojourners in Canaan long before the temple was built. For four hundred years, the Israelites served God in Egypt and the faithful

among them worshipped Him during the desert journey to Canaan at the tabernacle which God instructed them to make. They continued in this way until the time of David. David wanted to build a temple, but God forbade him to do so. When Solomon was given permission to build it, he acknowledged that a house could not be built big enough for God for ‘Heaven and the heaven of heavens’ was not big enough for Him (1 Kings 8:26,27). His judges should have drawn the conclusion that the temple is not essential for the worship of God.

As for the charge that Jesus spoke against the the Law of Moses, the fact was that Jesus perfectly kept the Law and openly declared that He came “not to destroy the Law but to fulfill it” (Matthew 5:17,18). J. W. McGarvey summarized the conclusion to Stephen’s defense: “As Joseph, the divinely-selected savior of his brethren, had been sold by those brethren into slavery, and as Moses, divinely selected to deliver Israel from bondage, was at first rejected by them to become a sojourner in Midian, and was then sent back by the God of their fathers to be rejected by them again and again, notwithstanding the most indisputable manifestations of God’s presence with him; and as all the prophets had met with a similar fortune, so now, the final prophet, of whom Moses and all the prophets had spoken, had been rejected and slain by the sons of these persecuting fathers. The combined power of all these facts and analogies is now concentrated in the closing paragraph of the speech....” (McGarvey, p. 86).

“You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always fight against the Holy Spirit just as your ancestors did! Which of the prophets was not persecuted by your ancestors? And they also killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, of whom you have now become the betrayers and murderers! You who received the Law by the direction of angels and have not kept it! When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart and gnashed at him with their teeth” (verses 51-54).

The tense situation of being on trial for his life, the depths of emotion welling up in Stephen as he not only defended himself, but stood up for Jesus, and the look of anger, even hatred, he may have discerned on the faces of his judges, may explain the fact that they saw his face as “the face of an angel” (cf. 6:15). The strongest language in the New Testament is that of our Lord in Matthew 23 as He upbraided the scribes and the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. Stephen’s description of members of the Sanhedrin before whom he stood is akin to our Lord’s condemnation of the leading religious leaders of Israel.

These men sitting in judgment upon Stephen were described by him as “stiff-necked.” This means they were proud and refused to humble themselves even before the Lord. Being “uncircumcised in heart and ears” describes the

fact that their religion was outward. They “talked the talk” but did not “walk the walk.” They made a pretense of doing God’s will, but “their hearts were far from Him” (Matthew 15:8,9). They resisted the Holy Spirit by rebelling against His Word taught in the Scriptures just as many do today (2 Timothy 3:16,17; 2 Peter 1:21). Their ancestors persecuted the prophets such as Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others. They killed the prophets who foretold the coming of “the Just One.” This is another description of the Christ, the only truly “Just One” who ever lived upon this earth. The members of the Sanhedrin before whom Stephen was speaking were guilty of the betrayal of Christ. They paid Judas to betray the time and place where they could arrest Jesus away from the crowds of His followers. They were guilty of His murder by bribing false witnesses to testify against Him, and by insisting that the Roman governor, Pontus Pilate, condemn Him to be crucified when Pilate was willing to release Him.

The members of the Sanhedrin had their anger stirred to the boiling point by Stephen’s powerful words. They could not truthfully deny them. They were aroused to the point that they behaved like wild animals. They gritted their teeth in their wrath and might have literally torn Stephen apart if they had not had other means of putting him to death.

“But Stephen, being full of the Holy Spirit, looking intently into Heaven, saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. He said, ‘Look, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’ Crying out with a loud voice, they stopped their ears, and rushed with one accord upon Stephen. Having thrown him out of the city they stoned him to death. The witnesses took their outer garments and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul. They stoned Stephen as he called upon the name of the Lord, saying: ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ He fell to his knees and loudly cried out, ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin.’ Having said this, he fell asleep. Now Saul approved of his death” (verses 55 - 8:1a).

Two of the qualifications given by the apostles to the church in Jerusalem for the men who would serve in the daily feeding of the widows was that each must be “full of wisdom” and “full of the Holy Spirit” (6:3). Stephen’s name appears first in the list of the seven chosen. It is stated that he was “a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit.” Stephen certainly had miraculous gifts which were given by the laying on of the apostles’ hands for he “did great signs and wonders among the people.” However, we can also be “filled with the Spirit” in a non-miraculous way. Ephesians 5:18,19 commands us to “be filled with the Spirit” without specifying the manner. Colossians 3:16,17 is a parallel passage. It begins “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you....” When we let the Spirit given

Word dwell in us richly in all wisdom” we are being “filled with the Spirit” in a non-miraculous way. Today we are filled with the Holy Spirit when we are filled with the Word of God which guides our thoughts and deeds.

Stephen, who became the first of many thousands of Christians who died for their faith, stared intently toward Heaven. Before his eyes he saw a vision of God’s splendor and Jesus standing at the Father’s right hand. Not surprising, he loudly exclaimed: “Look! I see Heaven opened and the Son of man standing at God’s right hand!” To the unbelieving orthodox Jews, Stephen’s words were the rankest of all heresy, even blasphemy! They held their hands over their ears as they cried out in horror that one dare speak such blasphemy.

They rushed upon Stephen and dragged him out of the city of Jerusalem. Under the Law of Moses, one who was to be stoned or otherwise executed must be taken outside the camp {or city} (Leviticus 24:14; Numbers 15:32-36). The Jews followed this command whenever they stoned someone (cf. Acts 14:19). Jesus was crucified outside the city of Jerusalem (John 19:16-20). The witnesses to the sin/crime of the person to be executed must be the first ones to cast stones at the victim (Deuteronomy 17:7). A young man named Saul was present. He did not take part in the stoning so he must not have heard Stephen’s teaching. However, he was present and in agreement with what was done for he watched Stephen die and held the outer garments of those who stoned him to death. Soon this young man will lead a fierce persecution against the Christians, including giving his consent for their death (Acts 8:1 ff; 1 Timothy 1:12-17). Later, the Lord appeared to him on the road to Damascus as he went to persecute Christians there. Saul became a believer and was baptized into Christ (Acts 9:1-18; 22:14-16). He became an apostle and is better known by his Roman name, “Paul.”

Stephen’s arrest and trial were much like that of Jesus. He was dragged before the Jewish Council (the Sanhedrin) and tried on false charges brought by false witnesses as was Jesus. He was then taken out from the city and stoned to death. Jesus was forced to walk out of the city bearing His cross to a hill where He was crucified even though he was innocent of the charges brought against him. Jesus prayed for those who crucified Him: “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). As Stephen was dying, he knelt down and cried out, “Lord, do not lay this sin to their charge.”

Jesus taught that prayers are to be directed to God, our Father in Heaven (Matthew 6:9). The apostle Paul taught the same thing (Ephesians 3:14). Jesus also taught that when He returned to Heaven our prayers should be made in His name (John 14:13,14). Notice especially John 16:23, 24: “And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you whatever you ask the Father in

My name, He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full.” The apostle Paul also taught the same thing (Colossians 3:17). Our Father in Heaven is the “giver of every good and perfect gift” (James 1:17). Jesus is the only Mediator between man and God (1 Timothy 2:5). When we pray, therefore, we address our prayers to our Heavenly Father, but we approach Him through Jesus who is our Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5), High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-16), Advocate (1 John 2:1, 2), and Intercessor (Hebrews 7:25).

How then do we understand Stephen’s two petitions to Jesus in the vision of the Heavenly throne room? Stephen plainly asked: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” and “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” First, we must keep in mind that the Word of God is truth. The chief characteristic of truth is consistency. If a statement is true, it is always consistent. It is never contradictory! Error, on the other hand, is always inconsistent. Sooner or later it contradicts itself.

Here is a sensible way to harmonize the general Bible teaching with this one “exception” found here. The way we are to pray today is to address our prayers to our Heavenly Father in the name of Jesus Christ (Matthew 6:9; Colossians 3:17). This is the way that is right and cannot be wrong! The case with Stephen is not the usual, standard approach to prayer. It is rather a vision of Heaven in the miraculous age sent to the first Christian martyr to strengthen and encourage him in his death. He was able to communicate directly with the Lord who has taken such an interest in his situation that He is standing instead of sitting at the right hand of God’s throne as is usually depicted in the New Testament. We no longer live in the age of miracles (1 Corinthians 13:8-13). God does not reveal Himself to us in visions and dreams any longer (Hebrews 1:1). Therefore, we do not see the Lord nor make direct requests to Him!

Stephen, who became the first Christian to die for his faith, stared intently toward Heaven. He saw a vision of God’s glory and Jesus standing at the right hand of His Father. Stephen exclaimed, “Look I see Heaven open and the Son of Man standing at God’s right hand!” To these harsh, unbelieving Jews, Stephen’s words were the rankest heresy. They held their hands over their ears as they cried out in horror that one would dare speak such words which they considered to be the rankest blasphemy.

They rushed upon Stephen and dragged him out of the city of Jerusalem. One who was to be executed was always taken out of the camp or the city (Leviticus 24:14; Numbers 15:32-36). Jesus Himself was taken out of the city bearing His cross (John 19:16-20). The witnesses to a capital crime or sin were required to cast the first stones at the accused (Deuteronomy 17:7). A young man named Saul was present. The witnesses laid down their outer garments at

the feet of this man. He was not included among the witnesses, but he was “consenting to Stephen’s death.” Soon after this, Saul began a very severe persecution of the church. He even went to foreign cities seeking Christians that he might bring them bound to Jerusalem to stand trial (Acts 8:3). On his way to Damascus, the Lord appeared to Saul. Saul became a Christian (Acts 9:1-18; 22:14-16). He also became an apostle and was better known as Paul, his Roman name (1 Timothy 1:12-17).

Review Questions

1. What were the false charges brought against Stephen?
2. What was the penalty for blasphemy?
3. Where did Stephen begin in his defense? Where did he conclude?
4. What was the land between the Tigris and Euphrates called?
5. Where was Abraham’s original home?
6. When God told Abraham to leave his father’s house and family and to go to a land that He would show him, what did he do?
7. Give the genealogy of Christ from Abraham to Judah, the son of Jacob.
8. What was the distinguishing mark of God’s people, Israel?
9. True - False: Abraham obeyed God and left his kin to go to a land that God would show him, though he did not know where he was going.
10. Why were Joseph’s brothers jealous of him? Give several reasons.
11. What did Joseph’s brothers do to him in order to get rid of him?
12. Describe the vivid dream of Pharaoh that Joseph interrupted?
13. Where was Jacob buried?
14. Explain the apparent discrepancy between Genesis 46:26,27 and Acts 7:14. How can it be reconciled?
15. Fill in the blanks: “There arose a Pharaoh who did not _____ Joseph.

16. Moses was mighty in _____ and _____.
17. Why did Moses kill an Egyptian?
18. How old was Moses when he decide to take his stand with his people?
19. How many years did Moses spend in Midian?
20. Name two ways Pharaoh tried to decrease the number of the Israelites?
21. Why did Pharaoh want to decrease the number of the Israelites?
22. Name seven things God hates.
23. How did Jochebed comply with Pharaoh's decree, yet save her son?
24. What is a common practice in modern times to control population growth that God hates?
25. What was the name of Jochebed's son who was adopted by a princess of Egypt?
26. How did God appear to Moses at Sinai?
27. What was the first thing God told Moses to do when He appeared to him at the burning bush?
28. Where does the word "angel" come from and what does it mean?
29. Describe angels as given in the Scriptures.
30. How did Stephen describe the members of the Sanhedrin?
31. How did he appear to them?
32. Who wanted to build a house for God? Who was permitted to build it?
33. Where was Abraham from originally?
34. What was the penalty for blasphemy?
35. Do people blaspheme the Name of God today? How?

Chapter 8: THE GOSPEL GOES TO SAMARIA AND ETHIOPIA

The eighth chapter of Acts is a pivotal chapter. The Gospel has been preached in Jerusalem and Judea. Now we are going to learn of it being taken to Samaria and also to a Jewish proselyte, a high official in the government of the African nation of Ethiopia. It will soon be taken to the Gentiles and then eventually it will go to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8; 10:1-11:18; Colossians 1:23). In this chapter we have three clear examples of conversion to the faith and an example of what a Christian must do to be restored to the faith when he has sinned.

“Saul approved of Stephen’s murder. That very day a great persecution against the church began in Jerusalem. All the members, except for the apostles, were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he ravaged the church in Jerusalem. He went from house to house and dragged out both men and women and committed them to prison. Now those who fled to various places proclaimed the Gospel everywhere” (verses 1- 4).

Saul, a young man who held the coats of those who stoned Stephen to death, did not cast a stone himself, perhaps because he was not a witness of Stephen’s teaching. However, he assisted those who murdered Stephen and approved of their evil deed. The persecution was so widespread and intense that the Christians had to flee for their lives. They scattered all over the surrounding area, but wherever they went they taught the Gospel of Christ (Matthew 28:18-20). Therefore, Satan’s plan to annihilate the church failed. In fact, it had the opposite effect from what Satan had intended. It resulted in the spread of the Gospel. God thwarted Satan’s plan and turned defeat to victory!

“Then Philip went down to a city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. The crowds were united in giving attention to the things Philip preached when they heard and saw the miracles which he did. The unclean spirits who possessed people cried out as they were cast out. Those who were paralyzed and those who were lame were healed. As a result, there was great rejoicing in that city” (verses 5-8).

During His ministry on earth, Jesus and His apostles had traveled through Samaria. At Sychar, Jesus remained at the city well while His disciples went into the city to buy food. A woman came to the well. Jesus engaged her in conversation and as a result taught her about true worship. The excited woman ran into the city and called others to “Come and hear a man who told me

everything I have done.” Many of the Samaritans believed in Jesus as a result. They asked Him to remain with them and He stayed two days. The seed had been sown. Now it is going to bear fruit (John 4:1-43).

Philip “preached Christ” to the Samaritans. To “preach Christ” is the same as to preach the Gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16,17; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4). It involves preaching that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world to die for our sins (John 3:16). After His death, He arose and ascended back to Heaven. He then sent the Holy Spirit upon the apostles as He had promised. The church was established on Pentecost day (Acts 2). One day He is going to return, raise the dead, judge every accountable being, and take his faithful ones away into Heaven for eternity (Matthew 25:31-46). To preach Christ also involves preaching what one must do to be saved (Mark 16:15,16; John 3:1-5).

The Samaritans were very attentive to the preaching of Philip especially when they saw the miracles he did by the power of the Holy Spirit. People who were possessed of demons were released from the demons’ control. Those who were paralyzed were made well and those who were lame were given the power to walk. Luke tells us that as a result of the preaching of the Gospel and the miraculous healing, there was great happiness and joy in Samaria.

“But there was a certain man there named Simon. Before this time, he had astonished all the people by his sorcery, claiming to be some great person. They all paid attention to him from the least to the most prominent. They said, ‘This one is that power of God which is called great.’ They were all following him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic tricks. But when they believed Philip preaching the good news concerning the kingdom of God and the authority of Jesus, they were immersed, both men and women” (verses 9-12).

There was a certain man in Samaria whose name was Simon. Before Philip came, Simon had amazed the people by his use of magic. He set himself forth as some kind of a great person. The people were deceived into thinking that this magician received his power from God. Therefore, they followed him, but when they heard the preaching of the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ and saw the mighty miracles which Stephen worked by the power of the Holy Spirit, they believed and were baptized. When they saw genuine miracles, it was apparent to them that Simon’s magic tricks were not actual miracles worked by the power of Almighty God, but simply the deceitful tricks of the magician’s arts.

Jesus gave the Great Commission to His apostles shortly before He

ascended back to Heaven. He told them to go into all the world and preach the Good News of salvation to everyone. Those who believed and were baptized would be saved. Those who did not believe would be condemned at the Last Day. He said that signs or miracles would be done by them to confirm the Word they preached was from God (Mark 16:15-20). Philip and Stephen had hands laid on them by the apostles when they were chosen along with five other men to be in charge of feeding the widows in the Jerusalem church. After this we see them working miracles to confirm the message of salvation which they preached (Acts 6:6-8). These miracles proved the preachers were accredited by God for only God could give such power to men.

Luke summed up the fruit that resulted from Philip's preaching and confirming the Word by the miracles (Mark 16:19,20; Hebrews 2:1-4), saying: "But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of God's kingdom, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were immersed both men and women." In order for one to preach Christ, he must preach the kingdom of God for it is the church of Christ, the one body, into which one is baptized (1 Corinthians 12:13). Those who were baptized were not infants or small children but were adults - men and women. Infant baptism is not found in God's Word!

The denominations which "baptize" babies believe they are born with inherited sin. However, the Bible defines sin as a "transgression of God's law" (1 John 3:4). Sin is that which one does which is contrary to God's will, not that which one inherits from his parents. Punishment for sin is that which sinners earn for their disobedience of God's will (Romans 6:23). Little babies are innocent. They are not guilty of sin for they do not know the difference between right and wrong. The prophet Ezekiel wrote: "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself" (Ezekiel 18:20: NKJV).

The word "baptism" is a transliteration of a Greek word whose root is "bapto." It means "to dip, plunge, immerse, submerge" (Thayer, pp. 94, 95). The Bible teaches that baptism is a burial in water which symbolizes the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:1-5; Colossians 2:12). Church history also confirms that only immersion was regarded as proper baptism in the early church: "...there is overwhelming evidence, and an impressive consensus, that early Christian baptism was by immersion, and only for those old enough to make a profession of faith. Paul's writings emphasized baptism as a death to the old life and rebirth in the resurrected Christ, and Peter talked about baptism being more than merely getting wet - it was the answer of a good conscience toward God" (North, p. 17).

“And Simon himself also believed, and after he was immersed, he was a close companion of Philip and was amazed at the the signs and wonders which he did. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the Samaritans had received the Word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived they prayed for them that they might receive the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit for He had not yet fallen on any one of them. They had only been immersed into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then the apostles laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit” (verses 13-17).

When Simon saw the authentic miracles done by the apostles, he was convinced they were from God. He believed the Gospel and was immersed into Christ (Galatians 3:26,27). He constantly accompanied Philip and was amazed when he saw the actual miracles done by him. The apostles laid hands on the Christians and gave them miraculous gifts. Only the apostles had the power to convey miraculous gifts to others by the laying on of their hands (Acts 6:6; 8: 14-17; Acts 19:6; Romans 1:11; 2 Timothy 1:6). This means that when the last apostle died, and the last person died who had received miraculous gifts of the Spirit by the laying on of an apostle’s hands, that miraculous gifts were no longer available. They were no longer needed when the Word of God (“that which was perfect” or “complete”) had been revealed and confirmed (1 Corinthians 13:1-13). Those who claim to work miracles today are as deceitful as Simon was before he became a Christian!

“When Simon saw that through the laying on of the hands of the apostles the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit were given, he offered the apostles money and said to them: ‘Give me this authority also that upon whomever I lay my hands he may receive the Holy Spirit.’ Peter said to him: ‘Your money perish with you because you have thought to buy the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter for your heart is not right before God. Therefore, repent of your wickedness, and pray to God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven, for I see you are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of wickedness.’ Then Simon pleaded: ‘Please pray to the Lord for me that none of these things may come upon me.’ When the apostles had testified and spoken the Word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, but proclaimed the Good News in many villages of the Samaritans as they traveled” (verses 18-25).

Simon had believed and been baptized just as other Samaritans had done. Nothing in the text indicates that his conversion was not sincere. He accompanied Philip and was amazed at the miracles done by him. When he

saw the apostles actually conferring the ability to work miracles by the laying on of their hands, Simon returned to his old, occultic mindset. He may have thought, "If I possessed this power to give miraculous gifts to other people, I could make a lot of money by charging for it." He came to the apostles and tried to buy this ability from them. Peter strongly rebuked him. He sternly told him: "You have no part in this matter!" It had been given by the Holy Spirit to the apostles only!

Some people, such as those who believe in the doctrines of Augustine and John Calvin, teach that a true child of God can never sin and fall away despite the plain teaching of Scripture (1 Corinthians 10:1-12; Galatians 5:4; Hebrews 4:11; 6:4-8). Therefore, they say that Simon was not sincere and was not truly converted. The Bible does not teach this! Other people will point out that early Christian writers speak of a Simon the sorcerer who was an apostate from the church and caused great harm. However, if such a man existed, it is not possible to connect him with this Simon in the Bible (Lenski, p. 233, 234).

Simon had obeyed the Gospel of Christ. Therefore, he was saved for he had obeyed God's first law of pardon (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). However, he then had sinned because he tried to buy the ability to bestow the gifts of the Holy Spirit on others when this privilege was given only to the apostles. Peter rightly rebuked him and called upon him to repent and seek God's forgiveness: "Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you" (Acts 8:22). This has been correctly called "God's second law of pardon." If one has been Scripturally baptized and then sins, he does not need to be baptized again. However, he does need to repent, confess his sin, and ask God for forgiveness (James 5:16; 1 John 1:7- 2:2).

Peter and John returned to Jerusalem. Along the way, they preached the Good News of salvation in many of the villages of Samaria and extended the borders of the kingdom of God even farther.

"An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip and said: 'Get up and go toward the south on the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza, which is uninhabited country. He arose and went. Note! An Ethiopian who was an important government official, the treasurer of Candace, the queen of Ethiopia, had been to Jerusalem to worship, and was returning. While riding in his chariot, he was reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The Holy Spirit said to Philip: 'Go near and join the chariot.' Philip ran to the chariot and heard him reading from Isaiah the prophet. He asked the official, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' The man replied: 'How can I unless someone guides me?' Then he invited Philip to get into the

chariot and sit with him. The passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: ‘He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before his shearer is silent, so He did not open His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away. Who shall declare His posterity for His life was taken from the earth?’ The official asked Philip: ‘I beg of you to tell me of whom the prophet is speaking. Of himself or of someone else?’ Then Philip opened his mouth and beginning at that same Scripture, proclaimed the good news about Jesus” (verses 26-35).

The conversion of the official from Ethiopia is one of the best known accounts of conversion in the book of Acts. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16) makes it clear that the Gospel must be preached to every accountable human being. It also makes plain what one must do in order to receive the salvation made possible by the death, burial, and resurrection of the sinless Son of God. There are several examples of people being converted to Christ which show us exactly what we must do in order to be saved from our sins. The conversion of the treasurer of the queen of Ethiopia is probably the best known example after that of the Jews on Pentecost.

It is sometimes taught that one must have a special visitation of either an angel, or of the Holy Spirit, in order to be saved. In the conversion of the Ethiopian official, both the Spirit and an angel played a part, but neither spoke directly to the sinner who needed to be saved. The Lord sent an angel to direct Philip to leave his good work in Samaria and go to a specific place where he would find one who was a good prospect for the Gospel. When Philip arrived at the place he was sent, he was then told by the Holy Spirit to approach the chariot. The angel and the Spirit were both involved, but they spoke to the preacher! Neither the angel nor the Spirit spoke directly to the sinner who needed to be converted to Christ. God has given the teaching of the Gospel to men (Mark 16:15; 2 Corinthians 4:7). Neither the Holy Spirit nor angels of the Lord speak directly to us today! The Good News of salvation is taught to men by men who learned it from the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures (Rom. 10:17; 2 Tim. 3:16,17).

The prospect to be taught was an important official in the government of the queen of the ancient African nation of Ethiopia. He is referred to as a eunuch in the King James Version of the Bible. Ancient kings often used eunuchs as slaves to protect and serve their wives. Many of the eunuchs also attained other responsibilities in the government. In time, the term “eunuch” came to be applied to government officials in general and not exclusively to those who were actual eunuchs (Unger, p. 381). Some think this man was probably a Jew who had gained the Ethiopian queen’s favor and was given this

important job. However, the Bible specifically calls him an Ethiopian (v. 27). Since he had been to Jerusalem to worship, it is logical to conclude he was an Ethiopian who was a proselyte to the Jewish faith. He was obviously a man of great faith for he had made a long, arduous journey of hundreds of miles in a horse-drawn vehicle to worship the God of Israel in the temple in Jerusalem. His spiritual interest is further seen in his reading of the Scriptures as he traveled homeward.

At the bidding of the Spirit, Philip ran alongside the chariot and asked the Ethiopian: “Do you understand what you are reading?” The man replied: ‘How can I unless someone guides me?’ He may have noted that Philip was a Jew, and therefore he might have a better understanding of the Scripture than he did. He invited Philip to join him in the chariot, and the two rode along studying the Scriptures. Without doubt, an important official like the Ethiopian would also be accompanied by a number of servants and soldiers for security.

The Ethiopian was reading from Isaiah, chapter 53, verses 7 and 8. This is a clear prophecy of the Christ suffering for the sins of others, the innocent for the guilty, that the guilty might be forgiven and go free (1 Peter 2:21-25). Philip began from this very Scripture and “preached Jesus to him.” To “preach Jesus” is the same as to preach Christ or to preach the Gospel. It not only involves telling how Jesus died for our sins and was raised for our justification (Romans 4:23- 25), but also what we must do to receive the benefits of Christ’s atoning death (Acts 2:36-47).

“As they went on their way, they came to a certain water, and the Ethiopian exclaimed: ‘Look! Here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?’ Philip replied: ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he replied: ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ Then he ordered the chariot driver to stop. Both Philip and the Ethiopian official went down into the water, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit caught away Philip. The Ethiopian did not see him again, but he went on his way rejoicing. However, Philip was found at Azotus, and going on from there, he preached the good news of salvation in all the cities till he came to Caesarea” (verses 36-40).

As they traveled, they came to a certain a body of water. Whether it was a stream, a spring, a pond, a cistern or a well, we are not told. Philip obviously had taught the Ethiopian the necessity of Gospel obedience and the man was convicted of his sins for he exclaimed: “Look! Here is water! What prevents me from being baptized? Then Philip said: ‘If you believe with all your heart, you

may.’ He answered: ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God’” (Acts 8:36,37).

The simple statement of faith in Acts 8:37 is found in the Textus Receptus, the Greek New Testament edited by the Dutch scholar, Erasmus, in the Reformation era. It is the foundation for the Authorized or King James Version of 1611, the Bible of the English speaking world for nearly four centuries and still widely used by Bible students despite its archaic language and grammar. Many modern translations of the Bible do not include this verse. They say there is no manuscript evidence for it. These translations simply jump from verse 36 to verse 38. It is not a smooth transition. The perceptive reader cannot help but think something is missing. However, the New King James Version as well as the Updated New American Standard Bible (1995) retain the good confession as made by the Ethiopian government official.

A confession of faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God is widely taught in the New Testament (Matthew 10:32,33; 16:15,16; Romans 10:8-10; Philippians 2:9-11; 1 Timothy 6:12-16). A Lutheran scholar correctly stated: “A confession of Jesus as the Christ was always a prerequisite for baptism” (Lenski, p. 345). He said this in spite of the fact that Lutherans “baptize” infants who are unable to believe and therefore to confess. This confession of Christ is found in the writings of Irenaeus who lived in the second century and in the writings of Cyprian in the early third century (Reese, p. 340). The writings of these men predate the major manuscripts of the New Testament upon which modern translators heavily rely. The author wholeheartedly agrees with the statement of J.W. McGarvey: “The truth declared in the confession, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is beyond controversy, the foundation of the church of Christ, and is so declared by Jesus Himself. Without it no church of Christ could possibly exist. It had to exist as a truth, and be demonstrated to men as such, before the church could begin to be” (McGarvey, p. 101).

The fact that the Ethiopian wanted to be baptized indicates that Philip in preaching Jesus to him had told him of Jesus’ command for believers to be baptized in order to be saved (Mark 16:16). The Ethiopian official commanded the driver of his chariot to stop. He and Philip dismounted from it. Both of them went down into the water. Philip immersed the believer in the water. Then they both came up out of the water. Neither sprinkling nor pouring would require both baptizer and the one to be baptized to go into the water and come up out of it. Luke’s words paint a picture of immersion, and indeed, this is the meaning of the word in the original Greek of the New Testament. Immersion requires “much water” (John 3:23). It is a death to sin, a burial and a coming up out of the water by which the death, burial and resurrection of Christ is symbolized (Romans 6:1-18).

The Spirit “caught away” Philip and he was not seen again. The Ethiopian official continued his journey rejoicing. He had heard the Gospel, believed in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, confessed his faith in Christ, and was immersed in water in the likeness of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. He was now forgiven of all his past sins. He was saved! He had every reason to rejoice!

Philip was next seen at Azotus. Going on from there he preached the Gospel in every city until he came to Caesarea, the Roman capital of Judea. Philip remained at Caesarea for the next twenty years or more. When Paul and several traveling companions were on the way to Jerusalem bearing benevolent funds to the needy in Judea, they stopped in Caesarea and stayed for a time in the home of Philip the evangelist. Philip had married and now had four virgin daughters who prophesied (Acts 2:17,18; 21:8,9; 1 Corinthians 11:4,5; 14:34,35).

Review Questions

1. Why is Acts 8 a pivotal chapter?
2. True-False: Saul cast the first stone when Stephen was murdered.
3. Why did Satan’s plan to destroy the church fail?
4. Where did Jesus teach in Samaria? Whom did He teach?
5. How long did Jesus remain in Samaria?
6. What is involved in preaching Christ?
7. True-False: To “preach Christ” requires one to teach what one must do to be forgiven of his sins.
8. How did God confirm the preaching of Philip?
9. Why did the Samaritans believe Simon was “the great power of God?”
10. What was the response of the Samaritans to Philip’s preaching and working of miracles?
11. True-False: Only men and women were baptized.
12. True-False: Babies and little children were baptized as well as adults in Samaria.

13. List the passages in the New Testament which speak of confessing Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.
14. True-False: The Greek word which is translated as “baptism” in The New Testament also includes sprinkling and pouring.
15. Why do so many of the denominations baptize babies?
16. Prove from the Scriptures that infant baptism is wrong.
17. Fill in the blanks: “The Bible clearly teaches that baptism is an _____ in water.
18. Fill in the blanks: “Both _____ and _____ were baptized when they believed Philip preaching Christ.
19. Why did the apostles in Jerusalem send Peter and John to Samaria?
20. Who were the only ones who had the power to lay hands on others and give them the power of the Holy Spirit to work miracles?
21. True-False: The conversion of Simon was really genuine.
22. What is the “second law of pardon?”
23. True-False: In order be forgiven, Simon had to be baptized again.
24. Which Old Testament book was the Ethiopian official reading?
25. What part did the angel play in the conversion of the Ethiopian?
26. What part did the Spirit play in the conversion of the Ethiopian?
27. Name two modern translations of the Bible which retain Acts 8:37?
28. To whom is the preaching of the Gospel committed?
29. Prove the Ethiopian official was immersed.
30. Give reasons for accepting Acts 8:37 as part of the inspired text.

Chapter 9: A PERSECUTOR BECOMES A PREACHER

“Now Saul was still breathing out threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. He went to the high priest and asked for letters giving him permission to go to the synagogues of Damascus so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem” (verses 1 & 2).

The death of Stephen must have been very traumatic for the church in Jerusalem and surrounding areas. The chief persecutor, a highly educated young man named Saul from the city of Tarsus in Cilicia, was zealous for the ancient Jewish faith. He was a Pharisee, the strictest sect of the Jews. He had been educated at the feet of the great Jewish scholar, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Saul was determined to destroy this new Jewish heresy (as he regarded it) which had sprung up in Judea. With all the fervor of his earnest being he “sought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 26:9). As a result of Saul’s rabid campaign against the Christians, the churches of Judea were laid waste and Christians were scattered abroad (Acts 8:1). Only the apostles had remained behind in Jerusalem.

Saul’s zeal was not satisfied as long as any believer in Jesus as the Christ remained. He pursued the Christians wherever they had fled. He had authority from the chief priests in Jerusalem, home of the temple and the headquarters of the Jewish faith, to go even to foreign cities and arrest Christians and bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem to stand trial (Acts 9:2). He made no distinction between women and men, but apparently the women were shown no special consideration because of their gender, but were as roughly treated as the men.

“As Saul traveled and approached Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven shined around him. He fell down on the ground and heard a voice speaking to him saying: ‘Saul, Saul. Why are you persecuting Me?’ Saul said: ‘Who are you, Lord?’ He answered: ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ He, trembling and astonished, asked: ‘Lord, what do you want me to do?’ And the Lord said to him, ‘Get up. Go into Damascus and you will be told what you must do. And the men who traveled with Saul stood speechless, hearing the sound of the Voice, but seeing no one. Then Saul got up from the ground and when his eyes were opened, he did not see anyone. They led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days, Saul was without sight and did not eat or drink anything” (verses 9:3-9).

Damascus is about 150 miles northeast of Jerusalem. It is one of the oldest, if not the oldest, continuously inhabited cities in the world. Apparently, it had a fairly large Jewish population and perhaps a growing Christian community as well. Many of those Christians who fled from the persecution in Jerusalem and Judea may have gone to Damascus to escape. This may be the reason Saul chose Damascus as the first foreign city to visit in his mad search for Christians to arrest and prosecute.

As Saul and his company were nearing the city at midday when the sun would have been at its brightest, a great light shone around them brighter than the noon day sun (Acts 22:6; 26:13). Saul fell to the ground. He may have been mounted on a horse or camel, or riding in a chariot. The blinding light seems to have overwhelmed him. Some writers suggest that Saul (Paul) at a later time suffered from bad eyesight as a result of this encounter (Gal. 4:13-15).

Saul heard a Voice calling him by name and repeating it twice. “Why are you persecuting Me?” the Voice inquired. Saul had persecuted the church. He had carried out his persecution by entering into the homes of Christians and dragging out fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers and children old enough to be accountable. He took them away in chains to be imprisoned until they could be tried for the offense of accepting Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. When one persecutes His people, he persecutes Jesus. The church is His body. He is its head and Christians are members of the body. To mistreat the members of His body is to mistreat Christ Jesus, the Head of the church (Eph. 1:22,23; 4:4-6; 5:30; 1 Cor. 12:12-27).

Saul asked, “Who are you, Lord?” Saul was aware that he was speaking to a Divine Being. Whether at this point he understood that He was speaking to the glorified Lord, he soon learned it was Jesus who was both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). The Lord replied, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting!” When he understood that the Divine Being to whom he spoke was none other than the very One he had been persecuting, Saul must have been overwhelmed with the thought that he had been fighting against God and His Christ! Is it any wonder that he was astonished and trembling?

Saul asked the same question in essence that is asked several times in the book of Acts: “What must I do to be saved” (Acts 2:37; Acts 8:35-39; 16:30). The Lord replied, “Arise, and go into the city and it shall be told you what you must do.” Some claim that Jesus spoke to them and told them they were saved. Why did He not do that to the Jews on Pentecost, or the Ethiopian eunuch, or the jailor and his family in Philippi? Jesus entrusted the Gospel to men (Matt. 28:19,20; 2 Cor. 4:7). He does not speak directly to us today, but he speaks only through His Word (Romans 10:17)! God is no respecter of persons

(Acts 10:34; 11:15-17). Since Pentecost, no person has been saved apart from hearing and obeying the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Hebrew 5:9; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:22-25).

The men who had accompanied Saul were speechless. They heard a Voice but saw no one. The vision of the Lord was for Saul only. Saul, who became the apostle Paul, later spoke of the fact that He had seen the resurrected Lord. Therefore he was an eyewitness of His resurrection, and could testify to it (Acts 22:14-16; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8). This was a qualification of being an apostle of Christ (Acts 1:22). Since there is no one living today who has actually seen the Lord in the flesh after His resurrection from the dead, there is no one who is qualified to be an apostle. Mormons, Catholics and other sects which claim to have living apostles simply do not have men who have seen the Lord and therefore can bear witness of him (Acts 22:14-16).

Saul had to be led by the hand into the city for he was blinded by the bright light which shone from above. For three days, he neither ate nor drank and spent the time in prayer! How many tears he must have shed at the thought that he had denied His own Savior, the Christ, God's Son! He had also persecuted and imprisoned His people as he tried to force them to deny their confession of Jesus as the Christ (Acts 26:9-11; 1 Tim. 1:12-16).

“Now there was a certain disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision and said: ‘Ananias,’ and he replied, ‘Here I am, Lord.’ And the Lord said to him: ‘Get up and go to the street called Straight and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying, and has seen in a vision a man called Ananias coming in and laying his hands on him so that he might receive his sight.’ Then Ananias replied: ‘I have heard from many about this man, and of how much evil he has done to your holy ones in Jerusalem, and he has authority here from the chief priests to bind everyone who calls upon Your Name.’ But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of mine to bear My name before the Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel, for I will show him how much he must suffer for My Name’s sake’” (verses 10-16).

Ananias was a Christian who lived in Damascus. He was a Jew who had become a Christian. Some of those who fled the persecution following Stephen's death may have gone to Damascus. The Lord spoke to him in a vision just as He had spoken to Saul on the road to Damascus. The Lord knew exactly where Saul was and gave Ananias explicit directions. The street that is called “Straight” was said to go through the city of that day. It had neither bend nor curve. At the house of one named Judas, Ananias would find Saul praying.

He also informed Ananias that Saul had seen a vision of someone called Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him that he might receive his sight.

Instead of telling the Lord that he would do as He had commanded, Ananias said: “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, and how much evil he has done to your holy ones in Jerusalem, and he has come here with authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon your Name.” The Lord replied to him: “Go, for he is My chosen vessel to carry My Name before the Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel, and I will show him how many things he must suffer for the sake of My Name.”

Today, many of us who profess to be followers of the Christ are like Ananias and argue with the Lord about his commands that we do not like. Jesus said: ‘Why do you call Me ‘Lord,’ ‘Lord,’ but do not do the things I say?’ (Luke 6:46). If we do not do His will humbly and willingly, we cannot claim the blessings Jesus has promised (Matt. 7:21).

“Then Ananias went on his way and entered the house of Judas and laid his hands on Saul. He said: ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you in the way you came has sent me to you that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and Saul received his sight. He arose and was baptized. He then ate and was strengthened and remained with the disciples in Damascus for several days” (verses 17-19).

Saul was expecting Ananias to come for he had seen him in a vision from the Lord. Ananias explained that the Lord had sent him that Saul might receive his sight and receive the Holy Spirit. In order to be an apostle one had to be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4,5). The baptism of the Holy Spirit was sent by the Lord from Heaven (John 14:26; 15:26). There are only two recorded instances of the baptism of the Spirit in the New Testament: (1) The apostles (Acts 2) and the household of Cornelius (Acts 10:1-11:15). Saul must also have received the baptism of the Spirit for he was a full-fledged apostle in the Biblical sense (1 Cor. 9:1,2). However, Saul’s baptism of the Holy Spirit is implied but not specifically recorded. We know he received it as a result of Ananias’s coming to him, but we are not given the details of its occurrence.

Saul received his eyesight, and then was immediately baptized for the remission of sins as the Great Commission teaches, and as was practiced in all the examples of conversion in the New Testament (Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; 8:12,13; 35-39). Following his baptism Saul had his first meal in three days and regained his strength. He continued with the Christians for several days.

“Right away Saul began preaching that which he had until a short time ago denied. He preached in the synagogues that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, the Son of God. All those who heard him were amazed and said: ‘Is this not the one who persecuted all those who called on the Name of Jesus in Jerusalem, and has now come here for the purpose of binding and leading believers to the chief priests?’ Saul became stronger and stronger and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus proving that Jesus is the Christ” (verses 20-22).

The reputation of Saul the persecutor was known in Damascus. The Jews in the synagogues heard him preach and argue that Jesus was not an imposter but was truly the Christ, God’s Son. They were amazed at this reversal for they knew he had come to Damascus to arrest believers in Jesus as the Christ and take them as prisoners to stand trial in Jerusalem. Saul increased in strength in his preaching and left the Jews confounded. They simply could not stand up to him.

“When many days had passed the Jews consulted together how they might kill Saul. Their plot became known to him. The Jews watched the city gates day and night planning to kill him if he tried to escape. However, the disciples took Saul at night and let him down by the wall in a basket” (verses 23-25).

A considerable period of time passed as Saul continued evangelism in the synagogues. Since they could not answer his arguments from the Scriptures, the Jews decided their only option was to kill Saul. Damascus, like all cities of the ancient world, was surrounded by walls for protection. One could only enter or leave the city by going through one of its gates. The Jews, perhaps with the cooperation of the city officials, had men at the gates day and night watching to see if Saul attempted to leave. Saul somehow learned of the Jews’ plot against his life. The Christians took him at night to a house built on the city wall. They put him in a large basket and let him down by a rope. Rahab had done the same thing during the conquest of the land when she let down the two Israelite spies (Joshua 2:15).

“When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe he was a disciple. But Barnabas brought him to the apostles and told them how Saul had seen the Lord on the road, and that the Lord has spoken to him. He told them also how he had boldly preached Christ in the synagogues in Damascus. Saul was accepted, and was with the disciples coming and going and speaking

boldly in the Name of Jesus Christ. He debated the Greek speaking Jews, but they tried to kill him” (verses 26-29).

Saul now returned to Jerusalem. When he left he was in favor with the Jewish leaders and held in high esteem by all those who rejected Christ. He had led a violent effort to stamp out the Christian faith by arresting men and women and holding them in prison. He consented to the death of Stephen and gave his vote to have others put to death simply because they believed Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. His return to Jerusalem was not welcomed by either the orthodox Jews or the disciples of Christ. The Jews now hated him and wanted him put to death. The Christians doubted his conversion. They remembered how he had persecuted the believers before he went to Damascus. When he attempted to join them, they were afraid of him.

A man named Joses who was given the nickname “Barnabas,” meaning “son of encouragement,” by the apostles, was a generous man who had sold his land and given the proceeds to the church to care for the poor. He continued to live up to his name. He knew of Saul’s conversion in Damascus and his efforts to convert the Jews there, so he took him to the apostles and vouched for him. Saul was then accepted and became very active in evangelism. He entered the synagogues of the Jews who spoke Greek and preached to them that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Like those who crucified Jesus and also stoned Stephen, they could not refute the truth he was teaching. Instead of accepting it, they tried to kill Saul.

A word needs to be said about “placing membership” with a local congregation. Many Christians move into a new area but fail to identify with a local congregation of God’s people. God’s plan for His church is for it to be overseen by elders (also known as shepherds or pastors, and bishops or overseers). These men “watch out” for the souls of the members (Heb. 13:7,17). They are the spiritual shepherds of the flock. Saul understood this and, in effect, sought to place membership (“join himself with the disciples”). We should do the same today. We need to be part of a local church and have godly elders watching out for our souls. “Placing membership” or “joining ourselves to the disciples” is required by God and is necessary for our spiritual growth and safety. This will be discussed further in later chapters in Acts.

“But when the brethren knew about it, they took Saul down to Caesarea and sent him on to Tarsus. After this, the churches had peace throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria and were built up. They lived in reverence of the Lord, and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, and increased in number” (verses 30, 31).

The brethren who lived in Jerusalem feared for Saul's safety. They knew he could be killed just as Stephen was. In order to protect him, they escorted him to Caesarea, the Roman capital of Judea. Caesarea was on the coast. From there Saul easily could book passage to Cilicia and safely travel on to his home in Tarsus. With Saul no longer going into the synagogues and debating the rabbis, things became peaceful in Jerusalem and surrounding area. A period of quiet growth followed during which the disciples were built up in the faith.

“Now it happened that while Peter was passing through that part of the country that he visited the holy ones in Lydda. There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedfast for eight years. Peter said to him, ‘Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Now get up and make your bed.’ Then Aeneas immediately arose. When everyone who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw Aeneas, they turned to the Lord” (verses 32-35).

We now turn our attention from Saul to the apostle Peter. Peter visited the church in Lydda which was located at the crossroads between two major trade routes. One led from Egypt to the cities of the Tigris- Euphrates Valley. Another well travelled road led from Joppa on the sea to Jerusalem (see Harrison, p. 161). We are not told how the church began in Lydda but it may have been the fruit of Philip's labor for he lived in Caesarea not far from Lydda. In Lydda, Peter found a man named Aeneas who was paralyzed and had been confined to his bed for eight years. Peter performed another miracle here by the power of the Holy Spirit. He did not tell Aeneas that he must have faith, but he simply told him: “Jesus who is the Christ is healing you.” He then commanded Aeneas to get up and make his bed.

The healing did not depend upon the faith of Aeneas, nor did Aeneas have to learn to walk again, but he was able to walk as soon as Peter told him the Lord was healing him. He was able to get up of his own accord, make his bed and go his way. This is very different from the so called “faith healing” of today (Present day “faith” healing might more accurately be called “fake” healing). The news spread throughout the whole area around Lydda. Everyone in the city and in the Plain of Sharon where Lydda was located became believers in the Lord as a result of this miracle.

“Now, there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha which means ‘Gazelle.’ This woman did many good works and deeds of charity. In those days Tabitha became ill and died. They washed her body and laid it in an upper room. Now Lydda was near Joppa. When the disciples heard Peter was at Joppa, they sent two men who begged him, ‘Do not delay to come

to us.’ Peter got up and went with them. When he arrived in Joppa he was taken to the upper room where all the widows were crying and showing him coats and other clothing that Tabitha had made when she was with them. Peter asked everyone to leave. He kneeled and prayed and turned to the body and said: ‘Tabitha, arise!’ She opened her eyes and saw Peter, and sat up. He extended his hand to her and raised her up. Then he called the holy ones and widows and presented her to them alive. When this became known throughout Joppa, many believed in the Lord. After this, Peter remained in Joppa for many days with Simon who was a tanner” (verses 36-43).

Luke records that Jesus often prefaced stories He used to illustrate a point by saying, “There was a *certain* individual” (cf. Luke 12:16; 13:6; 15:11;16:19). Jesus’ parables, unlike fables, were always based on reality, things that either could, or did actually happen (Dungan, p. 226, 227) whereas fables were simply illustrations where animals or plants were given personality and were said to accomplish things that only humans could do (Dungan, p. 244, 245). Luke is specific here. He introduces Tabitha by saying “there was a certain disciple named Tabitha.” She was a real person who lived and loved and served the Lord by using her talent to sew. It appears she made garments for the poor, for the widows and orphans who were taken care of by the church (cf. Acts 4:32-37; 6:1 ff; 1 Tim. 5:3-16; James 1:27).

The Hebrew (Aramaic) word “Tabitha” is “Dorcas” in Greek. Luke gives both names. The name in English is “Gazelle.” A gazelle is an animal of the African plains that is known for its grace and beauty. No physical description is given of Tabitha, but the good works she did reveals she was a person of spiritual grace and beauty. This good woman, a member of the church in Joppa, was well beloved by all who knew her. In time, she became sick and died from her illness. Her body was prepared for burial. It was bathed and laid in an upper room to await the funeral which would likely be held the following day.

However, when the church learned the apostle Peter was in Lydda some ten miles away, two men were sent to summon him to come without delay. When Peter arrived, he was taken to the upper room where the widows were mourning. They wept as they showed Peter the coats and other clothing which Tabitha had made “*while she was with them.*” It is interesting to observe that her body was there, but Tabitha was not! There is more to human beings than their fleshly bodies. Humans, unlike animals, also have a soul or spirit that resides in them. God is Spirit (John 4:24) and man is made in His image Gen. 1:26-27). The image of God that man bears is his spirit which is given to him by

God at conception (Zech. 12:1). In fact, the inspired apostle Paul tells us that man is made up of body, soul, and spirit (1 Thess. 5:23). One dies when his spirit leaves his body (James 2:26; Gen. 35:18). At death our spirits return to God (Eccles.12:7). They await the resurrection and the Judgment in the place God has prepared for them (Luke 16:19-31). At the second coming of Christ, man's body will be raised and his body and spirit will be re-united and changed into a body suited to inhabit eternity (1 Cor. 15:20-58).

Peter put all the mourners out of the room. Then he knelt and prayed. Turning toward the body, Peter said: "Tabitha, arise!" She opened her eyes and seeing him she sat up. He reached out and lifted her up. Then he called the widows and presented her alive to them.

The news of this miracle soon spread throughout the whole area and many became believers as a result. Peter himself remained in Joppa with Simon the tanner for a long while. God had another important work for him to do which He would reveal to him shortly.

Review Questions

1. List several things which describe Saul.
2. When the church in Jerusalem was scatted by persecution, who remained behind?
3. Where is Damascus located in relation to Jerusalem?
4. What special distinction does Damascus have among the cities of the world?
5. Describe the brightness of the great light which shone around Saul and those with him as they approached Damascus.
6. Fill in the blanks: "When one persecutes the church, he is persecuting _____ for the church is His _____."
7. What did the Lord ask Saul? What was his reply?
8. Why was Saul astonished and trembling?
9. What did Saul ask the Lord? What was the Lord's answer?

10. Does Jesus speak personally to sinners today and tell them what to do to be saved?
11. How does the Lord speak to us today?
12. To whom has God entrusted the preaching of the Gospel?
13. Did the men who were with Saul actually see the Lord as Saul did?
14. Why was it necessary for Saul to see the Lord?
15. Is anyone today qualified to be an apostle? Why or why not?
16. What did Saul do the first three days he was in Damascus?
17. Why was Ananias reluctant to go to Saul?
18. True/False: Saul was going to have to suffer many things for the Lord.
19. How did Saul escape from Damascus?
20. True/False: The brethren in Jerusalem immediately accepted Saul into fellowship when he sought to join them.
21. Who vouched for Saul to the apostles?
22. True/False: Placing membership with a local congregation is necessary for our spiritual well-being.
23. When the Jews in Jerusalem could not refute the preaching of Saul, what did they plan to do?
24. True/False: Peter told Aeneas that he must have faith if he wanted to be healed.
25. What is the meaning of the name Tabitha (or Dorcas)?
26. What is the difference between a parable and a fable?
27. How did Tabitha use her talents to serve God?
28. True/False: Human beings are made in God's image, but animals are not.

Chapter 10:

THE FIRST GENTILE CONVERTS

Luke continues to trace the progress of the Gospel as the apostles seek to carry out the Lord's Commission (Matt. 28:19,20; Col. 1:23). The preaching of the Gospel began in Jerusalem on Pentecost Day. It spread from there to the cities and villages of Judea and then was carried to Samaria. It is now entering its fourth and final phase. It will be taken to the Gentiles which will result in its going to the very ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). As a prelude to this final phase, the Holy Spirit had directed Philip, the evangelist, to intercept a carriage carrying a high official in the government of the African nation of Ethiopia. This man had been to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home. Although not a Jew, he believed in and worshipped the true God who created Heaven and earth. He must have been a proselyte to the Jewish faith. Through Philip's teaching, he became a Christian and carried his new found faith back to Ethiopia. This would account for the presence of the large church which grew up in Ethiopia at a very early date. We are now about to embark upon another triumph of the Gospel that will have far reaching consequences which continue to the present day.

“There was a certain man in Caesarea named Cornelius. He was a centurion of a band made up mainly of men from Italy. He was a devout man who held God in highest reverence. He had taught all the members of his household to do the same. He was generous in giving to the poor, and prayed to God without ceasing. Cornelius clearly saw a vision about three o'clock in the afternoon. He saw an angel of God coming to him and saying: ‘Cornelius!’ Cornelius looked intently at the angel speaking to him and said, ‘What is it, Lord?’ The angel said to him, ‘Your prayers and your gifts to the poor are a memorial before God. Now, send men to Joppa to bring here Simon who is nicknamed Peter. He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, who lives by the side of the sea. When the angel who spoke to him went away, Cornelius called two of his servants and a Godly soldier from among those who served him. After he had told them everything, he sent them to Joppa” (verses 1-8).

It has been said that sergeants are the backbone of modern armies. They are usually on the front lines of battle. In the same way centurions were the backbone of the mighty Roman Army, which had conquered a vast empire that included territory on three continents, and lasted for several hundred years. No nation since has claimed such a vast empire for so long a period of time. A centurion commanded one hundred soldiers. We often meet centurions in the New Testament (Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 7:2-10; Acts 22:24ff; 23:17, 23; 27:1-3, 42, 43). They are almost always presented as noble men. Even the centurion who

presided over the crucifixion of Jesus “glorified God, saying, ‘Certainly this was a righteous Man!’” (Luke 23:47).

A man of war by profession, Cornelius was a righteous man who had come to believe in the true God of Israel. Not a proselyte to the Jewish faith for this required circumcision, he likely was one who was known as a “God fearer.” Cornelius worshipped His Creator. He seems to have been greatly influenced by the Jews’ religion. Some suggest he was a noble Gentile who still worshipped God according to the Patriarchal covenant. We find such worshippers from time to time in the Old Testament (Gen. 14:18-20; Exod. 2:15-22; Num. 24:1-9).

Luke tells us many good things about Cornelius. First, he was a devout man. He was a very religious man. He sought to find the true God and worship and serve Him. He was a God-fearing man. He had great reverence for the Eternal Being Who created Him and before Whom he one day would give an account for the deeds done in this life (2 Cor. 5:10). How sad it is in our irreverent, secular society today that so many think nothing of taking the sacred Name of our Creator in vain and using it as a curse and a by-word. God will require such profane people to give an account to Him for their blasphemous speech (Exod. 20:7; Matt. 5:33-37; 12:36,37)!

Cornelius not only feared God, but “He feared God with all his house.” This means that Cornelius’ reverence for his Creator was taught to his wife, children, and even the battle-hardened soldiers who served under him. Further, Cornelius was a man of compassion. He was kind to the poor and gave generously to help those who were in need. Finally, we learn that Cornelius was a man of prayer. He will soon learn from an angel that his prayers “have gone up as a reminder” before the Heavenly Throne.

Few people today, even the best of church-goers, can equal the character of Cornelius. Many would think he surely was already saved, but he was not! Peter was sent to him to “tell him words whereby he and all his family would be saved” (Acts 11:13,14). No accountable person since Pentecost has been saved without faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to His Gospel plan of salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:11,12; Heb. 5:8,9; John 3:16; Luke 13:3; Rom. 10:13-17; Mark 16:15,16).

As Cornelius was praying at the ninth hour of the day, he saw a vision. The “ninth hour of the day” was three o’clock in the afternoon and was one of “the stated hours of prayer of the Jews” (Harrison, p.165; note also Psalm 55:17; Dan. 6:10; 1 Thess. 5:17). This shows the influence of the Jews on Cornelius. Perhaps he may have learned about the true God from his association with the Jews and their religion?

In his vision, Cornelius saw an angel of God. He was afraid when he saw him, but he was assured by the angel that his prayers had gone up for a memorial (a reminder or remembrance) before God. “The prayers of Cornelius had ascended like incense and were remembered by God” (Boles, p. 161). The angel commanded Cornelius to send to Joppa for Simon who was known as Peter. He gave specific directions for how to locate Peter in Caesarea. He was residing in the home of Simon, a tanner of animal skins, who lived by the seaside. As soon as the vision was over, Cornelius called two of his household servants and one of his soldiers, a devout man like himself, told them of the angel’s appearance, and sent them to Joppa to bring Peter back with them.

“The next day as the servants of Cornelius approached the city about twelve o’clock (noon), Peter went up on the roof of the house to pray. He became very hungry and desired to eat, but while preparations were being made, Peter went into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something that looked like a large sheet was lowered to the earth by its four corners. In this sheet were all kinds of four-footed animals, reptiles of every kind, and the birds of the skies. A Voice said: ‘Rise, Peter. Kill and eat.’ But Peter answered: ‘Certainly not, Lord, for I have never eaten anything common or unclean.’ The Voice spoke again: ‘What God has cleansed, do not call common.’ This was repeated three times before the sheet was received back into Heaven” (verses 9-16).

Caesarea was about thirty miles from Joppa. If the men Cornelius sent had left at shortly after 3:00 p.m. the previous day, they could have traveled half way that day and by noon the following day, they would have arrived. Peter, unaware that he would soon have visitors, went up on the flat roof of the house to pray. As we have previously noted, the Jews commonly set aside time for prayers every morning, noon, and evening. While Peter was praying, he became very hungry so preparation for a meal was made.

As Peter pondered what the meaning of the vision might be, the men from Cornelius arrived at Simon’s house and were standing at the gate. They inquired if Peter was staying there. While Peter was still wondering what the vision he had seen might mean, the Spirit spoke to him: ‘Behold! Three men are looking for you. Arise, go down, and go with them without doubting because I have sent them.’ Then Peter went down to the men and said: ‘I am the one you are seeking. Why have you come?’ They explained: ‘Cornelius the centurion, a righteous man who fears God and has a good reputation among the Jews, was instructed by a holy angel to bring you to his house that he might hear a message from you.’ Then Peter invited them

in and gave them lodging for the night. The next day Peter went with the men back to Caesarea and certain brethren from Joppa also came with them” (verses 19-23).

God’s timing is always exactly right. The men from Cornelius arrived almost immediately after Peter’s vision. As Peter tried to understand what the vision of the great sheet meant, the Spirit of God spoke to him and told him that three men were looking for him and that he must go with them for He had sent them. When Peter inquired the reason for their coming, they explained that Cornelius, a righteous man who had a good reputation among the Jews in Caesarea, had been instructed by an angel to send them to Peter. The angel also said that Peter must accompany them on their return journey that Cornelius might hear a message from him. Peter then did something that was highly unusual among the Jews. He invited the three Gentiles into the house to spend the night. The following day, he accompanied the messengers from Cornelius on their journey back to Caesarea. Peter took six brethren with him as well. This proved to be a wise thing to do for Peter would be called to give an account for lodging the Gentiles in his home and associating with them.

“The next day they entered Caesarea. While Cornelius was waiting for them, he had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered his house, Cornelius fell down at his feet and worshipped him. But Peter raised him up saying, ‘Stand up for I am also a man.’ When Peter had further spoken with Cornelius he went in and found many who had come together. Peter explained to them: ‘You know it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with, or approach one of a different nation, but God has shown me that I should not call anyone common or unclean. Therefore, I ask, ‘Why have you sent for me?’ Cornelius answered: ‘Four days ago at this very hour, I was praying in my house, and suddenly a man wearing bright clothing stood in front of me. He said: ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your charitable deeds have been remembered by God. Send to Joppa and ask for Simon Peter. He is staying in the house of Simon, a tanner who lives by the sea. I immediately sent for you and you have been very kind to come. Now therefore we are all present to hear all of the things that God has commanded you” (verses 24-33).

Cornelius was concerned about his family and close friends. He wanted all of them to hear the message from God so he had invited them to come to his house. There they anxiously waited to hear what God’s messenger had to say. When Peter entered his house, Cornelius fell down before him. He was a man under authority and was used to showing respect to those who were his

superiors in rank. It was natural for him to fall down before this special messenger sent to him by God, but Cornelius worshipped Peter. Perhaps he thought that Peter was an angel, or a divine being? Peter quickly lifted up Cornelius and told him to “Stand up for I am a man just like you.”

The Roman Catholic Church honors the apostle Peter and regards him as the first pope even though such a position as “pope” is unknown in the New Testament. The only head of the church is the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:22,23; Col. 1:13-18). The pope is honored, if not worshipped, by men bowing or kneeling before him, kissing his ring, etc. The author was in St. Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City in Rome on one occasion when the pope of that time made an entrance. He was wearing red robes, holding a scepter, and sitting on a gold plated throne that was carried by four men. A loud speaker blared “Hallelujah!” The crowd went wild! My wife and I, with our two small children, feared the children would be trampled in the unruly crowd and made our way out of the room as quickly as possible. The apostle Peter, a humble fisherman, called by the Lord to be His disciple, was not remotely related to any position in the church like the papacy, or in charge of the vast wealth that the Roman Catholic Church possesses today (Acts 3:6)! Peter refused such worship as the pope today insists upon receiving from even those who are the leaders of nations.

Peter spoke to the assembled group of Cornelius, his faithful soldiers, family and friends, and explained that it was unlawful for a Jew to associate with anyone of another nation. However, God had shown him that he should not call anyone common or unclean. Therefore, he asked why they had sent for him. Cornelius then related the visit of the angel who told him his prayer had been heard and his helping the needy was remembered before God. He was then instructed to send to Joppa for Peter. He did so immediately and stated how they were all present before God waiting to hear everything that God had commanded Peter. Never has a preacher had a more receptive audience to hear his message than this small assembly in the house of Cornelius! If only people today were as eager to hear all that God has commanded as the assembly in the house of Cornelius, society would be transformed and multitudes would respond to the preaching of God’s Word!

“Then Peter began to speak. He said, ‘I truly understand that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation anyone who fears God and works righteousness is acceptable to Him. He sent the message to the children of Israel, preaching the Gospel of peace by Jesus Christ who is Lord of all. This is the message which was preached throughout Judea, beginning from Galilee following the immersion which John taught, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Jesus went about

doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the Devil for God was with Him. We are witnesses of all the things that He, whom they killed by hanging Him on a cross, did in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. God raised Him from the dead on the third day, and He was openly seen, not by all the people, but by witnesses who were chosen before by God. He ate and drank with us after He arose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that He was the One appointed by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead. All of the prophets testify of Him that everyone who believes in Him may receive forgiveness of sins through His Name” (verses 34-43).

Peter began his sermon by stating that he now understood that God did not respect the Jews above all other people. People of every nation who believe in Him, hold Him in reverence, and work righteousness are acceptable to Him. Peter then summarized the basic facts about the ministry, death, burial and resurrection of the Lord. He knew his hearers were aware of these things for they were spoken in Jerusalem, Judea and Galilee. The message began to be preached from the time of John’s immersion of people in the Jordan River. Jesus went about doing good, even healing those who were oppressed by the Devil. This was well known to everyone in that area.

Peter summarized the basic points of that message. God had anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit at His baptism (Matt. 3:13-17). From that time Jesus had gone throughout Galilee, Jerusalem and Judea preaching the good news of salvation, healing the sick, casting out demons, and doing many good deeds of compassion. The rulers of the Jews, however, condemned Him to die and crucified Him. However, God raised Him from the dead. The apostles were all witnesses to this for they saw Him and ate and drank with Him after His resurrection. They had been with Him day and night for three years, knew Him best, and could give firsthand, eyewitness testimony to all these things.

The apostle Peter had been given the keys of the kingdom by Jesus Himself (Matt. 16:13-19). On the day of Pentecost, he was privileged to preach the first Gospel sermon of the crucified, resurrected Son of God who was both Lord and Christ. When the hearers who were cut to the heart by his message that they had crucified the Son of God, but God had raised Him from the dead, they cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Peter used the keys to open the door of the kingdom of Heaven which is the church of Christ. He told them to “Repent, and let everyone of you be immersed in the Name of Jesus Christ in order to receive the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift which the Holy Spirit gives” (Acts 2:14-38). Peter was now privileged to open the door of the kingdom to the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the Word. Those believers of the circumcision who had come with Peter were astonished because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles. They heard them speaking in other languages and glorifying God. Then Peter asked: ‘Can any one forbid water that these should not be immersed who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did?’ And he commanded them to be immersed in the Name of the Lord. After this, they asked him to stay with them for a few days” (verses 44-48).

Approximately eight centuries before this time, the great prophet, Joel, had foretold: “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 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 testify” (Acts 2:17-19). The baptism of the Holy Spirit was for “all flesh,” that is, for the whole human race. The Jews divided all of humanity into two categories: (1) the Jews, i.e God’s chosen people, Israel; (2) the Gentiles. This included everyone who was not a Jew or a proselyte to the Jewish faith. The apostles represented the Jews who were baptized in the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Day. The household of Cornelius represented the Gentiles who were baptized in the Holy Spirit while Peter was preaching to them. Therefore, Joel’s prophecy of all flesh being baptized in the Holy Spirit was fulfilled on this occasion! The apostle Paul tells us that today there is but one baptism. It is not the baptism of the Holy Spirit for that was fulfilled nearly 2,000 years ago. It is the baptism of the Great Commission which will continue until the end of the world (Eph. 4:4-6; Matt. 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16).

Review Questions

1. Where did the apostles begin preaching the crucified, resurrected Lord? On what occasion?
2. After Jerusalem and Judea, where was the Gospel preached next?
3. After the Gospel was preached in Samaria where was it taken?
4. Define “centurion?”
5. What was required for Gentiles to become proselytes to Judaism?
6. Name four outstanding attributes of Cornelius.

7. Explain the meaning: “Cornelius feared God with all his house.”
8. True/False: Cornelius was already saved when God sent Peter to him?
9. True/False: No accountable person since Pentecost has been saved without believing in Jesus as the Christ and obeying His Gospel.
10. Describe the vision Peter saw while he was in a trance? What did it mean?
11. What did Peter do that was highly unusual among the Jews at that time?
12. Who accompanied Peter when he went to Caesarea with the men Cornelius had sent?
13. Besides Cornelius, who else was waiting in Caesarea to hear what Peter had to say?
14. What did Cornelius do when Peter first entered his house?
15. Who is the only Head of the church? Give Scriptures that teach it.
16. What lesson did Peter learn from the vision he saw in a trance?
17. Summarize the basic points of Peter’s sermon at Cornelius’ house.
18. When and where did Peter first use the keys of the kingdom?
19. How did the Jews understand the expression “all flesh?”
20. When did the Jews first have the Gospel preached to them in its fulness?
21. When did the Gentiles first have the Gospel preached to them?
22. By whom were the doors of the kingdom first opened to the Jews? To the Gentiles?
23. Prove by the Scriptures that the Gospel is meant for every race and every nation.
24. How did Cornelius come to believe in the true God? Give three possibilities? Which do you think is most likely? Why?

Chapter 11: THE CHURCH IN ANTIOCH OF SYRIA

Before His ascension our Lord had commanded His apostles “not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father which you heard from Me that John, indeed, immersed with water but you will be immersed in the Holy Spirit, not many days from now” (Acts 1:4,5). This promise was fulfilled on Pentecost day when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the apostles as Joel had foretold (Acts 2:16-21). When Peter preached to the multitude that they had crucified the Son of God, but God had raised Him from the dead, they were “cut to the heart and cried out, ‘What shall we do?’ Peter told them to “Repent, and be immersed every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit for the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all who are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:38,39).

Peter prophesied by the Holy Spirit that God’s salvation was not only for the Jews, but also for those who were “afar off,” a Jewish way of referring to the Gentiles. When Peter foretold the Gospel would be taken to the Gentiles even he did not understand it at that time. It was approximately ten years later that he was privileged to be the one to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius. However, it took a vision from the Lord repeated three times before he learned that “Everyone who fears God and does righteousness is acceptable to Him” (Acts 10:35).

While Peter was still speaking to the family and friends of Cornelius, the Holy Spirit was poured out on those who heard His preaching. They began speaking with languages they had not learned and praising God. Peter then asked: “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be immersed, who have received the Holy Spirit, even as we did?” He commanded them to be immersed by the authority of the Lord. Thus Joel’s prophecy eight hundred years before, and Peter’s own prophecy on Pentecost, were fulfilled.

“Then the apostles and the brethren in Judea heard the Gentiles had also received the Gospel. When Peter returned to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying: ‘You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them.’ Peter began an orderly explanation of what had happened. He said: ‘I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a vision I saw something like a large sheet coming down. It was let down by its four corners and it came to me. I looked carefully at it and saw the four-footed animals of the earth, the wild beasts, the reptiles and the birds of the heavens. I heard a voice saying to me: ‘Rise, Peter, kill and eat.’ But I said, ‘No, Lord. Nothing common or unclean has ever come into my mouth.’”

Then the Voice spoke to me a second time from Heaven: ‘What God has cleansed, you must not call common.’ This happened three times before it was all drawn up into Heaven” (verses 1-10).

The city of Caesarea is approximately seventy miles from Jerusalem. The news of Peter’s visit to the house of Cornelius and the conversion of the Gentiles to Christ soon reached Jerusalem. Instead of rejoicing that the Gentiles had received the Gospel, it appears the Jewish Christians were alarmed at Peter’s actions of going into the home of uncircumcised Gentiles, eating with them, preaching the Gospel to them and then baptizing them into Christ. They would not have objected if Cornelius and his family were circumcised first, and therefore became full-fledged proselytes to the Jewish faith. When Peter arrived in Jerusalem, he was asked to explain his what he had done.

Peter must have anticipated there might be some adverse reaction to his going into the home of uncircumcised Gentiles and teaching and baptizing them. Wisely, he had prepared for this by taking six Jewish Christians with him. The Jewish law required two or three witnesses to convict one of wrongdoing (Deut. 19:15). This practice is also required of Christians (2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Tim. 5:19). To be safe, Peter had taken double the number of witnesses required! The fact that Peter was held to account for his actions is an indication that the church did not look up to him as a pope whose official actions were infallible and could not be questioned.

Instead of becoming angry with the defenders of Jewish orthodoxy, Peter kindly and calmly defended his actions by simply explaining in order what had taken place. He told of the vision of the great sheet let down from Heaven with all manner of beasts, clean and unclean, birds, reptiles, etc. in it and the command to “Rise Peter, kill and eat.” He told also of the Voice saying, “What God has cleansed, do not call common!” This was repeated three times to insure that Peter got the message. Peter then went down from the housetop where he had seen the vision to find the three men from Caesarea who had been sent by Cornelius. He received instruction from the Spirit to go with them.

“Now immediately, three men stood before the house where we were. They had been sent to me from Caesarea. The Holy Spirit told me to go with them without questioning. These six brethren also went with me, and we entered into the man’s house. He told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house who told him to ‘Send to Joppa and call for Simon Peter who will tell you words by which you and your household will be saved.’ As I began speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on them even as He did on

us at the beginning. Then I remembered the Lord's statement: 'John indeed immersed in water, but you shall be immersed in the Holy Spirit.' If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave to us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I should withstand God?' When they heard these things, they were silent. Therefore, they praised God saying, 'Then God has also granted repentance unto life to the Gentiles'" (verses 11-18).

The Holy Spirit commanded Peter to go with the three emissaries from Cornelius without question. These six Jewish brothers in Christ who had accompanied Peter from Joppa to Caesarea also entered Cornelius' house without question. They were doing what God had commanded them to do. Therefore, they could not be rightly criticized. Cornelius related to them how an angel had visited him and told him to send for Peter who would tell him "words by which he and his family would be saved." The words referred to the Gospel, the Word of God, for "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). Faith does not come any other way. The souls of accountable men and women are not saved until they have heard and obeyed the Word of God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:16,17; Mark 16:15,16; Heb. 5:8,9). There are no accountable people who are saved where the Gospel has not been preached (Matt. 28:19,20).

As Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius and his family and friends just as He had on Peter and his fellow apostles on Pentecost day. This was the baptism (immersion) of the Holy Spirit that Jesus had promised the apostles shortly before He ascended to Heaven (Acts 1:4,5). Peter was fully convinced for he said: "If God gave them the same gift He gave to us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to oppose God?" As we learned in the previous chapter, Peter also said: "Can anybody forbid water that these should not be immersed who have received the Holy Spirit the same as we?" He then commanded them to be immersed by the authority of Jesus Christ (Acts 10:47,48).

We must understand that two immersions are spoken of here. First, there was the immersion of the Holy Spirit that came upon the apostles on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13). This was foretold by Joel eight hundred years before it happened (Acts 2:16-31). This immersion was for the purpose of preparing the apostles for their work as ambassadors of the kingdom of God (2 Cor. 5:20; Eph. 6:20). Their reception of the Holy Spirit had been foretold by the Lord at the Last Supper (John 13 -16). Jesus had specifically told them to wait in Jerusalem until they received this "power from on high" (Luke 24:49). The apostles (and only the apostles) had the ability to lay hands upon others and give them the power to

work miracles (Acts 8:14-22; 19:6; Rom. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:6). These miraculous powers equipped the church for its ministry until the New Testament had been fully completed (Eph. 4:11-16). Then they ceased (1 Cor. 13:8-13). Those who claim the ability to work miracles today are making a false claim for no one living has the power the apostles had of passing miraculous gifts on to others.

The falling of the Holy Spirit upon Cornelius, his family, and his friends was also an immersion (or baptism) of the the Holy Spirit, although it was for a different purpose. It was to convince the Jews that the Gentiles were also to be the recipients of the favor of God and enjoy the blessings of salvation in Christ Jesus. Notice that Peter argued: “If God gave them them the **same** gift that He gave us, who was I that I could withstand God?” The Greek word for “same” is “isos.” Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of The New Testament defines “isos” as “equal in quality or quantity; the same gift, Acts 11:17.” It was not a similar gift. It was the same gift which the apostles had received on Pentecost. The purpose, however, was different. For the apostles, the immersion in the Holy Spirit gave them gifts necessary for the revealing and confirming of the Word of God and the ability to pass on these gifts to others (Acts 19:6). For the house of Cornelius, the immersion in the Spirit was given for the purpose of convincing the Jews that the Gentiles were also to be recipients of the Gospel. Nothing but such a supernatural event would have convinced the Jews of this important fact!

When the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem heard Peter’s explanation, they had no further opposition to what he had done. They glorified God for opening the door of salvation to the Gentiles, saying, “Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life.” Sadly, at a later date some of the brethren in Jerusalem insisted that Gentiles must first become circumcised and keep the Law of Moses before they could become Christians. In other words, they believed that Gentiles had to become Jewish proselytes before they could be converted to Christ. The apostle Paul steadfastly resisted this false teaching in a confrontation with the Judaizers at Antioch (Acts 15:1-29: Gal. 2 & 3).

“Those who had been forced to flee their homes as a result of the persecution following the stoning of Stephen went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. They preached the Gospel but only to the Jews. However, some of those who were originally from Cyprus and Cyrene, when they came to Antioch, also preached the Lord Jesus to the Greek speaking Jews. The Lord was with them and many of those who believed were converted to the Lord. The church at Jerusalem heard about this and sent Barnabas to Antioch. When Barnabas came, he saw God’s favor and rejoiced. He encouraged all of them to cleave to the Lord with all their

hearts. Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith and a great number were converted” (verses 19-24).

Several years had passed since the death of Stephen and the great persecution instigated by Saul which followed. Those who had fled their homes in Jerusalem and Judea had traveled as far from home as Phoenicia, a strip of land along the eastern Mediterranean coast where the ancient trading cities of Ptolemais, Tyre and Sidon, were located. Others had traveled to Cyprus, an island in the eastern Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Syria. This was the original home of Barnabas and where he later spent time in missionary labors (Acts 4:36; 13:1-12; 15:36-39). Still others had gone to Antioch on the Orontes River in Syria (This Antioch must not be confused with Antioch of Pisidia where Paul and Barnabas later preached on their first missionary journey (Acts 13: 14-52). Antioch on the Orontes was three hundred miles from Jerusalem. It was located about 16 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea. In Paul’s day it was the third largest city in the Roman Empire. It was one of sixteen cities which bore the name of Antiochus III, a king of the Seleucids who had once ruled the area which is now Turkey. The church in this city became the center of evangelism to the Gentiles (Unger, pp. 52,53; Pfeiffer, pp. 202, 204, 210, 212, 218).

Barnabas was sent by the church of Christ in Jerusalem to Antioch to encourage the brethren. “Barnabas” was not his original name. His given name was Joses or Joseph. “Barnabas” means “son of encouragement” and was given to Joseph by the apostles (Acts 4:36). Nicknames usually describe a characteristic which is unique to a person’s nature. Obviously, Barnabas was “ready for every good work” (Tit. 3:1). As a result of this good man working with them, leading in evangelism, the Antioch church had a great outburst of growth and many souls were added to the body of the saved (cf. Acts 2:41,47)

Barnabas was called “a good man” by Luke who was inspired to write the book of Acts. When we are first introduced to him, Luke tells us Barnabas was a Levite, the priestly tribe of Old Testament Israel, and that he was born in Cyprus. The first act that is recorded of Barnabas is that he sold his land and gave the money to the church (Acts 4:34-37). Later, when Saul came to Jerusalem after his conversion, the disciples were afraid of him for they remembered his career as the chief persecutor of the Christians. They were reluctant to accept him as a fellow Christian. Barnabas, however, vouched for Paul to the apostles and, as a result, he was accepted into fellowship and became active in evangelism in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-30).

Barnabas was said to “be full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” (Acts 11:24). How does one become full of the Holy Spirit and of faith today? The Scriptures

give us the answer. Ephesians and Colossians are often called “The Twin Epistles.” They were both written by Paul in the same time frame. Paul was imprisoned in Rome awaiting his appearance before Caesar’s court when he wrote them. They contain similar teaching especially regarding the practical life of a Christian. In Ephesians, Paul commanded: “Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but **be filled with the Spirit**; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord: giving thanks always for all things unto God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 5:18,19). Here we have a command of an inspired apostle to “Be filled with the Spirit.” Now note the parallel passage in Colossians: **“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly** in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father by Him” (Col. 3:16,17).

In Ephesians, Paul says we must be filled with the Spirit. In Colossians, Paul says we must let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly. The Word of God is “the sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17). Paul is saying essentially the same thing to both churches. The Word of God was revealed and confirmed by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit works through His inspired, revealed Word today in the same way that the Roman soldier went to battle and defeated his enemies by using the sword in battle. He did not go out barehanded and unarmed to fight against his enemy. He defeated his enemy in battle, but it was done by means. The means was his sword. Today, the Holy Spirit does battle against Satan and his evil works. He does not do it directly or miraculously, but through means, i.e. His inspired, confirmed Word which He has given to God’s people who use it skillfully to overcome the wiles of the Evil one.

“Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to seek Saul. When he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. Therefore, they worked together with the church for an entire year and taught many people and the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch” (verses 25, 26).

Tarsus was about one hundred miles northwest of Antioch. It could be reached either by sea or by land. We do not know which way Barnabas chose to go, but when he arrived, it appears he had to do some searching to find Paul who at that time was still known by his Hebrew name “Saul.” When Barnabas found Saul, the two began a working relationship that lasted for several years and was productive of great good in the kingdom of God. They spent a year working to reach the lost in Antioch, and as a result, one of the great churches of all time was built. History tells us that Christianity remained strong in Antioch

and the regions around it for several hundred years until finally the city was conquered by the Muslims (Unger, p. 82).

The followers of Jesus were commonly called “disciples” for the first several years of the church’s existence. (Acts 9:1, 26). A “disciple” is a learner, a student, one who follows the teaching of another (Vine, p. 317). The disciples of Christ were also called by a number of other descriptive names. They often referred to one another as “brethren.” This described the closeness of their relationship with one another (Acts 15:13; Rev. 6:11). They were sometimes called “saints” (literally “holy ones” in the Greek). This reveals their character and their location in regard to the world (Acts 9:13, 32, 41; Rom. 1:7). Then too they were called “those of the way” (Acts 19:9; 2 Pet. 2:2). This referred to the fact that Jesus is the only Way to Heaven (John 14:6). However, it was at Antioch that the disciples of Christ were given a new name. They were called “Christians” for the very first time (Acts 11:26).

The word “Christian” is defined in an English dictionary as “a person professing a belief in Jesus as the Christ, or the religion based on the teachings of Jesus” (Webster, p. 253). In a dictionary of the meaning of Greek words in the New Testament, the word “Christianos” is defined as “Christian, a word formed after the Roman style, signifying an adherent of Jesus, was first applied to such by the Gentiles and is found in Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16.... From the time of the second century onward, the term was accepted by believers as a title of honor” (Vine, p. 191). The careful student will note that the first definition is only partially correct. It is not a full definition of what it takes to be a Christian according to the teaching of Christ and His inspired writers in the New Testament. He must also disagree with the definition from Vine for he suggests that the name came from the Gentiles as a sort of “nickname.” Others err by suggesting the name “Christian” was given by the enemies of Christ and His disciples, that it was meant as an insult, and was used to show reproach.

The name, however, was given by the inspiration of God. The Greek word “chrematidzo” is translated as “were called” in most English translations of the New Testament. According to Thayer’s Greek Lexicon of the New Testament, “chrematidzo” means “to give a divine command or admonition,” “to be divinely commanded” (Thayer, p. 271). Hugo McCord translates Acts 11:26: “The disciples were divinely called ‘Christians’ first at Antioch” (McCord, p. 249). Another scholar writes: “Were called” is from the original “chrematisai” and has the force of divine command” (Boles, p. 185). J. W. McGarvey wrote: “The whole world had heard something of Christ as the remarkable personage who was put to death under Pontius Pilate, though many had heard nothing of the early history of the church. From this fact, when strangers came to Antioch, and heard the new party who were attracting so much attention called

Christians, they at once recognized them as followers of that Christ of whom they had already heard. This explains the fact stated in the text that ‘the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.’ The fact that Luke here adopts it, and that both Peter and Paul afterward recognized it, gives it all the validity of inspired usage, and therefore all the weight of divine authority” (McGarvey, p. 147).

“And in those days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named Agabus arose and signified by the Holy Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the inhabited world (it came in the days of the emperor Claudius). Therefore the disciples, each as he prospered, purposed to help their brethren in Judea. This they did and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” (verses 27-30).

In the early church while the New Testament was in the process of being revealed, prophets were very active in revealing God’s will to the saints. Some of these prophets came to Antioch from Jerusalem. Agabus, a man we shall meet again in our study (Acts 21:9,10), appears to have been the spokesman for the group. He arose in the assembly of the Christians and revealed by the Holy Spirit that a great famine was coming. The Christians in Antioch determined to do what they could to help their brothers and sisters in their time of need. Some writers have suggested that because of the earlier period of persecution the churches of Christ in Judea must have been impoverished already. The coming famine would be devastating to them. Therefore, they determined to help.

God’s people have always been generous, benevolent people. The Lord Himself set an example of compassion for the sick, afflicted, downtrodden, outcast and needy during His ministry on earth. When He comes again at the Last Day to judge the world, He will judge us as to whether we have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick, given drink to the thirsty and visited those in prison. A failure to do so will be considered a sin against the Lord Himself (Matthew 25:31-46). Pure religion also requires caring for widows and orphans (James 1:27). Christians help the needy as they have opportunity and the means to do so (Gal. 6:10).

Luke tells us that the contribution was delivered to the elders of the church. This is the first mention in the New Testament of elders in the Lord’s church. Elders are also known as presbyters, bishops {overseers}, and pastors {shepherds} (Acts 14:23; 20:17,28; Eph. 4:11; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). Elders lead and feed the flock of God. We are not told when they were first appointed but it was most likely after men had had time to grow, mature and attain the spiritual qualifications required (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9).

Review Questions

1. What was Jesus' last command to His apostles before He ascended?
2. When were the apostles baptized (immersed) in the Holy Spirit?
3. What was the reaction of the multitude when Peter told the Jews on Pentecost they had killed the Son of God?
4. What important fact did Peter learn from his vision on the housetop?
5. While Peter was speaking to those assembled in Cornelius' house, what happened to his hearers that was shocking to the Jews?
6. Prove by the Scriptures that the household of Cornelius received the baptism of the Holy Spirit?
7. True/False: When the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem heard that the Gentiles has received the Gospel, what was their initial reaction?
8. What had Peter done in preparation for any possible criticism he might receive for going into the house of Cornelius and eating with Gentiles?
9. How is one filled with faith today? Give Scripture to support your answer.
10. What is the difference between "a like gift" and "the same gift"?
11. What was the purpose for Cornelius and his household being baptized with the Holy Spirit?
12. How many baptisms are commanded of us today? What is the one baptism mentioned in Ephesians 4:6? Prove your answer.
13. True/False: We must have both the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the baptism in water for the remission of sins in order to please God.
14. What was the purpose of the apostles being baptized with the Holy Spirit?
15. How and by whom were miraculous gifts given to the early Christians?
16. Name the regions and cities where the Gospel had spread?

17. Why was Joseph called “Barnabas”? What does “Barnabas mean?”
18. Who sent Barnabas to Antioch?
19. Name some of the things he did that show that Barnabas truly lived up to his name of being “a good man.”
20. How was Barnabas filled with the Holy Spirit? Was this a miraculous or non-miraculous filling?
21. How is one filled with the Holy Spirit today?
22. Who gave the name “Christian” to the disciples at Antioch?
23. Does it really matter what we call ourselves as long as we believe in Jesus?
24. Show that Ephesians 5:18,19 and Colossians 3:16,17 are parallel.
25. Who gave the name “Christian” at Antioch? Was it God, the disciples of Jesus, inspired Christian men, the Gentiles, or the enemies of Christianity?
26. When are elders first mentioned in the New Testament as being part of the church?
27. What was the name of the New Testament prophet who foretold the coming of a great famine?
28. Fill in the blanks: “God’s people have always been _____,
_____ people.”
29. What are two requirements for “pure and undefiled religion?” _____

30. Give three passages in the New Testament where disciples are called Christians.
31. Discussion Questions: Does it really matter what we call ourselves as a church? Is it Scriptural to refer to ministers as “church of Christ preachers” or refer to ourselves as “church of Christ” when somebody asks our religion?

Chapter 12:

AN APOSTLE IS MARTYRED

Chapter twelve is the dividing line in the book of Acts. The first eleven chapters cover the ministry of the apostles starting from the ascension of Jesus to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the beginning of the church on the Day of Pentecost, and the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and finally to the Gentiles when Cornelius and his household were converted. In chapter twelve, a new persecution in Jerusalem began. This time it was not instigated by the religious leaders of the Jews, but came from Herod Agrippa I, a king who ruled by the authority of Caligula, the reigning Roman emperor.

Herod Agrippa I was the grandson of Herod the Great who was on the throne of Israel when Jesus was born. It was Herod the Great who had all the male babies in Bethlehem murdered in an unsuccessful effort to kill the baby Jesus (Matt. 2:16-18). He also had at least one of his wives killed as well as his own son, the father of Herod Agrippa I. He feared his son was plotting to take over his throne.

Herod Agrippa I was educated in Rome where he became a friend of Caligula. When Caligula became emperor, he made Agrippa king of the territory that had been previously ruled by Herod Antipas, and also the territory ruled by Roman governors such as Pontius Pilate and his successors. Thus Herod Agrippa I was king of all Judea, Galilee and Samaria.

Herod Agrippa I was not a Jew by lineage. He was an Idumaeen. The Idumaeans were the descendants of the ancient Edomites who ruled the territory south of Judea toward the Dead Sea. Their capitol was at Petra (McGarvey, p. 151,152; Pfeiffer, 69,70; 184-188). Agrippa I, although not a true Jew, hoped to impress the Jews by his zealous support of their religion. To please them, he began a persecution of the Christians. When the Jews, led by Saul, had last persecuted the church, they dared not touch the apostles. As a result, the apostles had remained in Jerusalem when the other Christians fled (Acts 8:1). This time, however, Herod Agrippa I began with the apostles.

“Now about this time, King Herod exerted his power to persecute some of the members of the church. He executed James, the brother of John, with the sword. When he saw this pleased the Jews, he made plans to arrest Peter as well. This was during the days of unleavened bread. He had Peter arrested, put him in prison, and guarded by four quaternions of soldiers. After the Passover, Herod intended to bring Peter out and execute him publicly. While Peter was constantly under guard, the church continually prayed to God on his behalf” (verses 1-5).

There was no better way to please the orthodox Jews than to persecute the Christians. Herod began with James, the brother of John, who was one of the best known of the apostles. James and his brother, John, were among the first disciples called by Jesus. They were the sons of Zebedee and his wife, Salome (Matt. 10:2; 20:20-28; 27:56; Mark 15:40; 16:1). Some writers suggest that Salome may have been the sister of Mary, Jesus' mother (Unger, p. 1113). She was one of the women who came to Jesus' tomb on the first day of the week (Mark 16:1).

When Herod saw how pleased the Jews were with the murder of James, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Because of his outgoing and aggressive nature, Peter was a natural leader among the believers. Peter and his brother, Andrew, had been partners with James and John and their father, Zebedee, in a fishing enterprise (Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:10). They had left their nets to follow Jesus (Matt. 4:21,22). Peter was arrested during the days of unleavened bread, a part of the Passover celebrations.

Herod's plan to execute Peter had to be postponed for a short while until the feast of Passover was past. The translators of the King James Version wrongly translated the Greek word "pascha" as "Easter." "Pasha" simply means "a passing over" and was applied to the feast ordained by God so that the children of Israel would remember the "passing over" of their houses when the Lord came into Egypt to slay the firstborn. The firstborn in every family in Egypt was killed, but those in the homes of the Israelites where the blood of the lamb was applied over the lintel and on the door posts were spared (Exod. 12:1-39). Under the heading of "Easter" Vine's Expository Dictionary says: "'Pascha,' mistranslated 'Easter' in Acts 4:12 A.V. denotes the Passover The term 'Easter' is not of Christian origin. It is another form of 'Astarte,' one of the titles of the Chaldean goddess, the queen of heaven. The festival of Pascha held by Christians in post-apostolic times was a continuation of the Jewish feast, *but it was not instituted by Christ* The Pagan festival of Easter was quite distinct and was introduced into the apostate Western religion, as part of the attempt to adapt Pagan festivals to Christianity" (Vine; Vol. 3; pp. 14,15).

Herod Agrippa I may have been aware of the incident a few years earlier when the Sanhedrin had arrested the apostles and put them in prison overnight. During the night an angel had freed them and told them to go into the temple and preach to the people (Acts 5:17-28). The king must have learned from this for he placed Peter under maximum security. He assigned four squads, each composed of four soldiers, to guard Peter. Peter was chained to two of them, likely one on either side of him. The other two guarded the door to the cell where Peter was kept. The guards would be changed every four hours to keep them alert. Escape was humanly impossible, but Peter had the Creator of all

things on his side and the support of the continual prayers of his fellow Christians ascending to the very throne of God in Heaven.

While Peter was in prison, the church prayed earnestly and fervently on his behalf. Were they praying for his release? Or, were they praying he would face death courageously? They must have been praying for Peter's release for, as we shall soon see, God heard their prayers and answered them by sending an angel to release Peter.

“Now on the night before he was to be brought out to be executed, Peter was sleeping between two of the soldiers. He was bound with two chains. The other guards stood before the door to keep the prison secure. Behold, the angel of the Lord appeared and shined a light into the cell where Peter was. He struck Peter on the side and awakened him and said to him, ‘Get up quickly!’ The chains fell from Peter’s hands as the angel spoke. Then the angel told Peter: ‘Fasten your belt and put on your sandals.’ Peter did so. The angel then told him to ‘Put on your coat and follow me.’ He went out and followed the angel. He did not know if what had been done by the angel was real. He thought what he had seen might be a vision. When they had passed the first and second guards, they came to the iron gate which led into the city. The gate opened to them of its own accord. They went out through the gate and when they had walked to the end of one street, the angel suddenly disappeared” (verses 6-10).

On the very night before Peter was to be brought before the people to be publicly executed, he was in the cell sleeping soundly between his two guards. His arms were chained to his captors. The soldiers who were guarding the doors were standing at their posts of duty fully alert. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared. A light shined in the cell. Peter was so sound asleep that the angel had to strike him to awaken him. He told Peter to “Get up and get dressed!” Peter was not worried or afraid because he was to face the executioner in the morning. If he had been, he could not have slept so soundly. The chains simply fell from his arms. Peter followed the angel out of the cell, walking closely behind him. He was not sure if this was really happening or if he was seeing a vision. They passed the two guards on the way out and came to the gate which led from the prison into the city. The gate automatically opened as they approached it. They entered a street and walked to the end of it. Suddenly, the angel disappeared and Peter was left alone. God had heard and answered the prayers of the church! Peter had been released from the prison and would escape the public execution that Herod Agrippa I had planned for him. He was now on his own. God had done for Peter what he could not

have done for himself just as God hears our prayers and provides what we need that we are unable to provide for ourselves.

“When Peter had come to himself, he said: ‘Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent His angel and delivered me from the hands of Herod and from the execution the Jewish people were expecting to see. He gave thought to what he should do and decided to go to the home of Mary, the mother of John (who is also called Mark) where Christians were gathered praying for him. Now when he knocked at the door of the gate, a maid servant named Rhoda came to answer it, but when she recognized Peter’s voice, instead of opening the gate, she ran inside and told those gathered there that Peter was outside at the gate. They said, ‘You are crazy!’ But she confidently declared it was so. They said: ‘It is his angel.’ Despite this, Peter continued knocking. When they opened the gate and saw him, they were amazed. He motioned for them to be quiet. He then told them how the angel of the Lord had released him from prison and led him out. Peter told them to give the news to James and the rest of the brethren. He then left them and went elsewhere” (verses 11-17).

When Peter came to his senses, he understood what had actually happened. He thought, “Now I know for certain that the Lord sent His angel to save me from the power of Herod and from what the Jewish people hoped would happen to me.” After thinking about it, Peter went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark where many Christians had gathered to pray for his release.

Mary apparently was a widow. No mention is made of a husband. She must have been married at one time for she had a son. She owned what appears to have been a fairly large house for it had sufficient space for the church to gather in it. Not only did she own a house which indicated some wealth, but she could also afford to have a servant.

Mary is a very common name in the New Testament. In his commentary on the book of Acts, H. Leo Boles lists six different women named Mary who were among the disciples of Jesus: (1) Mary, wife of Cleophas (John 19:25); (2) Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:2); (3) Mary, the mother of Mark and the sister of Barnabas (Acts 12:12; Col. 4:10:KJV); (4) Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (John 11:1-5); (5) Mary, a member of the church in Rome (Rom. 16:6); (6) Mary, the mother of Jesus (Matt. 1:18-25) {Boles, pp. 192,193}.

The Christians were having a prayer meeting on behalf of Peter, doubtless praying that he would be saved from the sword of Herod’s executioner. Peter

knocked at the gate which, according to the custom of the times, would have led into a walled courtyard with the house at the back of it. Rhoda, the maid, answered Peter's knock. When she heard his voice she was so overcome with joy and relief, that she ran inside to tell the others the good news leaving Peter standing outside. The Christians who were praying for Peter's release did not believe her. Was their faith lacking (Matt. 21:19-22)? Are we not like this at times? We pray but lack faith our prayer will be answered?

Someone said, "It is Peter's angel." This suggests that Peter had what is commonly referred to as a "guardian angel." Certainly it appears that at least some of the early Christians believed individuals had angels who were in some ways concerned about them. Our Lord Himself said of little children: "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I say to you, that in Heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father in Heaven" (Matt. 18:10). Among the many passages which indicate God's children have guardian angels are Acts 27:23; Heb. 1:13,14; Psa. 34:7; 91:11,12). Prominent preachers among the churches of Christ who taught the existence of guardian angels include Alexander Campbell, J. W. McGarvey, B. W. Johnson, and J. Noel Meredith. However, other scholars in the church, including such men as Guy N. Woods, have dismissed the idea that Christians have individual angels who are personally concerned for their well-being and safety (Quertermous, pp. 252-287).

Peter would have been in danger if he had been seen. He persevered in getting the attention of his brethren. He "continued knocking." At last they came to the gate to see for themselves. Peter motioned for them to be quiet while he explained what had happened. He then told them to take the message of his angelic release to James and the other brethren in Jerusalem. This James is probably the Lord's brother (Matt. 13:55), who did not believe in the Lord during His earthly ministry (John 7:5), but likely became a believer when the Lord Jesus appeared to him after His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7). He was among the one hundred and twenty believers who assembled with the apostles following the ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:14). He became a leader in the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13 ff; 21:18; Gal. 2:9). He also wrote the book of James in the New Testament. According to early church history, James was killed by fanatical Jews in A.D. 53. They dragged him to the roof of the temple and threw him down from its highest point (The New Analytical Study Bible, p. 1403).

We do not know where Peter went after this. He probably left Jerusalem to go to a safer location. We know he later served the Lord in many different places, and according to the Lord's prophecy, he eventually died a martyr's death by crucifixion (John 21:17-19). We do not find further mention of Peter in

the book of Acts. He was the chief character in the first twelve chapters. In the remaining chapters, the apostle Paul is the leading character.

“Now, as soon as morning came, the soldiers were greatly perplexed about the escape of Peter. When Herod had search made for him and did not find him, he questioned the soldiers and commanded that those who were responsible for Peter’s security should be executed. Following this, he left Judea and went to Caesarea where he remained” (verses 18,19).

When the soldiers went to bring Peter to the place of execution, they did not find him in the prison. They must have been greatly surprised as well as worried about his disappearance. Herod interrogated the guards to find out how Peter had escaped when he was under such strict security. He then ordered that the soldiers who were responsible for Peter’s security should be executed. This was the usual Roman punishment for a soldier who allowed a prisoner to escape. The king had been staying in Jerusalem since his appointment by the Roman emperor, Caligula. After the escape of Peter, he moved to Caesarea, the Roman capitol of his territory, and remained there (Harrison, p. 195).

“Now the king was greatly displeased with the cities of Tyre and Sidon. The cities’ leaders made friends with Blastus, a chief servant of King Herod. Then they sought to make peace with the king because their country depended upon his country for their food. On an appointed day Herod dressed in his royal clothing and sat on a throne and made a speech to them. The people shouted, ‘This is the voice of a god, not a man.’ Immediately, an angel of the Lord struck Herod because he did not glorify God. Herod was eaten by worms and died from it. However, the Word of God grew and multiplied” (verses 20-24).

For some reason not mentioned in the text, Herod Agrippa I had a disagreement with the coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon in Phoenicia. Ships from these ancient trading cities for centuries had sailed the Mediterranean Sea. They carried goods for trade and Tyre and Sidon had prospered as a result. Carthage in North Africa was established by Tyre and Sidon as a trading post, but became a major city state and even rivaled Rome at one time.

Tyre and Sidon wanted to settle their dispute with Herod as soon as possible for they depended upon their trade with the agricultural northwest of Herod’s domain for their food supply. They had made Blastus, Herod’s chamberlain, “their friend,” which probably means they had bribed him to help them persuade his master to resume trade with them. Josephus, the first

century Jewish historian, recorded this occasion in his book Antiquities of the Jews (Ash, pp. 173,174).

Herod sat upon a throne to address the delegation from Tyre and Sidon. He was dressed in royal robes made of silver. The rays of the morning sun reflected off the silver of his robe making quite an impression. When Herod spoke, the people shouted, “The voice of a god, and not of a man!” In his pride and vanity, the king accepted their praise. God was not pleased! He sent one of his angels who struck Herod Agrippa so that he died. Josephus wrote that Herod was afflicted by worms in his intestines. He suffered in great agony for five days before he died. His death came at the age of 54. He was a victim of his own pride and vanity.

Herod’s persecution of the church was unsuccessful in stopping its growth. It brought suffering initially but as always, in the long run, it resulted in people being added to the church. This occasion was no exception.

“Now Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had accomplished their mission. They brought John Mark back with them” (verse 25).

It is interesting to note that at this point Barnabas’ name always comes first. It was he who years before had vouched for Saul when he came back from Damascus to Jerusalem after his conversion in Damascus. It was Barnabas who was sent by the church in Jerusalem to help the church at Antioch. He went to Tarsus to seek for Saul and they worked together to assist the growth of the church in that key city.

Mark, the nephew of Barnabas (some versions say “cousin”), has now been taken under the wing of his more experienced relative and will receive on the job training as a “missionary apprentice” of Barnabas and Saul.

Review Questions

1. By whom was the second major persecution of the church in Judea begun?
2. Who was the grandfather of King Herod Agrippa?
3. Name the three territories that were included in Herod Agrippa’s domain.
4. T - F: Herod Agrippa I was a Jew by birth.

5. T - F: Herod Agrippa I was an Idumaeen.
6. T - F: The Idumaeans were descended from the ancient Edomites.
7. With whom did Herod Agrippa I begin his persecution of the church?
8. During which Jewish feast was Peter arrested?
9. Describe the strict security used to prevent Peter's escape.
10. What is the origin of Easter? Was its origin Christian or pagan?
11. What did the church do to free Peter from prison and execution?
12. Did Peter realize fully what was happening to him when the angel freed him from prison?
13. True or False: God does not do for us what we can do for ourselves.
14. Where did Peter go when he was released?
15. Name two famous Christians who were related to Mary in whose home the church met to pray for Peter.
16. Who at Mary's house answered the gate when Peter knocked? What was her reaction?
17. Discussion question: Do Christians have guardian angels? Give Scripture for your answer.
18. True or False: Chapter 12 contains the last mention of Peter in the book of Acts.
19. How did Herod Agrippa I die?
20. What was the final result of this second attempt at persecution in Jerusalem and Judea?
21. Why did Tyre and Sidon want to make peace with Herod?
22. What was the name of the Jewish historian who wrote of Herod's death?

Chapter 13: PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY (1)

The missionary journeys of the apostle Paul are recorded in the book of Acts. The Holy Spirit through Luke gives us an overview of what occurred on each journey. These journeys resulted in the Gospel being taken across Asia Minor and then over the Aegean Sea to the Roman provinces of Macedonia and Achaia in Greece. Prior to this, Jerusalem had been the center of Christian activity. The center now shifts to Antioch of Syria. A fourth journey of Paul was also recorded by Luke in Acts. This was not a planned journey. Paul was sent as a prisoner to Rome to stand trial before the emperor after he had used his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar.

Antioch of Syria was the most prominent of fifteen cities named in honor of Antiochus, a Seleucid ruler. It was located on the Orontes River about 16 miles inland from the city of Seleucia on the Mediterranean Sea. It had served as the capital of the Seleucid kingdom of the Greeks and in Paul's day, it was the capital of the Roman province in which it was located. With a population of 500,000, Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire. The church in this city may have been quite large. Some of the Christians in Jerusalem and Judea who had fled from Saul's persecution had come to Antioch and taught the Gospel to the Jews (Acts 11:19). Following the taking of the Gospel to the Gentiles by Peter, Christians from Cyprus and Cyrene came to Antioch and preached to the Greeks as well as to the Jews (Acts 11:20). This was followed by a year that Barnabas and Saul labored together with the church and "taught many people" and "the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch" (Acts 11:26; see also Unger; pp. 82,83).

"Now there was in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers. Among them were Barnabas and Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, foster brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they were busy in the Lord's work and fasting, the Holy Spirit said: 'Set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work for which I have called them.' Then, after they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" (verses 1-3).

The early church was blessed to have leaders who had hands laid on them by the apostles and had thereby received miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. Nine different gifts are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:7-12. In Ephesians 4:11, Paul mentions five leadership roles God gave to the church. These were apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. The first two roles belonged to the infancy of the church when the New Testament was in the process of being revealed. Once the New Testament was complete, they were

no longer needed (1 Cor. 13:8-13). The latter three roles continue in the church today because the need for them continues, and their work is not dependent upon the possession of miraculous gifts.

The list of prominent leaders in the church begins with Barnabas, the “son of exhortation” who had been sent by the church at Jerusalem to Antioch. He had remained there to work with them. Next was Simeon who was called Niger. Niger means “black.” This indicates he was most probably a black man from Africa. After this was Lucius from Cyrene. Cyrene was a city established by Greeks in North Africa. It had a large population of Jews. Simon, a Cyrenian, was compelled to bear the cross of Jesus (Mark 15:21). Men from Cyrene were present on Pentecost (Acts 2:7-11). Manean “had been brought up with Herod, the tetrarch.” Saul is listed last. This indicates he may have been one of the last of those listed to come to Christ. Perhaps he also still bore the stain of having been a fierce persecutor of Christ and His church.

The Holy Spirit had called Barnabas and Saul for a new work. How had the calling taken place? It is likely that the Holy Spirit through one of the prophets He inspired had received the message that Barnabas and Saul had been chosen for this work. Today, we live under the Great Commission given by our Lord shortly before He ascended to Heaven (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:46,47). It is a mandate that applies to every Christian.

Barnabas and Saul were well qualified. The kindly nature of Barnabas, and his success reaching the lost certainly must have played a large role in his being chosen. Saul may have been the least esteemed of the leaders of the church, but the Spirit of God knew he was well qualified to be a missionary to the Gentiles. He had grown up in Tarsus of Cilicia, a Gentile city. Therefore, he would be well acquainted with the customs and culture of the Gentiles. He was a Roman citizen as well as a devout Jew, and he was a student of the Old Testament who had been trained at the feet of Gamaliel, Israel’s greatest teacher of the Law. As an apostle, he could speak by inspiration and work miracles to prove his message came from God. Undoubtedly, Christ has never had a more qualified missionary than Saul who is better known as the apostle Paul. He would become preeminently “the apostle to the Gentiles” (Gal. 2:7,8).

The church fasted and prayed before they sent Barnabas and Saul out on this first journey to take the Gospel to the heathen. Bible students often wonder if we in the churches of Christ should fast before appointing elders and sending out preachers to the mission field. Fasting was practiced by the Jews. Jesus taught it must be done in the right manner and for the right purpose (Matt. 6:17,18). Fasting is not specifically commanded, but it contributes to a spiritual state of mind and emphasizes the seriousness of an occasion such as the

appointing of elders (Acts 14:23). Fasting is often associated with prayer in the New Testament (Luke 2:37; Acts 10:30,31; 14:23).

“Laying on of hands” was a practice of the Jews and the early Christians that was used for a variety of purposes. These include: {1} Transferring guilt as when the high priest laid his hands on the scapegoat and symbolically transferred the sins and guilt of Israel to the animal which was then led far away into the wilderness (Lev. 16:21; Num. 8:12); {2} Laying hands on someone in anger or to arrest him (Matt. 21:46); {3} Laying hands on the sick so that they would recover (Mark 5:23; 16:18); {4} Laying hands on someone to appoint him to a work or an office (Acts 6:5,6; 1 Tim. 5:22); {5} an apostle laying hands on someone to give him a miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-6).

“Having been sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they preached the Word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They had John (Mark) as their helper. When they had gone through the island all the way to Paphos, they encountered a certain sorcerer, a false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus. He was with the pro-consul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man of good judgment. Elymas, the sorcerer, intended to turn him away from the faith so he opposed them. Then Saul, who is also called Paul, looked him straight in the eye and said: ‘You who are full of all lies and of evil tricks, you son of the Devil and the enemy of everything that is good and righteous, will you not stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now you are going to see the hand of the Lord upon you. You will be blind, not able to see the sun for a while.’ Immediately a mist and a darkness came upon him and Elymas went about trying to find someone who would lead him by the hand. Then the pro-consul, having seen what was done, believed, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord” (verses 4-12).

The missionary team consisted of three men: Saul (Paul), Barnabas, and Barnabas’ nephew, John Mark. They were “sent forth by the Holy Spirit.” The Spirit had chosen them and commanded the church to set them apart, and now they were going with the blessing of God and His people. They traveled 16 miles south to the nearest seaport, the city of Seleucia. They then embarked on a ship going to Cyprus, a large island about 100 miles southwest of Seleucia. Cyprus was the original home of Barnabas (Acts 4:36). They arrived at Salamis, a port on the eastern side of the island. The Gospel had already reached the Jews of this island for some of the Christians who had fled during the persecution instigated by Saul had gone there and had preached (Acts 11:19).

In Salamis, they preached the Gospel first in the synagogues. This was Paul's usual practice when he went into new territory. In the synagogues they would find the Jews who already believed in the true and living God, had a higher standard of morality than the rest of the population, were acquainted with the Old Testament Scriptures, and were expecting the coming of the Christ. In the synagogues also they would find Gentiles proselytes, those who had fully accepted Judaism even to the point of being circumcised as well as others who were known as "God-fearers," those who had come to believe in the true God and met with the Jews for worship, but had not yet taken the final step of circumcision (Unger, p. 1045). Thus the Christian missionaries would find good prospects for conversion to Jesus the Christ in the synagogues and seldom were disappointed.

The missionary party traversed the island, which is about 160 miles long, to the city of Paphos on the western side. It is very likely they preached along the way in the communities which had synagogues. Paphos was the Roman capital of the island. There, a notorious scoundrel by the name of Bar-Jesus (Son of Joshua) had great influence among the people. Luke describes him as a Jew, a sorcerer, and a false prophet. He was also known as Elymas which means "a wise man." He was a "con-artist," a religious charlatan who made his living deceiving people who supposed he was some great man and had been sent by God. Among those who were under his influence, it seems, was none other than Sergius Paulus, the Roman pro-consul.

Luke describes Sergius Paulus as a man of intelligence. When he became interested in the message of Christ proclaimed by Paul and Barnabas and believed, Bar-Jesus disputed what the missionaries said. He was determined to keep the pro-consul from the Christian faith for he did not want to lose his influence with him. Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, looked Bar-Jesus in the eye and by inspiration condemned him. He stated he was full of lies and evil deeds, the son of the Devil, and the enemy of all that was good and righteous. Remember, he was speaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Paul then pronounced God's punishment upon this false teacher: "You will be blind; not even able to see the sun for a time!" As soon as Paul had spoken these words, the eyes of the religious charlatan were darkened as if a mist had fallen over them. Bar-Jesus blundered about groping to find someone who would lead him around by the hand for he could see nothing. Sergius Paulus was astonished! He was convinced that Paul and Barnabas were teachers of truth. He became a believer in Christ that very day.

"Now Paul and his companions sailed from Paphos to Perga in Pamphylia where John left them and returned to Jerusalem. They passed through Perga and went on to Antioch in Pisidia. On the sabbath day they went into

the synagogue and sat down. After the Law and the Prophets had been read, the leaders of the synagogue sent someone to them who said: ‘Brothers, if you have a word of encouragement for the people, you may speak’” (verses 13-15).

In verse 9, the statement was made that Saul was also called Paul. This laid the groundwork for the change in the name of the apostle who up to this point seems to have taken a back seat to Barnabas. Now for the first time Paul is no longer called “Saul,” his Hebrew name, but is referred to as “Paul,” his Roman name. It is likely that he bore both names with “Saul” being the Hebrew name given to him by his parents. However, because they were Roman citizens, they also gave him a Roman name, “Paul” (Acts 16:37,38; 22:24-29). Now that he and Barnabas were working among the Gentiles, Paul will be known by his Roman name exclusively (McGarvey, pp. 159,160; Boles, pp. 202, 203).

Another change must be noted also. Hitherto, Barnabas’ name has been placed first by Luke suggesting he was the leader of the missionary team. This will be the case no longer. Paul had taken the lead in dealing with Elymas so from this time forward, his name usually will be listed first indicating his leadership. The picture painted of Paul in the Scriptures is that of a man with a strong, dominant personality, a natural leader.

Leaving Paphos, the missionaries sailed to the Roman province of Pamphylia on the mainland of Asia Minor. It was 100 miles northwest of Cyprus. Cilicia, where Paul’s hometown, Tarsus, was located, was to the east of Pamphylia and Lycia to the west. The province of Pisidia, Paul’s next field of labor is north of Pamphylia. Paul and his party briefly stopped in Perga, but apparently did little or no preaching there on this occasion (Reese, p. 467; Pfeiffer, p. 209).

At Perga, John Mark left the missionary party and returned to Jerusalem. Luke does not give the reason for his sudden departure. Some speculate that John Mark was homesick. Others think he feared the journey ahead through the rugged mountains where robbers lay in wait for unsuspecting travelers. The most popular opinion is that he did not like the fact that Paul, rather than his uncle, had become the leader of the party. Those who hold this last opinion find support for it in the later dispute between Paul and Barnabas over taking John Mark on a journey to visit the churches established on their first journey. Barnabas wanted to take his nephew. Paul adamantly refused because of John Mark’s premature return home on this first journey. Because of this, these two great men came to a parting of ways. In later years, John Mark redeemed himself in Paul’s estimation. He was with Paul in his last imprisonment and was

spoken of in a complimentary way (Col. 4:10; Phile. 24). Mark also worked with Peter who referred to him as his son (1 Pet. 5:13). Paul and Barnabas did not remain long in Perga but continued their journey to Antioch in Pisidia.

Antioch of Pisidia was one of 15 cities in Asia Minor that were named in honor of Antiochus the Great, an ancient Seleucid king. At this time Antioch was part of the Roman Empire and the capital of the Roman province of South Galatia. Caesar Augustus had made it a Roman colony in 6 B.C. As a result, its residents were also accounted as Roman citizens (Reese, p. 469).

In Antioch (not to be confused with Antioch of Syria) the missionaries entered the synagogue on the sabbath day and sat down. According to custom, the rulers of the synagogue would invite visiting rabbis to present the morning sermon after the readings from the Law and the Prophets. Paul and Barnabas may have received special attention because they came from Jerusalem. If it were known that Paul had studied under Gamaliel, that was enough to guarantee him an invitation to speak. Perhaps this may have been the reason that when an invitation to give an exhortation was extended, it was Paul who responded to it.

“Paul stood up and making a motion with his hand, he said: ‘Men of Israel, and you who fear God, please listen. The God of the people of Israel chose our ancestors, and exalted our people when they sojourned in Egypt. With an uplifted arm, He led them out. For about forty years, as a father, he nourished them in the wilderness. When He had vanquished seven nations in the land of Canaan, He divided the land to them by lot for an inheritance. After this, God gave them judges for about 450 years until the time of Samuel the prophet. When they asked for a king, God gave them Saul, the son of Kish, who was from the tribe of Benjamin. Saul ruled Israel for 40 years. When God removed Saul, He set up David as the king. He testified of David: ‘I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after my own heart who will do all My will.’ From David’s descendants, God has raised up for Israel a Savior, Jesus, according to His promise. John preached before Christ’s coming the immersion of repentance to all the people of Israel. As he was fulfilling his cause, John said: ‘Who do you think that I am? I am not He. But look, there comes One after me, the latchet of whose shoes, I am not worthy to undo’” (verses 16-25).

Paul stood up to speak. Traditionally, the Jews sat while teaching or preaching (Matt. 5:1; Luke 4:20). The Greeks and Romans, however, usually stood (Acts 17:22). The synagogue in Antioch appears to have adapted the

Greek/Roman posture. Paul motioned with his hand to draw the attention of the hearers. Perhaps it was a gesture indicating silence? Paul politely addressed the two groups of hearers in his audience. "Men of Israel" referred to the Jews. "You who fear God" would include any Gentiles present who were there because they had come to believe in one God and had accepted the Old Testament as God's revelation to mankind.

Having gained their attention, Paul then gave a brief history of God's chosen people in the Old Testament. This is a very abbreviated history. Luke may have chosen by inspiration just to give the highlights. He began with Israel's sojourn in Egypt and quickly moved on to God's triumphal deliverance of His people from Egyptian slavery and His providential care for them in the wilderness for forty years. He then moved to the conquest of the land when seven nations of Canaanites were destroyed and the land was divided among the tribes of Israel and the families within the tribes. Paul then speaks of the period of the Judges. God intended to rule His people directly and did so until the time of Samuel. Near the end of Samuel's life, the people became dissatisfied with this arrangement and asked for a king so they could be like the other nations around them. He gave them what they asked for. When Samuel complained about this, God told him: "They have not rejected you. They have rejected me that I should be king over them" (1 Sam. 8:6,7). The prophet, Hosea, quoted God as saying: "I gave them a king in My anger, and took him away in My wrath" (Hosea 13:11).

Having introduced the time of the kings, Paul hurried over the reign of Saul to the time of David. He wanted to get to David because God had promised him: "When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish His kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever" (2 Sam. 7:12,13; Psa. 89:3,4). Jesus was the descendant of David who established His kingdom, which is the church of Christ, on the first Pentecost Day following His death for our sins, His burial and His resurrection from the dead (1 Cor. 15:1-4; Acts 2:1-42).

John, the immerser, preceded Jesus. His ministry was preparatory. He came to prepare the way for the Lord (Mal. 3:1; 4:5,6; Mark 1:1-3). His ministry was directed at Israel to call them to repentance. He plainly asserted that he was not the Christ, nor was he even worthy to untie His shoes, the work of a servant or slave who would wash the dirty feet of their master and his guests.

"Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, the message of salvation has been sent to you. Those who dwell in Jerusalem and their rulers did not know the Christ nor understand

the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day. They have fulfilled the prophecies by condemning the Christ although they found no reason for the death penalty, yet they insisted that Pilate should put Him to death. When they had fulfilled the Scriptures by crucifying Him, they took him down from the cross and placed His body in a tomb. However, God raised Him from the dead. He was seen for many days by those who came with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem who are now witnesses to the people. We bring you the good news that the promises God made to our ancestors He has fulfilled for us, their children, when He raised Jesus up, as it is written in the second psalm: ‘You are My Son. This day I have begotten You.’ Because He has raised Him from the dead, no more to see decay, He said: ‘I will give you the sure mercies of David.’ He said in another place, ‘You will not allow your Holy One to see decay.’ David did indeed die after he had served the Lord in his generation and was laid to rest with his ancestors and his body did decay, but the One whom God raised up, His body did not decay” (verses 26-37).

Paul addressed his message to the two groups who were present in the assembly. “Men and brethren” referred to his fellow Jews. They were the descendants of Abraham to whom God had promised that One would come in Whom all the world would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:18). “Those among you who fear God” referred to the Gentile “God fearers” who had come to believe in the one true God and who worshipped with the Jews in the synagogue each sabbath.

“Those who dwell in Jerusalem and their rulers” were the “establishment” in Jerusalem which included the high priest, the Sanhedrin, and the elders of the people, who along with Pontius Pilate and the Roman authorities, were all responsible for the death of Jesus, the Christ, the One who had been sent by God to be the Savior of mankind. They unwittingly fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies by condemning Jesus to death although there was no cause of wrongdoing in any way found in Him (Psalm 22; Isaiah 53) Matt. 27:17,18,23,24). The Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, declared several times that he found nothing worthy of death that Jesus had done, but the crowd, stirred up by the religious leaders of the Jews, insisted on the death penalty (Matthew 27:17; 18;23,24). The Jewish and Roman authorities also fulfilled the Scriptures when they crucified Him (Psalm 22:1,6-8, 12-18; Zechariah 12:10; 13:1,2,6,7; John 19:34-36).

Joseph of Arimathea received permission from Pilate to take the body of Jesus down from the cross (Matt. 27:57-60). Nicodemus assisted him in preparing the body for burial (John 19:39,40). Jesus’ body was in the tomb on

Friday evening and night, all day Saturday, and early Sunday morning when He arose from the grave. His body had not been in the tomb long enough to decay. David had prophesied: “Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices. My flesh shall also rest in hope for you will not leave my soul in Hades nor suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” (Psalm 16:9,10: KJV). Peter quoted this passage in his speech on Pentecost and applied David’s words to Jesus (Acts 2:25-35). As the late Foy E. Wallace, Jr. often said: “When one inspired man quotes another inspired man, and says ‘This is that,’ you can’t get any thatter than that!”

“Therefore, let it be known to you, men and brothers, that through this Man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and that through Him everyone who believes is justified from all things of which you could not be justified by the Law of Moses. Beware, therefore, unless that come upon you of which the prophets spoke: ‘Look, you despisers, be amazed, and perish, for I am doing a work in your days which you will not believe even though someone declares it to you.’ And when the Jews had gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles pleaded that this message might be preached to them on the next sabbath. Now when the congregation had dispersed, many of the Jews and proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas who persuaded them to continue in the favor of God” (verses 38-43).

Paul concluded his sermon with a warning. It was directed to all who were present, both Gentile proselytes and Jewish worshippers. Only through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, is the forgiveness of all sins possible. Under the Law of Moses, their sins were forgiven only provisionally. The writer of the book of Hebrews makes this clear in Hebrews 10:1-10. He stated that the sacrifices offered every year under the Law of Moses did not cleanse those who offered them, but served as a remembrance of their sins. The blood of animals could not atone for man’s sins. This is the reason God sent His Son into the world. Only the precious blood of the sinless Son of God could finally, fully pay the price for man’s sins (Eph. 1:7)

Paul warned they must take heed lest they reject the only possibility they had to be saved from their sins. The prophets had continually warned Israel of the consequences of rejecting God’s warnings. The prophet, Habakkuk, had issued such a warning in his day when he said: “Look among the nations and watch - be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days which you will not believe, though it were told you” (Hab. 1:5: NKJV). If they rejected God’s call to repent and return to Him, He was preparing a nation, the Chaldeans, to punish them. If we today reject the Christ and His atoning death there remains nothing for us except the inevitable eternal punishment for our sins (Eph. 1:7;

Heb. 12:25-28). After the congregation had dispersed, certain of the worshippers in the synagogue asked if Paul and Barnabas could continue teaching them the following sabbath. It seems the message of Paul had attracted the attention especially of the Gentile “God fearers.” They pleaded for a continuation of the subject on the next sabbath. Many of the Jews and proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas who persuaded them to continue in the favor of God.

“And the following sabbath, nearly everyone in the city assembled to hear the Word of God, but when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with envy and spoke against the message of Paul. They contradicted him and blasphemed. Then Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said: ‘It was necessary for the Word of God to be spoken to you first, but since you reject it and thus judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, look, we are turning to the Gentiles. The Lord has commanded us to do this for He said: ‘I have set you for a light to the Gentiles, that you might be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.’ When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and praised the Word of God. As many as were inclined to eternal life believed and the message of God was spread throughout all that area” (verses 44-49).

There must have been lots of discussion during the week among both Jews and those who were God fearers and proselytes. When the sabbath day came, almost the entire city gathered to hear the Word of God. The Jews had not been able to attract such large crowds and draw so much attention to their religion. Therefore, they were envious of the success of Paul and Barnabas. They contradicted what Paul was teaching and even resorted to blasphemy. To blaspheme is “to speak evil of God and/or of sacred things.” Their adamant denial that Jesus of Nazareth was the long awaited Christ and the Son of God amounted to blasphemy.

Paul and Barnabas had no choice but to boldly refute the false charges of their Jewish opponents. They said: “It was necessary for us to preach the Word of God to you, but since you reject it and in doing so show that you are not worthy of eternal life, we are going to give our attention to the Gentiles.” It was always the apostles’ approach to go to the Jews first to present the Gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16). The Jews had long been God’s people, chosen especially for the purpose of bringing the Christ into the world. Paul then quoted the latter part of Isaiah 49:6 and applied it in support of their going to the Gentiles with the Gospel: “I will also give you for a light to the Gentiles that you may be My salvation unto the end of the earth.” The Gospel was for the Jews first, but it was also for the Greeks {Gentiles} (Rom. 1:16).

The Gentiles rejoiced to hear these words. They glorified (highly exalted) the Word of God. The King James Version (1611) then says: "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed." "The Better Version of the New Testament" renders the passage: "As many as were disposed to eternal life believed." Hugo McCord translates the passage in the same way (McCord, p. 254). Calvinists use this passage to argue that God has predestined and foreordained a certain number of people to be saved, and they will be saved, for it is by God's decree. However, the word can also be translated as "disposed toward" meaning that those who are inclined in a certain direction will reach a certain outcome. Those who are disposed or inclined toward eternal life will make every effort to serve and please God so that they may be saved. "Disposed toward" or "inclined toward" is in harmony with the overall teaching of Scripture that those who desire to go to Heaven will do everything in their power to move in that direction.

Good news is contagious and the Gospel of Christ is the best news that has ever come into this dark world. The good news of salvation soon spread all over that entire area. It remained a stronghold of Christianity until the Muslim Conquest in the seventh century A.D. (Unger, p. 82).

"But the Jews stirred up the devout, reputable women and the prominent men of the city. They began a persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from their area. The two missionaries shook the dust off their feet and went to the neighboring city of Iconium. The disciples were 'filled with joy and the Holy Spirit'" (verses 49-52).

The Jews were enraged at their loss of members and God-fearers and the interest and general good will of the people. They used both their influence and connections in the city to prejudice leading citizens of both men and women against Paul and Barnabas. As a result the two missionaries were expelled from the city. They followed the teaching of Jesus to His twelve disciples when He sent them out to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He had said to them: "Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when you depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet" (Matt. 10:14). They rejected the city that had rejected them and moved on to the neighboring city of Iconium. The disciples (Christians) that they left behind were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. They were blessed that they had the opportunity to hear and obey the Gospel of Christ and therefore had the hope of eternal salvation. How could they be otherwise than filled with joy?! How blessed we are today that the Gospel is preached so widely, Bibles are generally available, and opportunities are abundant to hear the Gospel preached on television, radio, the internet, and the printed page!

Review Questions

1. How many missionary journeys of Paul are recorded in the book of Acts?
2. What was the purpose of Paul's journey to Rome?
3. What was the first center of Christianity? Where did it shift?
4. How many cities in the Roman Empire were named Antioch?
5. After whom are the various cities of Antioch named?
6. What distinction set Antioch of Syria apart from the other cities named Antioch?
7. List the prophets and teachers at Antioch and their descriptions.
8. Who selected Barnabas and Saul to be sent out as the first missionaries?
9. Name three things the Antioch church did before it sent out Paul and Barnabas.
10. How many leadership roles are mentioned in Ephesians 4:11? How many of these roles are continued today? What are they?
11. How many miraculous gifts are listed in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13? How many of these gifts do Christians have today? If they ceased, when was it?
12. What were various usages of laying on of hands? Name them.
13. Who accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey? What happened to him?
14. How did Paul describe Elymas the sorcerer?
15. How is Sergius Paulus described?
16. How was Elymas punished for withstanding the Lord?
17. What did John Mark do at Paphos?
18. Where did Paul and Barnabas go on the sabbath day in Antioch of Pisidia?

Chapter 14: PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY (2)

Paul and Barnabas had been selected by the Holy Spirit to be the first foreign missionaries of the church of Christ. They sailed to Cyprus, the original home of Barnabas, to begin their work. After a successful effort there, they traveled to Perga in Pamphylia where their assistant, John Mark, left them and returned home to Jerusalem. No preaching effort was made in Perga on this visit. They traveled next to Antioch of Pisidia where they preached in the synagogue and made a number of converts. They were persecuted by the Jews and left to go to Iconium about one hundred miles from Antioch of Pisidia.

Iconium was in Phrygia, part of the territory known generally as Galatia in Roman days. The city exists today as the modern Turkish city called Konya. It is located on a plateau 3,400 feet above sea level and overlooks the site of the ancient city.

The missionary journeys of the apostle Paul and his co-workers were historical milestones. As a result of them, many souls were saved, churches were planted, and the number of Christians multiplied. Gentiles were converted and soon became predominant in the church. The church had now become an international body!

“And it happened in Iconium that they entered the synagogue of the Jews and spoke so effectively that a great many people, both Jews and Greeks, believed. However, the Jews who did not believe stirred up the Gentiles and prejudiced them against the believers. They remained there a long time and spoke boldly about the Lord. The Lord bore witness to the Word of His grace by granting signs and wonders to be done by the missionaries in His name. The residents of the city were divided, some sided with the Jews and others sided with the apostles. When a violent assault was planned by both the Jews and Gentiles and supported by their rulers, to mistreat them and stone them, Paul and Barnabas became aware of it, and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia. There they continued to proclaim the Gospel” (verses 1-7).

The two missionaries went first to the Jewish synagogue where they knew they would be invited to speak. They also knew the worshippers would be eager to hear what they had to say. Many who heard them believed, both Jews and Greeks. However, the Jews who rejected the Gospel stirred up the unbelieving Gentiles against the believers and the whole city was divided. Some sided with the brethren and others against them.

Paul and Barnabas continued for a time boldly teaching the good news of salvation. The Lord confirmed their teaching by granting them power to work miracles among the people. However, when they learned of the plans of the unbelievers to mistreat them and even stone them, they left Iconium and went to Lystra and Derbe in the nearby district of Lycaonia.

“In Lystra there sat a crippled man who had no strength in his feet. He was lame from the time he was born, and had never walked. This man heard Paul speaking. Paul looked intently at him and saw he had faith to be healed. In a loud voice, Paul said to the lame man, ‘Stand up on your feet!’ He leaped to his feet and began walking. The crowd saw what Paul had done and raised their voices and said in the Lycaonian language: ‘The gods have come down to us in human form!’ They called Barnabas ‘Zeus’ and Paul ‘Hermes’ because he was the principal speaker” (verses 8-12).

The lame man who was about to be healed by Paul reminds us of the lame man at the beautiful gate of the temple who was healed by Peter (Acts 3:1-11). Three things are stated about the sad condition of this man: (1) He had no strength in his feet; (2) He was lame from birth; (3) He had never been able to walk. This man must have been paying close attention to what Paul had to say and Paul noticed him. He “saw he had faith to be healed.” Paul spoke loudly so that all present could hear. He told the man to “Stand up on your feet!” This would be a cruel thing to say to someone if he did not have the ability to stand and the one who commanded him to stand did not have the power to heal him. This man without strength in his feet, who had been lame all his life, and had never once walked now leaped up, stood erect, and began walking.

When the crowd saw what Paul had done by the power of the Holy Spirit, they began to talk excitedly in their own language saying: “The gods have come down to us in human form.” They began calling Barnabas “Zeus” (or Jupiter). This was the chief god of the pantheon in ancient Greek and Roman times. Perhaps Barnabas was older or more impressive looking than Paul and was therefore thought to be the chief of the gods. They called Paul “Hermes.” Hermes was the messenger of the gods. The Roman name for Hermes was “Mercurius. Since Paul was the chief speaker this seemed appropriate.

Somehow these pagans did not connect the impressive healing of the lame man with the message Paul had been preaching. They reverted back in their minds to their gods and immediately connected the miracle with them instead of to the true and living God proclaimed by Paul and Barnabas. Some commentators relate an old folk story that the people of Lystra told. According to the story, Zeus and Hermes had come to earth in the form of men. They

sought a place to rest for the night. They walked the streets of the city knocking on doors, but no one gave them an invitation. Finally, at a rundown cottage on the edge of town, a poor couple named Philemon and Baucis invited them to come in and rest while they prepared a feast for them. The gods made the hospitable couple priests and all those who had refused hospitality were killed (Reese, pp. 504, 505). Now the people believed the same gods had returned to bless their city once again.

“The priests of the temple of Zeus, which was in front of the city, brought bulls and wreaths of flowers to the gate. They intended to offer sacrifices with the people to these whom they supposed were their chief gods. When the missionaries, Barnabas and Paul, realized what was happening, they tore their garments and ran in among the people, crying: ‘Men, why are you doing these things? We are also human beings just like you. We are proclaiming the good news of salvation to you that you should turn away from these useless things and turn to the living God, who made heaven and earth and the seas and everything that is in them. In past generations, He allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet He did not leave Himself without testimony, for He continued to do good, sending rain and fruitful seasons from heaven, filling your hearts with food and gladness.’ Even though they said these things, they barely were able to restrain the crowd from offering sacrifices to them” (verses 13-18).

The missionaries had obviously failed with the message they were trying to get across to these pagans. No doubt they thought they were making progress until this event took place. Instead of the miracle causing the people to look to the God whom Paul and Barnabas preached, it caused them to return to their old pagan views. Perhaps the priests of Zeus took advantage of the situation to keep the people from the true message?

Paul and Barnabas “tore their garments.” They made a tear in their inner garment or tunic about the length of a man’s hand. This tear was symbolic of the deep grief they felt that was figuratively tearing their hearts. They ran in among the crowd, doubtless shouting to get their attention. They asserted their humanity. They were humans just like those in the crowd. They were present among them to teach them about the true God and the salvation He offered. This was the God who created all things, the heavens and the earth, the seas and everything in them. The Creator had allowed all nations of men on earth to follow their own ways in the past. However, He left full proof of His identity. He blessed the people with sunshine and rain, with good harvests that fed the hungry and brought happiness and contentment to them. In spite of their best

efforts, Paul and Barnabas almost failed in their efforts to restrain the people from offering sacrifices to them as gods.

“But the Jews from Antioch and Iconium came and turned the crowds against them. They stoned Paul, and supposing him to be dead, they dragged him out of the city. However, as the disciples stood around his body, he rose up and went into the city. The following day, he and Barnabas went to Derbe. After they had preached the Gospel in that city and made many converts, they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. They confirmed the souls of the disciples and exhorted them to continue in the faith, saying, ‘We must through many tribulations enter into God’s kingdom’” (verses 19-22).

The Jewish leadership, primarily the Sanhedrin, but including the leaders of the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees, persecuted Jesus throughout His ministry on earth and eventually brought about His death. The persecution of the Jewish leaders did not stop even at Jesus’ death, but they continued to persecute His followers as long as they had the power to do so. Writing to the church at Thessalonica, Paul spoke of these persistent persecutors: “For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus, because you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, even as they also did from the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and persecuted us, and who do not please God, and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, so as to fill up their sins always, but upon whom has now come the wrath of God to the uttermost” (1 Thess. 2:14-16: The Better Version, p. 241).

Paul and Barnabas escaped being killed or severely harmed by the Jews in their work in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. Now they faced the threat of death from the Jews once again. Somehow the Jews had managed to turn the people against the missionaries, capture Paul, and then attempted to stone him to death. Thinking they had succeeded, they had dragged his body outside the city and left it exposed to the wild animals, the birds of the air and the elements of the earth. However, Paul was not easy to kill. The Christians gathered around Paul’s body weeping and praying, but Paul was not dead. He may have been unconscious, or even in a coma, but he revived, arose, and was able to make his way into the city where his wounds would have been tenderly treated and he would have been cared for throughout the long, painful night. The following day, he had recuperated enough that he could travel with Barnabas to the neighboring city of Derbe.

Barnabas is twice referred to as an apostle in Acts (14:4,14). The word “apostle” is a transliteration of the Greek word which means “one sent out on a mission.” Our modern English word “missionary” comes the closest to being the translation of *apostolos* of any word in our language. It is in the general sense of “one sent out on a mission” that Barnabas is called an apostle. James, the Lord’s brother, and author of the epistle of James, is called an apostle in Galatians 1:19. Epaphroditus is referred to as “your apostle” in the Greek New Testament when Paul wrote to the church at Philippi (see Phil. 2:25 in *Novum Testamentum Graece*). This simply means the church at Philippi had sent Epaphroditus to Paul when he was in prison in Rome. The Lord Himself was one sent from Heaven on a mission to earth. Therefore, He is an apostle in the general sense of the word (Heb. 3:1; John 17:3). {See Vine’s Expository Dictionary of N.T. Words, p. 63, for a fuller exposition of “apostle”}.

In the strict usage of *apostolos*, the original twelve disciples, Matthias, and Paul were apostles who were specially chosen individuals whose qualification was that they had seen the Lord after His resurrection from the dead, and therefore they could be a witness and testify of what they had seen and heard (Luke 6:12-16; 24:45-49; John 20:1-31; Acts 1:15-26; 22:14,15; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:7,8). They also had to have been baptized with the Holy Spirit and therefore could pass miraculous gifts on to others by the laying on of their hands (John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26, 27; 16:7-15; Acts 1:4, 5; 2:1-21; 8:14-21; 19:1-6).

Paul and Barnabas visited the churches they had established. Modern day missionaries should learn from this. After Paul had established churches, he did not forget or forsake them. He made repeated visits back to them to strengthen, encourage, and further ground them in the faith. In addition, he often wrote to them and they to him as the epistles of the New Testament abundantly testify.

Paul did not tell the saints that being a Christian meant life would always be easy and everything perfect, but he often warned them of hardships and persecutions they would suffer simply because they were Christians. Jesus had told His apostles that “...the servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also” (John 15:20). Paul reminded the Christians that “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (v. 22). He later wrote to Timothy and reminded him: “Indeed, all who wish to live Godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12: The Better Version).

“And when they had appointed elders for them in every congregation, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed” (verse 23).

Just as surely as God has given a pattern for salvation (Rom. 6:17,18), He has also given a pattern for the organization of His church. Christ is the only Head of the church (Eph. 1:22,23; 5:22-24; Col. 1:18; 3:1). There is no earthly organization of the church above, or besides the local congregation! Each local church is independent and self-governing under Christ the Head. The elders are the leaders of a local church, and only in the church where they are members, and have been appointed (1 Pet. 5:1-4).

Elders are known by various names in the New Testament. In regard to age and maturity, they are called elders (Greek: presbuteros which is anglicized as presbyter). This refers to age and maturity (see Vine, Vol. II, p. 21). In regard to duties, they are pastors (Eph. 4:11). The word “pastor” is an old English word meaning “shepherd.” It comes from the Greek *poimen*. As a shepherd leads, feeds, and protects his sheep, so the pastor or shepherd does the same for the members of the church who are under his care (see Vine, Vol. III, p. 167). They also are called bishops which comes from the Greek word *episkopos* which means “overseer. Bishops are those who are in charge under Christ, the Chief Shepherd. They have the serious responsibility of “looking out for the souls of those in the congregation as they must give an account” (Heb. 13:17). These words describe the different characteristics that God’s leaders over the local congregation must have, and indicate the very serious nature of their work.

One can easily see that these words are used interchangeably. In Acts 20:17, Paul sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church. When he talked to these same men, he referred to them as bishops or overseers (Acts 20:28). He told them in this same verse that they are to “feed the church of God.” This is the work of a pastor or shepherd. In 1 Peter 5:1-6, Peter addressed the elders. In verse 2 he told them to “feed the flock of God.” To feed refers to teaching. This is especially the work of shepherds. If one takes all the Scriptures on the subject, he will find the different terms for elders all refer to the same office, but emphasize different aspects of the work, or the particular qualifications for the office. The specific qualifications for elders are found in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Tit. 1:5-9.

Paul and Barnabas had established these churches on the outward journey. On their return journey they visited them again and appointed elders in each congregation. How could they do this so soon? The first missionary journey lasted between two and three years (Boles, pp. 230, 231). How could they have men qualified to be elders in that short period of time? There are congregations today which have been in existence for ten, twenty, thirty, even forty years or more and do not yet have elders. Why?

There are several possibilities as to how the early church could have had elders so soon. First, many of the converts were Jews or proselytes who had worshipped in the synagogue. It is possible that many of these were men of age and maturity who had served God for much of their lives. They believed in God, studied the Old Testament and were looking for the coming of Christ. They had a high moral standard, far above that of most of the first century Roman world. The only thing they needed to be mature spiritually was to learn that the Christ had come and to obey the Gospel (Romans 1:16; 6:1-18).

Second, miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit were available through the laying on of the apostles' hands (Acts 8:14-22; 19:1-6; Rom. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:6). Nine gifts of the Spirit are listed in 1 Corinthians 12:1-12. Some have suggested one could qualify by means of possessing two or three or more of these gifts. Others disagree, or are unsure. There are other gifts of the Spirit that are listed in Romans 12:6-8. These gifts seem more appropriate to help one qualify to be an elder.

Third, it is often the case today that congregations simply do not want to have elders. They prefer having a "Men's Business Meeting" where every male member has an equal say, whether he is qualified in the matter or not. God knows best! He ordained that churches should have elders and gave the qualifications for them. From the beginning of a congregation, efforts should begin to be made to qualify men who can eventually be appointed elders.

"When they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia, and when they had spoken the Word in Perga, they went to Attalia. And from there they sailed to Antioch where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work which they had fulfilled. When they arrived, they gathered the church together and told them everything that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. They remained there with the disciples for a long time" (verses 24-28).

The homeward journey of Paul and Barnabas is briefly stated by the inspired writer, Luke. They retraced their steps on the return journey through Pisidia where they most certainly would have spent time with the church in Antioch of Pisidia. They came into the province of Pamphylia and this time it is mentioned that they preached the Word in Perga. Perhaps this was for the first time. At last they made their journey to Antioch of Syria from which they had been sent out. They soon called the church together and happily reported the work of the past two or three years.

H. Leo Boles, in his excellent commentary, summarizes this first

missionary journey of the great apostle Paul: “Of the six hundred four miles from Antioch in Syria to Derbe, two hundred, forty miles were made by water. The return journey was about the same distance, which would make twelve hundred, eight miles. This was a long journey at that time with the ancient modes of travel. Paul and Barnabas had traveled the twelve hundred, eight miles and had established more than half a dozen churches within the two or three years that they were gone on this journey” (Boles, p. 231). This is a wonderful record and it would be hard to equal today even with all our modern means of travel and communication!

Review Questions

1. How did the Lord bear witness to the preaching of the Gospel by Paul and Barnabas?
2. Name three things said about the condition of the crippled man in Lystra?
3. When Paul healed the crippled man, what did the people say?
4. Who did they think Paul and Barnabas were?
5. Why did the people think Paul was Hermes?
6. How had God borne testimony of His existence to the Gentiles in past generations?
7. True/False: The missionaries failed to restrain the worshippers of Zeus from offering sacrifices to them.
8. Who stirred up the people of Lystra and turned them against Paul and Barnabas?
9. What did the Jews do to Paul? What did they do with his body?
10. After the attempt on Paul’s life, how long did he and Barnabas remain in Lystra?
11. What is the general meaning of the Greek word “apostolos?”
12. Were Paul and Barnabas both apostles in the same sense? If not, in what way were they different?

13. Name others in the New Testament besides the Twelve disciples and Paul who were called apostles.
14. What is the modern English word which best translates the Greek word “apostolos?”
15. Name the different words that are used to refer to the office of elders in the church.
16. List possible ways that the early church could have qualified elders so soon.
17. Why do you think so many congregations in our time do not have elders even though they may have been in existence for many years?
18. Who was responsible for the stoning of Paul?
19. Where are the qualifications for elders found in the New Testament?
20. True/False: True Christians will not have to suffer persecution or hardship in this world.
21. According to H. Leo Boles, how many miles did Paul and Barnabas travel on the first missionary journey? Approximately how long were they gone? How many churches did they establish?
22. True/False: The word “pastor” is a word which refers specifically to the preacher of a congregation.
23. Name some lessons that present day missionaries could learn from the work of Paul and Barnabas?
24. What did Paul write to the church at Thessalonica about the attitude of the Jews toward the Gospel?
25. Who started out with Paul and Barnabas on this missionary journey but for some reason quit and went back home?
26. Did John Mark ever regain Paul’s confidence in him? If so, where is the evidence found in the Scriptures?

Chapter 15: THE CIRCUMCISION CONTROVERSY

The work of the Lord was making great progress. The Gospel had been taken to the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Many souls were being saved despite opposition from unbelieving Jews and Gentiles. It is during times like this that saints must not let down their guard! Satan is ever watchful and waiting for an opportunity to stop the progress of the Gospel and cause division among brethren. The apostle Peter warned: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary, the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour, whom resist stedfast in the faith...” (1 Peter 5:8,9: KJV).

One of Satan’s common tactics to stop the progress of the Gospel is to cause division among the brethren. We now see an example of this in the controversy over whether or not Gentile converts had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses in order to be saved. Some Jewish converts were teaching that Gentiles must, in effect, become Jews in order to be Christians.

“Then certain men came down from Judea and taught that Christians could not be saved unless they were circumcised according to the requirements of the Law of Moses. When Paul and Barnabas strongly disagreed with them and debated with them, the church decided that Paul and Barnabas and some of the other brethren should go up to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and the elders regarding this question. Therefore, they were sent on their way by the church. As they traveled throughout Phoenicia and Samaria, they told of the conversion of the Gentiles. The brethren rejoiced at this good news. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders. They related all the things that God had done by them. However, some of the believers who had come from the Pharisees, rose up against them saying of their Gentile converts: ‘It is necessary to circumcise them and to command them to keep the Law of Moses’” (verses 1-5).

Luke does not tell us the names of the men who came from Judea. We are only told here where they came from. They did not object to the Gentiles becoming Christians because it was an accepted practice for Gentiles to become proselytes to the Jewish faith. However, these men were demanding that Gentiles who have become Christians must be circumcised, that is, become Jews, in order to be saved. This is a very serious matter! They were making a requirement for salvation that God had never made! They were, in effect, guilty of adding to the Word of God. God, in His Word, repeatedly warns against such arrogant assumption of the authority which belongs only to Him (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Prov. 30:5,6; Rev. 22:18,19).

Paul and Barnabas, who had labored diligently and sacrificially to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, had converted many of them and established churches among them, strongly opposed those who were teaching this false doctrine. Paul said of the Judaizing teachers: “To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the Gospel might continue with you” (Gal. 2:5). He understood their teaching as a direct perversion of the Gospel of Christ.

The leaders of the church at Antioch also understood the crucial nature of this discussion. It not only impacted many, perhaps a majority of their members who were Gentiles, but it would also have a direct effect on evangelism among the Gentiles and would retard the acceptance of the Gospel among them. Therefore, they wisely decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the apostles and elders there. Paul was himself an inspired apostle and there were other inspired men in the Antioch church as well (Acts 13:1). They could have decided the matter themselves, but it was an issue that affected the whole church. In addition, the men who had come down were from Judea, the province in which Jerusalem was located. These false teachers may have claimed or implied that they were representing the apostles and elders in Judea. Therefore, it was best to go to Jerusalem and settle the matter and present a united front against those who taught falsely.

Paul and Barnabas traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria. They visited the churches along the way and told of the conversion of the Gentiles. The brethren rejoiced greatly at this good news. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were received by the church, the apostles and the elders. They reported all the things God had accomplished through them as they taught the Gospel to the Gentiles. However, some of the Christians who came from the Pharisees, declared that it was necessary to circumcise Gentile converts and command them to keep the Law of Moses.

“The apostles and elders met together to discuss the matter. After there had been considerable discussion, Peter stood up and said: ‘Brethren, you know that quite awhile ago, God chose me from among us to be the one from whom the Gentiles would first hear the Gospel and become believers. God who knows the hearts bore witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as He did to us. He made no difference between the Gentiles and us. He purified their hearts by faith also. Therefore, why do you put God to the test by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples, which neither our ancestors nor we were able to carry? But we believe we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ just as they will’” (verses 6-11).

The apostles had been baptized with the Holy Spirit, and therefore were all inspired men (Acts 1:4,5). It is likely that the elders had hands laid on them by the apostles and therefore possessed spiritual gifts also. These men were not meeting to decide the truth, but to be sure there was unity of the faith. Following their discussion, Peter arose and reminded his fellow apostles and the elders who were present that God had chosen him to impart the Gospel to the Gentiles first. God confirmed the Gentiles were acceptable to Him when He gave them the Holy Spirit. The Spirit fell on Cornelius and his family just as He had fallen on the apostles on Pentecost (Acts 10:44-11:16). Cornelius and his family were baptized, thus their hearts were cleansed by faith (Acts 10:44-48).

Peter then asked a pertinent question: “Why are you tempting God by putting a yoke on the neck of the believers which neither we, nor our ancestors, were able to bear?” The Law of Moses had only been given to the Jews (Deut. 5:1-5) It was never meant to be a universal code of law (Gal. 3:19-25). Now Jesus had paid the ultimate price for man’s sins. When He died on the cross, He died for the sins of those who lived before the cross as well as those who lived afterward (Heb. 9:11-15). The Law did not make the worshippers under it perfect, “but in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins” (Heb.10:1-10). Only the blood of the sinless Son of God was an adequate offering for all the sins of the world which had been committed before the cross and have been committed since, or ever will be committed as long as the world shall stand. Salvation is only “through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.” There is no other Way” (John 8:24; 14:6)! Jew and Gentile stand equally before God in the matter of salvation (Gal. 3:23-28)!

“And all the congregation was quiet, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of the miracles God had performed through them among the Gentiles” (verse 12).

The apostle Peter had spoken and related how he had been the first to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. God had shown His approval by immersing Cornelius and his family in the Holy Spirit just as He had immersed the apostles in the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Now Barnabas and Paul add their testimony by telling of the various miracles God had enabled them to perform to confirm their preaching to the Gentiles. These two examples without doubt confirmed that God was showing His approval of the Gentiles being received into the church on the same grounds as the Jews.

“After they had finished speaking, James spoke. He said: ‘Brethren, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles to take from

among them a people to be called by His name. The words of the prophets agree with this. It is written: ‘After these things I will return and build again the tabernacle of David that has fallen, and I will rebuild its ruins and set it up so that the rest of the people may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom My name has been called,’ says the Lord who does these things which are known to Him from the foundation of the world. Therefore it is my judgment that we should not trouble those among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them that they abstain from the polluted offerings to idols, from fornication, from things strangled, and from blood. The Law of Moses has been read in the synagogues every sabbath, in every city, by those who preach him, for many generations” (verses 13-21).

James, the half brother of the Lord spoke next (Matt. 13:55,56; John 7:5; 1 Cor. 15:7; Acts 1:12-14; Gal. 2:19; James 1:1). He was not an apostle in the same sense as the Twelve, Matthias or Paul. He was likely one of the elders of the church in Jerusalem and presided over the meeting. It was his job to sum up what had been said and propose a plan of action (Unger, p. 649; Boles, p. 238).

James referred to Peter’s preaching to the household of Cornelius and their conversion to Christ. He then gave Scriptural support for what Peter did by referring to the Old Testament prophets and quoting specifically from Amos 9:11,12: “In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name,’ says the Lord who does this thing” (NKJV).

James then proposed they should not trouble the Gentile Christians, but simply write to them to abstain from things which were commonly practiced in the heathen worship of idols of that day. Sacrifices were made to the various pagan gods in the temples dedicated to them. The priests ate of the meat offered as did the offerers and their friends. What was not consumed by them and by fire was sold in the marketplace (See Paul’s discussion of this in Chapters 8 and 10 of First Corinthians). Christians were to have no part in pagan worship which was centered around the worship of idols (Gal. 5:19-21).

These four things pertained to common practices of the pagans in their worship: (1) They should not participate in the feasts where the offerer and those he invited feasted on the remains of an animal sacrificed to an idol or false god; (2) They were to abstain from fornication (from the Greek word “porneo” which refers to all manner of unlawful sexual intercourse (Thayer, pp. 531,532). It

includes what we commonly call adultery (sex between a married person and someone not his or her spouse); fornication (sex between two unmarried people); and homosexuality (sex between two men or two women). In other words, all sexual relationships other than of that of a man and a woman who are Scripturally married to one another, are sinful! They are works of the flesh, which, if not repented of, will keep Christians from going to Heaven (Gal. 5:19-21). Christians must have no part in such relationships! The worship of pagan gods often involved fornication. A prime example of this was the worship of the goddess, Aphrodite, at Corinth, who was served by one thousand priestesses who prostituted themselves as an act of worship to their goddess; (3) They must not eat what has been strangled. An animal or bird that had not been properly bled would involve eating the blood of that creature. This was strictly forbidden after the Flood (Gen. 9:3,4). It was also forbidden by the Law of Moses (Lev. 17:10-16). Not only the eating of meats with the blood is sinful but also drinking of blood and partaking of such foods as blood pudding are forbidden; (4) One is to abstain from blood. Because this is listed separately from the previous restrictions, some think it has reference to the unlawful shedding of the blood of another human being i.e. murder. One is forbidden to murder his fellow human beings! The first murder was committed early in the history of the human race when Cain killed his brother Abel (Gen. 4:3-15). Following the Great Flood, God specifically outlawed murder (Gen. 9:6).

The moral code of the Law of Moses provided a high standard of morality, far higher than anything found in the pagan world. However, instruction in the letter was not given concerning the moral code of Moses' Law because Jewish synagogues were found throughout the Roman Empire. In the worship of those synagogues, the reading and expounding of the teachings of the Old Testament were a major part of the worship. The four things forbidden above were not only common among Gentiles but were a part of the usual pagan worship.

“Then it pleased the apostles and the elders with the whole church to send men to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. Those sent were Judas who was also called Barsabbas and Silas, both leading men among the saints. They sent letters with them as follows: ‘The apostles, elders, and brethren to the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: greetings. Because we have heard that certain ones who went out from us have troubled you with words and unsettled your souls by saying, ‘You must be circumcised and keep the Law,’ to whom we gave no such commands, it seemed good to us, being all of the same mind, to select men to send you with your beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have given their lives for the name of Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas who will tell you the same thing in person for it seemed

good to the Holy Spirit and to us to put no other burden on you except these essential things, that you should abstain from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, it will be well with you. Farewell” (verses 22-29).

Judas and Silas were leaders in the church in Jerusalem. Both were also prophets as we shall learn in verse 32. Silas became Paul’s co-worker on his next missionary journey and played a significant role in the next several chapters of Acts. He joined with Paul in writing to some of the churches they established on the second missionary journey (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1). Silas, like Paul, was also a Roman citizen and used it to his benefit (Acts 16:19-40).

Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch and brought Judas and Silas with them. They also brought the letter written by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. This letter was the first written part of the New Testament. It stated clearly the conclusion of the meeting in Jerusalem of the apostles and elders and the decision of these inspired men in regard to whether or not Gentile Christians had to be circumcised and follow the Law of Moses as the Judaizers in Jerusalem had argued. The letter made it clear that the Judaizers did not have the support of the Jerusalem church, of any of the apostles, or of the Holy Spirit Himself.

“When the meeting in Jerusalem was dismissed, Paul and Barnabas went down to Antioch, and when they had gathered the whole church together, they delivered the letter. When they had read it, the church rejoiced because of the encouragement. Then Judas and Silas, who were prophets, exhorted the brethren with many words and strengthened them. After Judas and Silas had spent considerable time there, the brethren sent them away in peace to those who had sent them. However, it seemed good to Silas to remain in Antioch” (verses 30-34).

Jerusalem is located in the hills of Judea. The city is built on a rocky plateau about 2,550 feet above sea level. It is 3,800 feet above the level of the Dead Sea. Therefore in the Bible, we often have the statement made that people “went up to Jerusalem” or leaving the city “went down” to other destinations (Luke 2:42; 10:30). When Paul and Barnabas were sent away by the church in Jerusalem they “went down” to Antioch which was at a much lower elevation. The Bible is accurate even in the minutest of details (see Unger, pp. 675 ff.).

When Paul and Barnabas, accompanied by Judas and Silas from the Jerusalem church, arrived back in Antioch of Syria, they gathered the entire church together to report the results of the meeting in Jerusalem with the apostles and elders to discuss whether Gentiles were bound by the Old Testament law of circumcision and whether or not they must keep the Law of Moses. They also brought with them the letter written by the inspired apostles and elders in the Jerusalem meeting.

Judas and Silas used their prophetic gifts and exhorted the church with many words to strengthen them in the faith. After some time had passed, the church released the two prophets from Jerusalem and allowed them to depart in peace. Verse 34 says: "But it seem good to Silas to remain there." This is not found in some of the manuscripts of the New Testament and some of the later translations such as the New International Version and the New Revised Standard Version do not have verse 34. Whether Silas remained in Antioch when Judas returned to Jerusalem does not affect any doctrine of the Bible related to our salvation. Silas may have returned to his home in Jerusalem for a time, but then returned to Antioch to work with the church. As a prophet, he could have had a revelation to return to Antioch, for very shortly we shall see that he became Paul's co-worker on his second missionary journey.

"Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch teaching and preaching the Word of God along with many others. After some days had passed, Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let's go back now and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the Word of God and see how they are doing.' Barnabas was determined to take John Mark with them, but Paul was insistent that they should not take one who had departed from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to do the Lord's work. The contention over this became so sharp that Paul and Barnabas separated from one another. Barnabas took John Mark with him and sailed to Cyprus. Paul chose Silas to go with him and departed with the commendation of the brethren. He traveled through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches" (verses 35-41).

It is always sad when good brethren disagree with one another over matters that have no relevance to doctrine and do not pertain to matters of salvation. It is sadder still when such disagreement is so intense that they feel they can no longer work together. Paul and Barnabas were both good men. They were men of great faith and zeal and were willing to sacrifice and even risk their lives in the service of the Master. However, the two friends and co-workers were human and subject to human weaknesses as we all are. Barnabas and Mark were related (Col. 4:10). This may have influenced Barnabas' loyalty to

him. Barnabas was also one who was willing to “go the second mile” and give a person another chance. Indeed, he had been the one who had vouched for the young man, Saul (Paul), who had persecuted the Christians, and had given him a second chance when he came to Jerusalem and sought to join himself to the church there (Acts 9:26-30). It was also Barnabas who had gone to Tarsus seeking Saul (Paul) in order to bring him to Antioch to work with the church (Acts 11:22-26).

Tempers apparently flared. Feelings were hurt. The two friends, brothers in Christ, and co-workers who had gone through many trials together, now went their separate ways. However, good came from it. Two missionary teams were formed instead of one. Barnabas took John Mark and revisited the churches he and Paul had established in Cyprus on the first part of their first missionary journey. Paul took Silas and revisited the churches he and Barnabas had planted on the second part of their first missionary journey.

Unlike too many today, Paul and Barnabas did not become enemies nor remained estranged from one another. Later on Paul spoke of Barnabas in kind words (1 Cor. 9:6). Paul also had favorable things to say about John Mark. In Philemon, verse 24, Paul cites Mark along with others as his fellow-laborers in the Gospel. In his last imprisonment, he commended Mark during his second Roman imprisonment: “Luke alone is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for service” (2 Tim. 4:11 in The Better Version of the New Testament).

Review Questions

1. What is one of Satan’s common tactics to stop the spread of the Gospel?
2. True/False: Some of the Jewish Christians taught that Gentiles must be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses to be saved.
3. How were the Judaizers guilty of adding to the Word of God?
4. Why did Paul go to Jerusalem to discuss the circumcision question when he was an inspired apostle and could have decided it himself?
5. How and when were the hearts of Cornelius and his family purified by faith?
6. True/False: Cornelius and his family received the same gift of the Holy Spirit as did the apostles on the Day of Pentecost.

7. True/False: The Old Testament prophets foretold that a descendant of David would “restore the tabernacle of David” and the Gentiles would come to the Lord.
8. What were four things from which the Gentile Christians were to abstain?
9. Fill in the blanks: The worship of pagan gods often involved _____
_____.
10. Fill in the blanks: _____ was a Greek goddess who was served by 1,000 priestesses who were prostitutes at her temple in Corinth.
11. What does the Greek word “porneo” include? _____
12. True/False: The works of the flesh will keep those who are guilty of them from going to Heaven.
13. True/False: It is possible that abstaining from blood had reference to murder (shedding human blood).
14. The things forbidden to Gentiles were a part of common pagan worship. What were they?
15. Why did not Paul want to take John Mark with them when they visited the churches they had established on the first missionary journey?
16. Why do you think Barnabas contended so strongly for taking John Mark with them?
17. Prove by the Scriptures that Paul bore no ill will toward John Mark.
18. Did any good thing come from the contention between Paul and Silas? If so, what was it?
19. How did James prove it was God’s will that the Gentiles should receive the Gospel?
20. True/False: The Judaizers had the full support of the Jerusalem church including that of some of the apostles.
21. Why do the writers of the Bible speak of “going up to Jerusalem,” or if leaving Jerusalem, people are said to “go down” to other destinations?

Chapter 16:

PREACHING IN PHILIPPI

The Gospel had been preached in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, to a government official from Ethiopia, and then taken to the Gentiles following the conversion of Cornelius and his family. A strong church made up of both Jews and Gentiles had been established in Antioch of Syria and from there missionaries had been sent out into various parts of Asia Minor. Efforts to reach the lost had moved steadily westward. In this chapter, we shall see the Gospel taken across the sea to the continent of Europe. The Holy Spirit was directly guiding the travels of Paul and his companion to their destination.

“Then Paul came to Derbe and Lystra. At Lystra, there was a disciple named Timothy who was the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer. However, his father was a Greek. The brethren at Lystra and Iconium spoke highly of this young man. Paul wanted to take Timothy with him. He circumcised him because of the Jews in the area for they were all aware that his father was a Greek. As the missionaries traveled through the cities, they delivered the letter from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. As a result the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily” (verses 1-5).

Paul and Barnabas had established several churches on their first missionary journey. When they went their separate ways, Barnabas took John Mark with him and left to visit the churches in Cyprus. With the blessing of the church at Antioch, Paul and Silas had gone to visit the churches established in Asia Minor. At Lystra, Paul found a young man named Timothy who had great potential for the work of the Lord. Timothy was highly regarded by the brethren in Lystra and Iconium. His mother, Eunice, was Jewish, but she was a believer in Jesus the Christ (2 Tim. 1:5). Timothy’s father was a Greek. Nothing is said of his faith, but the implication is that he was an unbeliever.

Timothy had not been circumcised, most likely because his Greek father opposed it. However, Paul’s policy was to take the Gospel first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles (Rom. 1:16). He realized his efforts to take the Gospel to the Jews would be hindered by having an uncircumcised young man among the preachers in his party. Therefore, he circumcised Timothy. He did not do this because he was compromising with the Judaizers against whom he had stood so strongly in Jerusalem. He knew that circumcision meant nothing to those in Christ. It was part of the Law of Moses that had “been nailed to the cross” (Col. 2:13,14). It had nothing to do with salvation in Christ (Gal. 5:6).

Earlier, in Jerusalem, Paul had steadfastly opposed the Judaizers’ effort to

have Titus circumcised (Gal. 2:3-5). Titus was a Gentile, a Greek, and had never been under the Law of Moses. To have allowed him to be circumcised would give credence to the Judaizers' contention that one must be circumcised to be saved. Timothy was circumcised purely as a matter of expediency. He would not have been allowed access to the the synagogues and thus opportunities to preach Christ if he were uncircumcised. However, to have circumcised Titus would have been a compromise with the false teachers.

As the missionaries visited the churches they presented them with the decisions of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem that the Gentiles did not have to be circumcised or keep the Law of Moses to be saved, but only that they must abstain from meats offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from fornication (Acts 15:29). As a result, the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in number daily.

“Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the Word in Asia. After they came to Mysia, they planned to go into Bithynia but the Holy Spirit did not permit them to do so. Therefore, they passed by Mysia and came down to Troas. A vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and begged Paul to ‘Come over into Macedonia and help us.’ After Paul had seen the vision, we immediately made an effort to go to Macedonia for we were certain that the Lord had called us to preach the Gospel to them” (verses 6-10).

We must keep in mind that this was in the miraculous age of the church. The apostles had been immersed with the Holy Spirit to prepare them to be the ambassadors of Christ on earth. Those upon whom the apostles had laid hands were given various miraculous gifts. They were able to reveal the Word of God by inspiration and confirm it by miracles. Once the Word was fully revealed and confirmed, miraculous gifts were no longer needed and therefore passed away (1 Cor. 13:8-12). The Holy Spirit guides us today through His inspired Word (2 Tim. 3:15,16). The Spirit was directly leading the missionary party then. The Spirit revealed that it was now time for the Gospel to go beyond the continent of Asia to Europe.

In a vision which came to Paul at night, a Macedonian appeared to him and begged him to come over there and help the people. It was a call to bring the Gospel to the people of Northern Greece on the European continent. Paul told his companions of the vision and they were all convinced that God was directing them to take the Gospel to Macedonia.

“Therefore, we set sail from Troas and came with a straight course to Samothrace, and the following day we came to Neapolis. From there we went to Philippi, the chief city of that district of Macedonia, a Roman colony. We remained in that city for several days. On the sabbath, we went out of the city to the river side, to a place where prayers were commonly made. We sat down and spoke to the women who had assembled there. A certain woman was present named Lydia. She was a merchant who sold purple cloth. She was from the city of Thyatira and was a worshipper of God. Her heart was opened when she heard the Gospel. After she and the members of her household were immersed, she persuaded us, saying: ‘If you believe me to be faithful to the Lord, please come into my house and stay there, and she convinced us” (verses 11-15).

Paul and his co-workers, Silas, Luke and Timothy, led by the instruction of the Holy Spirit, began a journey across the Aegean Sea. Luke had joined the group at Troas where they had embarked on their journey. Luke, the author of the book of Acts, has been relating the history of what happened up to this time based on his research and interviews with those involved in the early history of the church, and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He has now joined Paul and his co-workers, Silas and Timothy. We know this from the fact that Luke no longer wrote in the third person (“he” or “they”), but beginning at Troas he wrote in the first person and says “we” including himself in the missionary party.

The island of Samothrace was about halfway between Troas and Neapolis, the seaport of Philippi on the Aegean Sea. It is an island about eight miles long and six miles wide. It is mountainous with peaks as high as 5,000 feet. The missionaries spent the night on the island and continued their journey the following day. They landed at Neapolis, the seaport of Philippi, and traveled 12 miles into the interior of Macedonia to Philippi, the chief city of that district.

Philippi was named after King Philip of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great. Philippi was situated on a spur of the Pangean Mountains. On the plains below the city an epic battle for control of the Roman Empire had raged in 42 B.C. The Roman army led by Mark Antony and Octavian, who became known as Caesar Augustus, defeated the army of Brutus and Cassius. In commemoration of his victory, Emperor Augustus Caesar made Philippi a “Roman colony.” It was regarded as a part of Rome itself. Retired soldiers of the Roman army were settled there and Roman law and customs were followed (Pfeiffer, p. 213).

Jewish custom said that ten Jewish heads of families were necessary to form a synagogue. Apparently, there were very few Jewish settlers in Philippi for

there was no synagogue. The Gangites River flowed just outside the city walls of Philippi. On the sabbath, Paul and his co-workers went outside the city to the river side for they supposed they might find a few worshipers of the Jewish religion there. They usually chose a meeting place near a body of water because of the various washings which were a part of the Jewish worship and religious ceremonies. They found a group of women down by the river side.

Among these faithful women who were worshipping God according to the Old Testament was a businesswoman from Thyatira named Lydia. She was a seller of purple cloth which was highly prized by royalty and by the wealthier classes in ancient times. According to the custom of Jewish teachers, the men sat down and were probably invited by the women to conduct the service. Paul, Silas, Luke and Timothy may all have spoken, but however it was done, the Word was preached and the women listened attentively. Lydia's heart was opened by hearing the Word of God and she became a believer (Romans 10:10-17).

Lydia and her household were baptized (immersed). Before Jesus had returned to Heaven, He commanded His disciples: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15,16 NKJV). This is exactly what took place here. Paul and his co-workers taught the simple Gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Lydia's heart was moved by the story of Jesus and His death, burial and resurrection that made possible the forgiveness of man's sins. Doubtless, she repented of her sins (Acts 2:38), confessed her faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God (Matt. 10:32,33; Acts 8:37), and was baptized {Immersed; buried in water and raised again} for the forgiveness of her sins (Rom. 6:1-18; Acts 2:38; 22:16).

Not only did Lydia obey the Gospel but so also did members of her household. Advocates of infant baptism argue that Lydia had children and her household refers to her little children being baptized. They use this to support baptizing little babies and small children. However, the case of Lydia does not support it but actually teaches the very opposite. Nothing is said of Lydia having a husband, yet they assume she had small children. Lydia may have had a husband at one time and perhaps is now a widow, but the Bible does not tell us this. It is only an assumption. Even if Lydia had infants or small children, they would not be subject to baptism for it is only for believers (John 3:16; Mark 16:16). It is also only for those who have repented of their sins, but babies and small children do not have sin. We do not inherit the sins of others (Ezekiel 18:20). Sin is that which one does (1 John 3:4). We are not born in sin! We become sinners when we knowingly and willingly disobey God's will. Jesus taught that we must become as little children in order to enter His kingdom

(Matt. 19:13,14). When our sins are washed away in obedience to the Gospel, we are as innocent as little children before they learn right from wrong and choose to do wrong, thereby becoming sinners.

Who then were the members of Lydia's household? Lydia was a business-woman and apparently a prosperous one for she had a house large enough to accommodate not only herself, but also the four missionaries for she insisted they come and stay in her house. She would also have had employees in her business and servants in her home. Those who lived in her home would be considered her household.

Having become a Christian, Lydia felt compelled to practice Christian hospitality. She invited the four preachers of the Gospel to stay in her home. They would receive room and board and this would help them greatly with living expenses. There would be no impropriety in this for her home would have had servants living there including some who had obeyed the Gospel when she did.

“It happened as we were going to the place of prayer that a certain young woman met us who was possessed with a spirit of divination and made a lot of money for her masters by telling fortunes. She followed after Paul and us and cried out, ‘These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.’ She did this for many days. Paul was very annoyed. He turned and said to the spirit: ‘I command you by the authority of Jesus Christ to come out of her!’ The spirit departed from her immediately” (verses 16-18).

The place of prayer was likely the same place where the women met by the river side. A certain young woman, a slave owned by two men, was possessed by an evil spirit. The girl's owners used her to tell fortunes and make money. She followed Paul and cried out “These men are servants of the Most High God who proclaim to you the way of salvation!” She was correct in what she was saying, but the testimony was being borne by the spirit who possessed her. Certainly Paul did not want to have an evil spirit bearing testimony to Christ, or leave the impression in any way that he and the other Christians were in league with evil spirits. He was very annoyed at this and finally turned to the girl, but addressing the spirit which possessed her, he ordered: “I command you by the authority of Jesus Christ to come out of her!” The spirit immediately departed from her!

“When her masters saw that their means of making money was gone, they laid hands on Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers who brought them to the magistrates. They charged: ‘These men

who are Jews are stirring up trouble in our city. They are teaching customs which are against the law for Romans to observe.’ The whole crowd joined in the protest against them. The magistrate tore off their clothing and commanded the officers to beat them with rods. When they had laid many blows upon them, they threw them into prison. They ordered the jailor to keep them securely. He cast them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. Now at midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them” (verses 19-25).

The owners of the poor girl who had been possessed with an evil spirit were angry that Paul had cast out the demon and therefore destroyed the possibility of their making any more money from fortune telling. They laid hands on Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers of the city. They charged that “These men are Jews who are stirring up trouble in our city. They are teaching things that are against the law for Romans to observe.” The crowd joined in the protest and agreed with the accusations made against Paul and Silas. The magistrates did not give the accused a hearing! They tore the clothing off the two men and gave orders to the lictors to beat them with rods. There was no justice! Standard procedure was not followed! Paul and Silas were given no opportunity to deny the charges or defend themselves! They were savagely beaten. The Jews would permit no more than forty stripes with a whip. The Romans used rods similar to the handle of a hoe. There was no limit to the amount of blows that might be laid on a prisoner. When the beating was finished, the prisoners would be dragged or thrown into the section of the prison thought appropriate for them.

Roman prisons were dark, damp, and dirty places. Prisoners were little better treated than cattle or swine. Roman prisons usually had three sections, each one worse than the one before it. The prisoners were put in the section befitting the crime of which they were accused and the amount of security required. The first section had light and fresh air. The second section had secure locks on iron doors and some light and air. The third section was the innermost place. It might be a dungeon. It would have strong, thick walls, very little air and almost no light. The two missionaries were thrown into this third section. For added security, the jailor, obeying orders to keep them secure, put their feet in stocks. “Two heavy pieces of timber would be opened, the legs of the prisoners would be stretched widely apart till their muscles began to hurt, and the timbers clamped shut. Clamped in such a spread-legged position they would be unable to walk, and they would be forced to lie with their faces or their backs on the ground, their wounds unattended since their beating with the rods” (Reese, p. 586).

It was midnight. Paul and Silas had been badly beaten and were bruised and bloody. They were lying in filth in a dark, wet, cold prison. Their pain, soreness and stiffness must have been nearly unbearable. They did not curse God. They did not deny Christ. Neither did they vow they were going to give up their faith for it was too costly, or at least give up preaching the Gospel for the price was too high, and the pay was too low. They understood that “all who would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). They knew that Jesus had taught: “The servant is not greater than his master. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20).

The two men in their misery were singing praises and praying to God. The rest of the prisoners were listening to them. For the moment, their curses, screams, blasphemies, groans, and cries of horror and despair were silenced. They were hearing the beautiful prayers and praises of hearts set free from the bondage of sin who knew this life on earth with its evils and suffering is but a vapor compared to the vast eternity ahead.

“Suddenly a great earthquake struck! The foundations of the prison were shaken! The doors immediately stood open and everyone’s bonds were loosed! The keeper of the prison was awakened from sleep. When he saw the prison doors open he supposed the prisoners had all escaped. He drew his sword and was about to kill himself when Paul called out to him: ‘Do not harm yourself for we are all here!’ Then the jailor called for lights and ran in and fell down trembling in fear before Paul and Silas. He brought them out and cried: ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ They replied: ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you and all your family, and you will be saved.’ They spoke the Word of the Lord to him and also to all the members of his family. Then the jailor took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds. He was immersed without delay, both he and all the members of his family. Then he took Paul and Silas to his quarters and set a meal before them and rejoiced, having believed in God with all his family” (verses 26-34).

Surely, no one would deny that the earthquake was sent by God! He had heard their earnest prayers and heartfelt praise and graciously granted them relief. The other prisoners, whatever their crimes may have been that caused them to be imprisoned, would certainly never forget the earthquake that night and the prayers and praise of the persecuted preachers. They must have perceived the connection between their prayers to God and the violent shaking of the earth that had loosed their bonds.

The earthquake had awakened the keeper of the prison from his sleep. He must have immediately gone to check on the prisoners. Seeing the doors open, he jumped to the conclusion that the prisoners had all escaped. He knew his Roman masters would hold him responsible for each prisoner. If even one had escaped, he would pay for it with his life. If all the prisoners had escaped, he likely would be tortured in cruel ways before finally, mercifully, death would come to release him from the misery and suffering laid on him by the Roman soldiers. For a heathen, the wisest thing would be to commit suicide and rob the Romans of the sadistic satisfaction they would find in his suffering and painful death. As he drew his sword, the voice of Paul rang out, saying: "Do not do yourself any harm for we are all here!"

The jailor in his joy and relief for himself and his family cried out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" He asked the most important question in the world! No one has ever asked, or can ever ask, a question more important than this! Where one will be in eternity depends upon the answer to this short, simple question and whether or not one has asked it and obeyed the inspired answer given to it!

Paul and Silas replied to the jailor: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and all your family." The next verse must not be overlooked! "And they spoke the Word of God to him and to all the members of his household." To believe is to have faith, but true faith comes only one way: "So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). One has to be taught the Gospel before he can believe it (John 6:45). One who is taught the Gospel and believes it will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, the only begotten Son of God (Rom. 10:10; Acts 8:37; John 3:16)!

The jailor then took Paul and Silas and washed their wounds. Does not this show repentance on the part of the jailor (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38)? Then the jailor and all the members of his household were baptized (immersed). It was well after midnight by this time, but they did not wait for the morning light to come. They were baptized immediately. A sinner is not saved until he has completed his obedience to the Gospel. Therefore, they were baptized the same hour of the night!

The jailor and his family rejoiced only after they had obeyed the Gospel fully. One is not saved until he has fully obeyed God by being immersed in water for the remission of his sins. The phrase "having believed in God" is comprehensive. It includes all that the jailor and his family did in order to be saved. They heard the Gospel. They believed in Jesus Christ. They repented of their sins. They confessed their faith that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. They

were immersed in water for the remission of their sins! Therefore, they had reason to rejoice because they were now saved from their sins!

“When daylight had fully come, the magistrates sent officers saying, ‘Let these men go.’ The jailor told Paul: ‘The magistrates have sent word to us to let you go. Therefore, depart in peace.’ But Paul said: ‘They have beaten us publicly, without a trial, men who are Roman citizens, and thrown us into prison. Now, they want us to leave privately? No! Absolutely not! Let them come themselves and openly escort us out.’ When the officers reported this to the magistrates, they were afraid, especially when they heard they were Romans. They pleaded with them and brought them out publicly and begged them to leave the city. Paul and Silas left the prison and went to the home of Lydia. When they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and then went on their way” (verses 35-40).

The magistrates had experienced the earthquake and had no doubt seen the condition of the wrecked and ruined prison. They must have also seen that the prisoners had not escaped. Perhaps they had also learned of Paul and Silas’ prayers and songs of praise to God before the earthquake? These events, in addition to a night’s rest and reflection, caused them to realize they had been guilty of rushing to judgment and this had led them to a serious miscarriage of justice. They had allowed themselves to get caught up in the furor of the mob and had accepted their false accusations. Because of this they had neglected their responsibilities and could in the future be called to give an account.

The jailor was ready to send them away in peace, but Paul refused to go. He and Silas had been shamefully and illegally treated. They were Roman citizens and their rights had been terribly violated. It was a very serious offense to imprison a Roman citizen without first having a fair hearing to determine just cause. It was an equally serious offense to subject a Roman citizen to such a beating as Paul and Silas had been given without a fair trial to ascertain guilt or innocence. The magistrates would suffer dearly for these offenses if they were reported to higher authorities.

Paul, however, was not trying to get revenge. His concern was for the church. He did not want the citizens of Philippi to think the church had been established in their city by men who were lawbreakers. He did not want the brethren to suffer because they had been associated with lawbreakers such as he and Silas appeared to be, if judged by the punishment they had received from the local authorities. Therefore, he forced the magistrates to humble themselves and to come personally to escort them out of the city. This would show the people that he and Silas had been falsely accused and arrested.

The magistrates came as Paul demanded. They begged Paul and Silas not to report them to higher authorities for their serious violations of Roman law. They pleaded with them to leave the city. It appears the missionaries took their time in leaving. They went to Lydia's home and met with the brethren. After they had encouraged them and said their farewells to the brethren, the magistrates came to escort them out of Philippi in the manner of departing honored guests to their city.

The church at Philippi grew and became a strong church. Luke may have stayed behind to work with the young congregation for when the next chapter begins, we no longer find Luke using the first person pronouns as he would if he were with Paul and Silas. He reverted to speaking of Paul and company in the third person once again, therefore excluding himself (McGarvey, p. 213). Luke does not include himself again with Paul and his company until chapter 20 when Paul comes back to Troas on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4,5).

Review Questions

1. What does the Bible tell us about Timothy's family?
2. Why did Paul circumcise Timothy, but refused to allow Titus to be circumcised?
3. Why did not Paul and Silas preach in Asia and Bithynia at this time?
4. Why did the missionaries decide to go to Macedonia to preach?
5. How does the Holy Spirit guide and direct us today?
6. Where in Europe (city and country) did Paul and his party first preach?
7. What special privileges did Philippi have as a Roman colony?
8. What was a basic requirement for establishing a synagogue in a city?
9. Where did Paul and his companions find a group of women gathered on the Sabbath day?
10. Who were the first to respond to the preaching of the Gospel in Philippi?
11. How many of Lydia's children obeyed the Gospel? Did her husband obey the Gospel also?

12. Baptism is only for those who have _____ of their sins.
13. Give a passage in the Old Testament which teaches that sin is not inherited (One is not born in sin).
14. Give a passage in the New Testament which teaches that sin is not inherited (One is not born in sin).
15. Since Lydia was most likely not married and had no children, of whom would her household consist?
16. Who followed after Paul and his companions day after day proclaiming: "These men are servants of the Most High God who proclaim to us the way of salvation?"
17. Why did Paul command the evil spirit to come out of the possessed woman?
18. How did the slave girl's owners react to Paul's exorcising the evil spirit from her?
19. What were the two accusations the masters of the possessed girl brought against Paul and Silas?
20. What did the magistrates do to Paul and Silas?
21. What were Paul and Silas doing at midnight in the prison? Who was listening to them?
22. What also happened at midnight that shook the prison to its foundations?
23. What was the jailor about to do when Paul called out to him?
24. What was the important question the jailor asked Paul and Silas?
25. What was the answer they gave?
26. Why did Paul refuse to leave the prison when the magistrates sent word they could go?
27. Discussion Question: The Bible clearly teaches us what we must do to be saved. Why do you think millions of people teach different ways?

Chapter 17: PREACHING IN THESSALONICA, BEREA AND ATHENS

Luke does not mention it, but he apparently stayed behind to continue teaching the young congregation in Philippi. In his inspired account Luke no longer includes himself in the apostolic party, He changes pronouns from “we” to “they.” Paul, Silas and Timothy would have traveled on the Egnatian Way, a famous Roman Road of antiquity which began at Neapolis and continued across Macedonia and then south toward the cities of Achaia. This road linked the Aegean and Adriatic Seas.

“After they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica where a Jewish synagogue was located. It was Paul’s custom to attend the synagogue on the sabbath. For the next three sabbath days he reasoned with the Jews from the Scriptures. He argued that the Scriptures taught it was necessary that the Christ would suffer and be killed and arise from the dead three days afterward. He concluded that Jesus whom he preached was indeed the Christ. Some were convinced and took their stand with Paul and Silas. This included a large number of the Greek proselytes as well as the God fearers and also many of the prominent women” (verses 1-4).

Amphipolis was 30-35 miles from Philippi. This was an average day’s journey. It was an important city for it was the Roman capital of the eastern province of Macedonia. The missionaries would likely have spent the night there and continued their journey the following day. Apollonia was another day’s journey (about 30 miles) from Amphipolis. The second night of their journey would have been spent there. Then a third day’s travel brought them to the city of Thessalonica which was 35 miles from Apollonia. They had now put about 100 miles, or three days travel, between them and Philippi. Most likely this was part of a plan to escape further persecution and interruption of their work of preaching the Gospel of Christ (Reese, p. 611).

Thessalonica was the largest city in Macedonia. It was originally known as Therma. Philip of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great, had a daughter whom he named Thessaly. Thessaly’s husband, Cassander, named the city “Thessalonica” in honor of her. The city still bears this name today. In Paul’s day, it was a large commercial city. It was a “free city” which meant it could pass its own laws and raise its own taxes. It had its own elected city officials who were known as politarchs (E. F. Harrison, p. 259).

Paul understood that the Jews had priority in receiving the Gospel (Romans 1:16). The Jews had been scattered throughout much of the Roman

world due to their many persecutions and captivities. In addition, many Jews had traveled to foreign cities and countries for commercial reasons. Wherever ten male Jews of a mature age could be found, a synagogue would be established where the faithful met on the sabbath to sing, pray, read and study the Scriptures and take up a collection for the needy. Synagogues were presided over by elders, one of whom might be the “minister” or “ruler” of the synagogue. Synagogues also had schools for the sons of the members. The “minister” was usually the teacher who gave instruction in reading, writing and basic mathematics as well as in the Old Testament (Unger. pp. 1229-1231).

Paul stated in his letter to the church at Rome that the Gospel is “...the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Rom. 1:16: NKJV). The Jews had been God’s chosen nation in Old Testament times. Their purpose was to bring the Christ into the world. Paul’s usual method of preaching was to go to cities that had an established Jewish synagogue and begin there to proclaim that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, the Son of the living God. In the synagogue Paul would find three things that greatly aided in making converts. First, the Jews believed in the one true God who created the heavens and the earth. Second, The Jews were expectantly waiting for the coming of the Christ. Third, the Jews had the Old Testament Scriptures which foretold the coming of Christ. Paul simply took the Old Testament which they revered and showed from the passages in the prophets that Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled the promises of God. Only when the Jews refused the Gospel and began persecution did Paul leave them and concentrate on teaching the Gentiles.

In Thessalonica, Paul’s preaching was opposed by the “hardshell” Jews, but was gladly accepted by the Greeks who were looking for the coming of the Christ. There were many Gentiles (non-Jews) in the early days of Christianity who were sick of the barbaric worship and human sacrifices of the Gentiles. The idea of one just, holy, and righteous God appealed to them as did His laws which demanded personal holiness. These Gentile believers worshipped in the synagogues. Some were proselytes who had been circumcised, and in effect, had become Jews. Others who believed in God, and mostly followed the Old Testament laws, worshipped in the synagogue, but stopped short of being circumcised. They were known as “God-fearers.” The proselytes and “God-fearers” often were very receptive to the Gospel. It seems there were prominent women among them who were among the first converts.

Paul reasoned in the synagogues for three sabbaths before the opposition among the Jews forced him and his converts out from among them. Paul’s preaching centered in the basic fundamentals of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He showed how Jesus had fulfilled the prophecies in the Old Testament of the

Christ, and how the prophets foretold the suffering of the Christ for man's sins, and His resurrection from the dead. A teacher in a school for the training of preachers was fond of saying, "The resurrection is solely a New Testament doctrine." He denied it was foretold in the Old Testament! Is it not strange that Paul, an inspired apostle, reasoned from the prophets and showed that Jesus fulfilled these prophecies when He arose from the dead, but this learned teacher was not aware of it? The apostle Peter, on Pentecost, quoted from Psalm 16:8-11, a plain prophecy of someone being raised from the dead, and said that David was not prophesying of himself, but spoke of the Christ, saying: "He seeing this before spoke of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus has God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses" (Acts 2:25-32).

"However, the Jews found certain evil men who lounged around the marketplace. They gathered a mob from them and they began to disturb the whole city. These men attacked the house of Jason and sought to find Paul, Silas and Timothy and deliver them to the mob. When they did not find them, they dragged Jason and certain of the brethren before the politarchs of the city. They cried out: 'These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also. Jason has received them. They all act contrary to the laws of Caesar by saying there is another king, one called Jesus.' The crowd of people along with the politarchs were troubled when they heard these things. After they had Jason and the other brethren with him post a bond, they allowed them to go" (verses 5-9).

One has to wonder about the sincerity of men who profess to believe in the one true God, but will resort to such evil behavior as these Jews did! They actually sought lazy, idle people who apparently had little respect for God or man so that they could use them in destroying the preachers of the Gospel. These unprincipled people did not hesitate to turn the whole city into chaos in a mad search for Paul and Silas. Failing to find them they stormed the home of Jason, one of the converts to Christ, and dragged him and his family before the politarchs and accused them saying: "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also!" They further charged: "They act contrary to the laws of Caesar saying there is another king named Jesus." This latter statement was a charge of sedition and it was taken seriously by the rulers of the city. Jason and other brethren who were with him had to post a security bond. This means they put up a certain amount of money which would be forfeited if the charge of sedition proved to be true. Jason and the brethren were then released for the time being.

"Then the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night to

Berea where they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Jews of Berea were more noble minded than those in Thessalonica. They willingly received the preaching and searched the Scriptures daily to see whether or not it was true. Many of them became believers especially among the Greeks and the prominent men and women” (verses 10-12).

The danger to Paul and Silas was great. The mob had been excited to a high pitch and was still a danger especially to the two preachers who were the leaders in the teaching, and therefore were the chief objects of hatred by the Jews who had stirred up the mob. Timothy is not mentioned. Likely at this time, he was not yet prominent in the initial preaching because of his youth and lack of experience. He must have left Thessalonica with them for we find him present later on as they travel.

Berea was about 50 miles southwest of Thessalonica. The missionaries must have traveled through the night and most of the following day in order to reach Berea before nightfall. Sometime after their arrival in Berea, the three went to the synagogue. As visiting Jews they would have been given the opportunity to speak to the assembly. Paul commonly used this opportunity to set forth the prophecies of the coming of the Christ and to show how Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled the prophecies of the coming Christ.

The Bereans are known to all Bible readers everywhere for their nobility of character. Instead of rejecting the Gospel out of hand, they listened to what Paul and his co-workers had to say and then did what all honest-hearted hearers will do, they searched the Scriptures for themselves to be sure these visitors were teaching the truth. They belonged to the category of the “good and honest hearts” spoken of by Jesus in His parable of the sower (Luke 8:4-15). As a result many of them became believers in Jesus. This included some of the prominent Greek women who were “God-fearers” as well as many of the men.

“When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that the Word of God was also being preached by Paul in Berea, they came there and stirred up the people. The brethren immediately sent Paul away as far as the seacoast but Silas and Timothy remained in Berea. Those who accompanied Paul went with him as far as Athens. When they were told by him to tell Silas and Timothy join him as soon as possible, they returned to Berea” (verses 13-15).

The jealousy of the Jews in Thessalonica and their hatred of Paul seemed to know no bounds. It is likely they knew of Paul’s having been a persecutor of

the Christians who had become a believer in the One he had once denied and this intensified their furious opposition to him. In his first letter to the church at Thessalonica, Paul described the malice of their Jewish enemies: “For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Judea which are in Christ Jesus for you also suffered similar things from your own countrymen as they have of the Jews who not only killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, but have also persecuted us! They do not please God! They are against all men! They forbid us to preach to the Gentiles so that they can be saved! They fill up the full measure of their sins, and wrath has come upon them to the uttermost” (1 Thess. 2:14-16)!

Since the fury of the unbelieving Jews was directed at Paul, the brethren sent him away by night for his own safety. He was accompanied by at least two believers. They served as a bodyguard for Paul. They went to the nearest seaport where they would have taken passage on a ship to Athens. When they safely arrived in Athens, Paul sent them home to Berea with instructions to tell Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible.

“While Paul waited in Athens for them to come, his spirit was stirred in him because he saw the whole city was filled with idols. Therefore, he went into the synagogue with the Jews and the Greeks who worshipped God and reasoned with them. Also he went out to the marketplace every day and and talked with those he happened to meet” (verses 16, 17).

The zeal of Paul and his concern for lost souls was stirred within him as he observed numerous idols everywhere built to honor a great variety of gods and goddesses. One ancient Greek philosopher was said to have observed that gods were so numerous in Athens that it was “easier to find a god than a man.” Paul went into the Jewish synagogue to proclaim Christ to his country-men who believed in one true God and looked for the coming of the Christ. He also went about the city observing the numerous idols and talking to as many people as he could about the true God and His Son, Jesus the Christ.

“But some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. They said, ‘What does this babbler wish to say?’ Others said, ‘He seems to be a preacher of foreign gods’ because he preached Jesus and His resurrection” (verse 18).

From its earliest times Athens had been known for its great learning and for the many philosophers and schools of philosophy it produced. Two of the most popular and better known schools of philosophy were the Epicureans and the Stoics. They were direct opposites in what they emphasized. The

Epicureans were named for their founder, Epicurus, who lived from 342 to 270 B.C. Epicurus taught the purpose of living was pleasure. He understood pleasure as being generous, kind and good. However, his followers formed their own opinion of what was meant by pleasure. They perverted his teaching into a rule of life which is often summarized as “eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.” Epicureans were known for their excessive indulgences in the pleasures of the flesh.

Epicurus taught that the material world is eternal. Therefore, he denied that the earth was created by a deity of any kind. He also denied man had an immortal soul and that there was life beyond the grave. In fact, he denied that any gods had any involvement in man’s affairs on the earth. He was, in effect, an atheist.

Stoicism was founded by a philosopher named Zeno who died in 264 B.C. at the age of 96. He assembled with his disciples on one of the porches in the marketplace in Athens. The word “stoic” came from “stoa” which means “porch.” The name “stoicism” refers to the philosophy first taught on the porches of Athens’ marketplace.” Unlike Epicurus, Zeno believed in the supernatural. He believed the world was created by Zeus, the highest god in the Greek pantheon. He believed everything that happened was subject to fate. This included the actions of the gods. The highest purpose in life was for one to deny himself. All feelings and emotions must be suppressed. His followers aimed at being indifferent to the lusts of the flesh and restrained themselves from all passions, whether of happiness or sadness. Stoics did not believe in life after death. They did believe all humans have souls. Some Stoics believed the soul would last until the end of the universe. Others believed that one’s soul at death was joined to deity, the great soul of the universe (Reese, 622, 623).

The philosophers of both schools came in contact and conflict with Paul. When he taught Christ was the Son of God and the Savior of the world, some said: “What would this babbling say?” The word “babbling” means “seed-picker.” Learned men who borrowed from different schools of thought were called babblers. They picked a few seeds of thought here, there, and wherever, but did not hold to a well formulated system. Others who heard Paul said, “He seems to be a setter forth of foreign gods” because he preached Jesus had arisen from the dead.

“Then they took hold of Paul and brought him to the Areopagus (Mar’s Hill). They said to him, ‘What is this new teaching you have for you bring strange things to our ears? We want to know what these things mean.’ All the

Athenians as well as the foreigners who lived in Athens spent their time doing nothing but hearing or telling something new” (verses 19-21).

“Mars Hill” is the translation of the Greek “Areopagus.” Mars was the Greek god of war. “Mars Hill is the name of a bare, rocky place, some 377 feet high, immediately northwest of the acropolis of Athens and separated from it by a narrow declivity. Steps cut in the rock lead to the summit, where benches rough and rock hewn can still be seen. In ancient times the Areopagus assembled at this spot” (Unger, 101). The term “areopagus” was used of the court that met on Mars Hill and also of the loungers who came there to pass on, or learn the latest news.

The idle people who lived in Athens were interested in keeping up with the latest news and gossip and learning information of any kind. They spent hours in the pursuit of learning something new or different that they could pass on to others. What Paul was preaching about Jesus and his resurrection was new to them and they wanted to know more. The fact that they “took hold” of Paul indicates they may have forcibly brought him to the Areopagus.

“Paul stood in the midst of the assembly on Mars Hill and said: ‘Men, Athenians. I see you are very religious in all things for as I passed along and observed your objects of worship, I found an altar with the inscription ‘To an unknown God.’ Therefore, the One Whom you worship without knowledge, I will make known to you. The God Who made the world and all things in it, the One Who is the Lord of Heaven and earth, does not live in temples made with human hands. Neither is He served with men’s hands as though He needs anything since it is He who has given to everyone life and breath and all things. He has made from one man (blood) everyone who dwells in every nation on all the face of the whole earth. He has before determined their appointed seasons, and set the limits of the lands they will inhabit so that they might seek after God, if perhaps they will feel after Him and find Him though He is not far from each one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being as even some of your own poets have said for we are also His offspring! Therefore, if we are the offspring of God we ought not to think the Divine Nature is like gold, silver, or stone, engraved by the art and device of man. Even though God overlooked the times of ignorance, He now commands all men everywhere to repent because He has set aside a Day on which He will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man Whom He has appointed. He has given assurance of this to all mankind by raising Him from the dead!’ Then some

of them, when they heard of the resurrection of the dead mocked, but others said: ‘We will hear you again concerning these matters.’ Paul then left their gathering. However, some among them believed including Dionysius, the Areopagite, and a woman whose name was ‘Damaris,’ along with others” (verses 22-34).

Mars Hill (or the Areopagus) was a high, stony elevation adjoining the acropolis, the mount on which the majestic Greek temple, the Parthenon, stood. Here before the learned philosophers from among the Epicureans and Stoics, the idle gossipers, and the self-styled intellectuals, Paul was given the opportunity to speak while they stood or sat and listened to what he might say about the foreign gods they thought he was preaching.

Paul was an intellectual and scholar equal to any of the learned Greeks gathered around him. Not only was he schooled in the Law of Moses by the outstanding Jewish teacher of his day, but he possessed a good education in the Greek writers and could quote their poets and philosophers (Acts 17:28; 22:3; Tit. 1:12). He claimed no gift of eloquence or training in oratory, but he certainly equalled, if not exceeded, the trained orators of his day in this masterful presentation on this occasion (2 Cor. 10:10-12). Besides his splendid education and his exceptional natural talents, Paul spoke and wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:1-16; 14:37).

Paul began his speech respectfully with a compliment. He could see that they were very religious people and devoted to those they believed were gods. He had found among the many idols erected to represent each of their array of gods was one that simply read: “To the Unknown God.” Paul said, “This is the God you worship in ignorance. I want to tell you about Him. He is the God Who created the world.” Paul was answering the Epicureans who believed matter was eternal and therefore uncreated. This God, Paul went on to say, is Lord of Heaven and earth. Therefore, He does not dwell in temples made by the hands of men such as abounded in Athens. The majestic pillars of the Parthenon arose on the Acropolis directly above them and within their eyesight. The God about Whom Paul spoke was too big to confine within the walls of even the most magnificent temple ever erected (1 Kings 8:27; Psa. 139:1-16)!

God, the great Creator of the universe, is not dependent upon man for anything (Psa. 50:7-15). It is He Who makes it possible for man to live. Man’s life and very breath are given to him by God. God has made all the people of the earth from one man whom He made from the dust of the earth which He had created (Gen. 1:1-31). Therefore, God is no respecter of persons but loves all mankind and provides for their needs! The King James Version renders this

passage “God has made all men of one blood.” “Blood” stands for the life God has given to man, but it is interesting to note that while there are several races among humans, blood types are the same among all races. A white man can safely give a black man a transfusion of his blood if they are of the same blood type and vice versa. We have a common set of parents, i.e. Adam and Eve (Gen. 1 & 2). There is but one Savior for all of mankind. He is the only way to God (Matt. 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16; John 14:6). There is but one church (Matt. 16:16-18), and there will be but one final Judgment at the end of the world where all will be judged by the Man appointed by God (Matt. 25:31-46).

God wants us to seek Him. He is not hard to find. He has given the testimony of His existence and great power through the things He has made (Rom. 1:19,20). He continues to provide man’s needs through supplying the sunshine and rain to feed the crops man plants to provide for his food (Acts 14:17). We can know of God’s existence through these things, but we can know what He is like only through His Son, Jesus Christ (John 1:18; 14:8,9) and that which He has revealed to us through His Word.

Further, Paul told the learned Athenians, and all mankind, that God is not far from us “for in Him we live and move and have our being.” What one of the Greek poets had said, Paul repeats as true, that “We are the offspring of God.” Every human being is a child of God in the general sense because of having been created by Him. But if we are the offspring of God, how then can we who have flesh and blood and live and breathe, believe that we came from dead matter? How utterly ridiculous to think that lumps of stone or gold, or silver carved into images by the most talented of sculptors could be the parents of living, breathing human beings? How utterly foolish to think that an idol made by human hands could actually be the creator of human beings!!

In times past, before God sent His only begotten Son into the world to die on the cross for our sins, God “overlooked” such utter ignorance and lack of reason, but not so any longer! Now all human beings, in all nations of the earth, are accountable to God for their sins! Therefore, God is one Day going to call the whole world (all accountable beings) to stand before His Son to give an account of their lives (Matthew 25:31-46; John 12:48; Acts 24:25; Rom. 2:16; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:11-15). God has given assurance to all men that this is going to happen. He who raised His Son from the dead has proved His power by the fact of that resurrection and He will one day raise us (Rom. 1:1-4; 1 Cor. 15).

When some of Paul’s hearers on Mars Hill heard him speak of the resurrection of the dead, they mocked. What Paul preached was directly contrary to their heathen philosophy. Others, however, had an open mind. They did not make a decision but wanted to think about it further and replied: “We

will hear you again concerning this.” Some good and honest hearts, however, were opened by Paul’s preaching of the Word. They became believers. Among them was Dionysius, a prominent man, a member of the Council of Judges who tried cases on the Areopagus who became a convert to Christianity that day. Another convert was a woman named Damaris. We are told nothing further about her, but likely she was a prominent woman who would be known by many in Athens since her name was specifically mentioned.

Review Questions

1. True/False: We know by the pronouns that Luke stayed behind when Paul, Silas, and Timothy left Philippi.
2. Give two reasons Paul and his co-workers did not stay in Amphipolis and Apollonia to teach the Gospel.
3. What did Paul teach in the synagogue in Thessalonica?
4. How long was Paul allowed to teach in the synagogue in Thessalonica?
5. True/False: The resurrection of the Christ was not taught in the Old Testament.
6. How did the Jews try to get rid of Paul and his co-workers?
7. What were the accusations brought against the missionaries by the Jews?
8. Where did Paul and Silas next go to preach the Gospel?
9. How did the Jews in Berea receive the preaching of Paul and Silas?
10. How did Luke describe those in the synagogue in Berea?
11. When the Jews in Thessalonica learned Paul was preaching in Berea, what did they do?
12. How far did the brethren take Paul to protect him from the Thessalonian Jews who came to Berea and stirred up the multitude against him?
13. What caused Paul’s spirit to be “stirred within him” in Athens?
14. Where did Paul preach in Athens and to whom?

15. What did one Greek philosopher say about there being so many gods in Athens?
16. Who were the Epicureans? Who founded them? What did they believe?
17. Who were the Stoics? Who founded them? What did they believe?
18. What did the philosophers of Athens call Paul? Why?
19. Where did the philosophers take Paul so that they might give him a hearing?
20. Where did the Areopagus meet? Which famous Greek temple was very near?
21. What is another name for the Areopagus?
22. What did most of the Athenians and many of the foreigners living in Athens spend their time doing?
23. How did Paul begin his sermon on Mars Hill?
24. How did Paul describe “the unknown God” he proclaimed to them?
25. Compare the learning and scholarship of Paul with that of Athen’s learned philosophers and scholars?
26. Why is it foolish to believe that people are descended from gods made of wood, stone, gold, or silver?
27. How do we know that all men are related to one another?
28. Why did some of Paul’s hearers on Mar’s Hill mock?
29. How did others react to the teaching about Jesus and the resurrection?
30. Give the names of two of the converts who became believers.
31. Fill in the blanks: “All _____ beings in the whole world will give an account to _____ of their lives.
32. _____ and Damaris were converted on Mars Hill.

Chapter Eighteen: THE CHURCH IN CORINTH

The city of Corinth was known for two things in ancient times. First, it was the major commercial center of the Roman Empire. Second, it was known for its immorality. Paul's stay in Corinth was his second longest residence with any of the churches he planted on his missionary journeys. He also visited it on at least three occasions and wrote to it three or possibly four letters, two of which are found in the New Testament (Harrison, p. 274). The low moral climate of the city and the number of members converted from paganism may have been the cause of many, if not most of the problems, experienced by the Corinthian church. Paul's frequent letters and visits to Corinth were the result of his having to deal with these problems and the division they caused.

“After these things, Paul left Athens and came to Corinth. Here he found a certain Jew from Pontus named Aquila who had recently come to Corinth with his wife, Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul lived and worked with them for they were all tentmakers by trade. He also reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. When Timothy and Silas came down from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit and earnestly testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. When they contradicted themselves and blasphemed, he took off his outer garment and shook it, saying: ‘Your blood be upon your own heads. I am not guilty of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’ When Paul left the synagogue he went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshipper of God. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his house, and many of the other Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized. The Lord appeared to Paul in a vision at night and said to him: ‘Do not fear. Speak and do not be silent because I am with you and no one will attack you in order to harm you for I have many people in this city.’ Paul remained there a year and six months teaching the Word of God among the people” (18:1-11).

After being beaten and imprisoned in Philippi, then having to flee from Thessalonica because of the Jews' hostility, Paul had moved on to Athens. He apparently had limited success in Athens, a city renowned for its many gods and its worldly philosophies. Paul then went to Corinth, a city which was notorious for its immorality. However, Corinth was to prove to be a very fruitful field for planting the seed of the Gospel of Christ.

The Gospel was certainly needed in Corinth for it was the home of the great temple to Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of sex and love. When even the

religion of a city or a nation is morally corrupt, then the society as a whole will be hopelessly enmeshed in sin. This was certainly the case at Corinth. “Because of the notorious immorality at Corinth, there was already in classical Greek a word ‘*korinthiazo*’ (‘to live like a Corinthian’) which was a euphemistic way of referring to the practice of fornication. All over the empire women who were promiscuous or of loose morals were often called ‘Corinthian girls’ employed as prostitutes. The reason for this is that at the temple of Aphrodite on the Acropolis at Corinth there were 1,000 ‘Corinthian girls’ employed as prostitutes. The worship of Aphrodite involved having sexual relations with one of the harlots. The worship formed a great temptation, even to the new Christians at Corinth, as is evidenced in Paul’s exhortations against it in 1 Corinthians 5:1ff and 6:9-19” (Reese, p. 638).

Paul became acquainted with a fellow Jew named Aquila. He was originally from Pontus but he and his wife, Priscilla, had come to Corinth from Rome. They fled from Rome when the emperor, Claudias, had ordered all the Jews to leave the city. Suetonius, a Roman historian of this period, wrote that Claudias’ order was given because of a tumult instigated by one called “Chrestus.” It is likely that “Chrestus” had reference to “Christus,” which is Latin for Christ. The Jews in Rome, as Jews had done elsewhere, attempted to stop the preaching of the Gospel of Christ by any means possible. The emperor, assuming that Christianity was simply a part of Judaism, and the Jews were fighting among themselves, attempted to solve the problem by evacuating all Jews from the capital city.

Aquila and Priscilla were tentmakers by trade. Paul was also skilled in this craft. He needed a place to stay and a means of earning a living so it seems a partnership was formed with Paul staying in the home of his fellow Jews. It is likely that he had met this fine couple when he preached in the synagogue. It is possible that they may have already been Christians. Every Jewish boy was taught a trade when he was growing up regardless of any other position he might hold in life. It was said by many of the ancient rabbis that “He who does not teach his son a trade teaches him to be a thief.” In other words, if one does not have a means of earning an honest living, he will be forced to turn to a life of crime in order to survive (Reese, p. 346).

Paul preached first in the synagogue as was his custom, but when the Jews rejected the Gospel and “blasphemed” (spoke evil of God’s way of salvation through the death, burial and resurrection of Christ), Paul lost patience with them. He took off his outer garment and began shaking the dust out of it. This is the same as shaking the dust off your feet when you leave a town that has rejected the Gospel message (Matt. 10:14,15). Paul and those who had become believers as a result of his preaching began meeting in the house of a

man named Titius Justus who lived next door to the synagogue. “Titius Justus” is a Roman name. He may have been a Roman who was converted to the one true God of Israel and worshiped in the synagogue, but had become a believer in Christ through the efforts of Paul.

Paul’s preaching in the synagogue was very fruitful for even Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, became a believer. Following this, we learn that “many of the Corinthians heard, believed, and were immersed.” They believed as a result of hearing the Word preached for “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Hearing and believing led to their repentance from sin just as it had with the Jews on Pentecost (Acts 2:38). They would also have made a public confession as did the man from Ethiopia who confessed, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:8-10). Upon this confession, these believing, penitent lost souls were buried with Christ in baptism (Rom. 6:3-16) that they might have their sins forgiven. This was a simple enactment of Jesus’ command in the Great Commission: “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved. He who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15,16; NKJV). It is so simple that any person of ordinary intelligence would need help to misunderstand it!

When everything was going well in Philippi and Thessalonica and other places Paul had preached, Satan had raised up opposition against him and his co-workers and they were persecuted. Paul feared that such would happen again but God spoke to Paul in a vision and told him he did not need to fear “for I have many people in this city.” There were many who would accept the Gospel if given an opportunity to hear and obey it and be added to the church. Paul must have felt greatly encouraged by these words. He remained in Corinth for a year and half (about eighteen months) preaching the Gospel of peace. This appears to be the longest period of time he remained anywhere preaching the Gospel except for his later work in Ephesus where he remained for three years (Acts 20:31).

“But when Gallio was the proconsul of Achaia, the Jews united together against Paul and brought him to the Judgment seat. They charged that he was persuading the people to worship God contrary to the law. When Paul was about to open his mouth and speak, Gallio said to the Jews, ‘If it were an act of breaking the law or of dangerous conduct, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to bear with you, but since it is a question about words and names and your own law, you can take care of it yourselves for I do not wish to be involved in such.’ Then he drove them from the judgment seat. Therefore, the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue and beat

him before the judgment seat, but Gallio did not pay any attention to any of these things” (18:12-17).

Gallio was a Roman born in Spain. His birth name was Marcus Annaeus Novatus. His father brought him and his brother, Seneca, to Rome when they were boys. He was adopted and educated by a scholar named Gallio and took his adoptive parent’s surname. Gallio was known to be a charming and mild-mannered man. An inscription found at Delphi and dated at 52 A.D. places him in Corinth as proconsul. During this time, the Jews saw an opportunity to prevent the teaching and preaching of the apostle Paul. They laid hands on Paul and brought him by force to the court of Gallio. They accused him of teaching an unlawful religion. Apparently, Gallio had some knowledge of Christianity and also of Judaism. He knew the many controversies Jews had among themselves and did not want to become involved in them. Despite their persistence, he had them driven from the judgment seat.

A strange thing then happened. Sosthenes, who apparently replaced Crispus as ruler of the synagogue, was taken and beaten before the judgment seat in the presence of Gallio. Two questions arise: (1) Who beat Sosthenes? (2) Why was Sosthenes beaten? Was he beaten by the Jews who had some grievance against their own leader? Perhaps they were disappointed in his leadership as shown by their failure to use Gallio for their own ends? Some equate this Sosthenes with one who was later a co-worker with the apostle Paul and joined Paul in writing First Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:1). If so, was he already thinking of becoming a Christian and therefore was not whole-hearted in joining the effort to have Paul tried and punished by Gallio? Or was the beating done by the Gentiles (likely Greeks) who had no love for the Jews and used the occasion of their being scorned by Gallio to vent their wrath upon the Jews? The context does not make it clear as to the identity of the assailants or the motive for beating the leader of the synagogue. Gallio simply paid no further attention to the Jews, and therefore did not interfere in what he may have considered simply a domestic matter among them.

“Now after Paul had remained a long time in Corinth with the brethren, he bade them farewell and sailed from Corinth to Syria. He was accompanied by Aquila and Priscilla. He had shaved his head in Cenchrea for he had taken a vow. When he arrived in Ephesus, he left Aquila and Priscilla there, but he entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they requested that he remain with them for a much longer period, he did not give his consent. Instead, he bade them farewell and told them: ‘It is necessary for me to keep the approaching feast in Jerusalem, but I will return to you again, God willing,’ and he sailed from Ephesus. When he

landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church (in Jerusalem: McGarvey, p.230) and then went down to Antioch. And after he had spent some time there, he left and went throughout the country of Galatia and Phrygia, in order, strengthening all the disciples. And a certain Jew by the name of Apollos, who was a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was eloquent in speech and mighty in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the Lord's way and was fervent in spirit. He accurately taught the things concerning Jesus, but he had received only the baptism of John. Apollos spoke boldly in the synagogues. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they privately explained to him the Word of God more fully. When Apollos wished to cross over to Achaia, he was encouraged by the brethren to do so. They wrote a letter to the brethren to receive him. When Apollos arrived, he greatly helped the believers. He refuted the Jews publicly and proved from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ (verses 18-28).

We do not know the exact length of time Paul spent in Corinth. We learned he was there for a year and a half before he was brought before Gallio's judgment seat (v. 18). Following that incident he remained in Corinth "for many days." He could have been in Corinth for two or three years or possibly longer.

Paul, accompanied by his friends and co-laborers, Priscilla and Aquila, sailed from Corinth to Syria. Corinth was built in the middle of a narrow isthmus which connected the northern (Macedonia) and southern (Achaia) sections of the Greek peninsula. Nine miles east of Corinth was the city of Cenchrea, Corinth's seaport on the Aegean Sea. "Ephesus was nearly due east from Cenchrea across the Aegean Sea; it could have been reached in two or three days under favorable sailing" (Boles, p. 293). From Ephesus, Paul would sail to Caesarea and then to Antioch.

Paul had shaved his head in Cenchrea for he had taken a vow. Vows are often associated with the Old Testament. The Nazarite Vow which was taken by Samson and most likely by John the Baptist (Judges 13:4,5; Luke 1:15) is probably the best known. Scholars debate why Paul took a vow when he so clearly taught that we are not under the Old Testament today, and vows were part of its teaching. "Why would Paul take a vow? Certainly it was not out of deference to the Old Testament, as though the Law of Moses was still in force. Vows are a matter that falls in the realm of Christian Liberty. There is nothing contrary to New Testament teaching in a Christian's making such a solemn promise to God" (Reese, p. 653). Everyone who has a church wedding with the "traditional" wedding ceremony take vows pertaining to marriage.

When they arrived in Ephesus, Paul left Aquila and Priscilla and entered into the synagogue to reason with the Jews. The Ephesian Jews seemed to be interested for they begged Paul to stay with them for awhile. He stated he could not for he was going to Jerusalem for a feast. He did, however, promise to come back if it was God's will.

When Paul sailed from Ephesus to Antioch, he greeted the church. This good church had originally sent Paul and Barnabas out and later Paul and Silas (see 13:1-4; 15:40,41). From Antioch Paul visited the churches in the Roman provinces of Galatia and Phrygia and strengthened the faith of the Christians. It was during this time that Apollos came to Ephesus.

Apollos as noted above was from the great city of Alexandria in Egypt. This city was known for its learning and culture. A large percentage of its population was Jewish. The city had been built by Alexander the Great. It was famous for its huge library. The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament was translated there by 72 scholars about 280 B.C. It was widely used among the Jews who lived in Gentile lands and was often quoted by the writers of the New Testament.

Priscilla and Aquila did not publicly correct Apollos but wisely took him aside privately and taught him further about Jesus. No doubt their teaching included information about the establishment of the church and the institution of the plan of salvation for all men as given in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:46,47; Acts 2:36-38, 42,47).

Some have denied that women can teach the Gospel privately to their husbands, adult sons, etc. This case of Priscilla and Aquila teaching Apollos refutes this contention. Priscilla was a part of the teaching of Apollos the way of the Lord more fully. However, it was a private teaching situation. Many men have learned the way of salvation from their Godly wives. There is no violation of Scriptures, either Old Testament or New for a woman of God to teach a man privately (see 2 Chron. 34:14-22). However, the New Testament specifically forbids women to teach men in the assembly or to assume authority over them. Instead they are told to "learn in quietness with all subjection" (1 Tim. 2:1-15; see also 1 Cor. 14:34,35).

We are not told how long Apollos taught at Ephesus, but when he desired to go to Achaia (Corinth) the brethren sent him on his way with a letter of recommendation. Now that Apollos knew the fulfillment of John's teaching about Christ, with his ability to speak and knowledge of the Old Testament, he was a great help to the Christians in Corinth in refuting the Jews.

Review Questions

1. Name the two things for which Corinth was well known.
2. What may have contributed to many, if not most, of the problems experienced by the church in Corinth?
3. What was the name of the Greek goddess whose temple was at Corinth?
4. What did the worship of Aphrodite involve?
5. What is the meaning of "*korinthiazo*?"
6. How many temple prostitutes served Aphrodite at her temple in Corinth?
7. Why did Priscilla and Aquila leave Rome?
8. Why had Claudius commanded the Jews to leave Rome?
9. Which trade did Aquila and Priscilla have in common with Paul?
10. What did the shaking out of one's garments signify to the Jews?
11. When Paul left the synagogue where did he go to preach?
12. When many of the Corinthians heard the Word of God, what did they do?
13. Why did God tell Paul he should not be afraid?
14. How long was Paul's initial stay in Corinth?
15. Where was Gallio from?
16. Why did Paul shave his head in Corinth?
17. Is it wrong for a Christian to make a vow to God?
18. True/False: Priscilla sinned by helping her husband teach Apollos.
19. True/False: Women are permitted by God to do everything in the worship that men are allowed to do.
20. Where was Apollos from?

21. Who built the city of Alexandria in Egypt?
22. What famous institution was located in Alexandria?
23. Which translation of the Old Testament into Greek was made at Alexandria? By whom? When?
24. "Chrestus" refers to _____.
25. Aphrodite was the Greek goddess of _____ and love.
26. The worship of Aphrodite involved having sex with a _____.
27. Who was Gallio's famous brother?
28. What did the Jewish teachers say would be the fate of a son whose father did not teach him a trade?
29. What was the charge brought against Paul by the Corinthians?
30. Thought question: Who beat Sosthenes at the Judgment seat of Gallio? Why did they beat him?
31. Name two important things that Aquila and Priscilla would have included when they taught Apollos "the way of the Lord more accurately?"
32. How many letters did Paul write to the church at Corinth?
33. How many visits did he make according to the New Testament?
34. What did the Lord mean when he told Paul in a vision: "I have many people in this city?"
35. Contrast the baptism of John with the baptism of the Great Commission; To whom was each given? What was the purpose of each? How long was the baptism of John meant to last? How long is the baptism of the Great Commission meant to last?
36. Fill in the blanks: "Many of the Corinthians _____ , believed, and were _____."
37. How many baptisms are in effect today according to Ephesians 4:5? Which is it: John's, the Great Commission, or the Holy Spirit?

Chapter 19:

THE CHURCH IN EPHEBUS

The planting of the church at Ephesus was one of the most fruitful works of the apostle Paul. It clearly shows the wisdom of his usual practice of preaching in the central city of a district, establishing a strong church, and leaving it to evangelize the surrounding areas by setting up churches in the smaller and less influential cities and towns. The congregations located in Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea were the outgrowth of the foundational work done by Paul and his co-workers in Ephesus (Rev. 2 & 3; Acts 19:10).

Ephesus was by far the most influential city in the Roman Province of Asia (Note: In Acts 19, Asia has reference to a province under Rome's control, not the entire continent of Asia). In Paul's day, Ephesus had a population of about one third of a million souls. It was renowned for being the center of the worship of the Greek goddess, Artemis. The magnificent temple of Artemis, a goddess of fertility, was located in Ephesus. It was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Ephesus was the Roman capital and the chief commercial city of Asia (Harrison, pp. 286-288).

Paul had previously been in Ephesus for a brief time. He preached in the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews in his typical manner. He was accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila who remained behind when he went on his way. When the Jews had begged Paul to stay a longer time, he promised he would return. Aquila and Priscilla encountered the eloquent preacher, Apollos, during this time and "taught him the way of the Lord more perfectly" (Acts 18:24-28). Apollos was a Jew who looked for the coming of the Christ. He had heard the preaching of John the immerser whose mission was to tell the Jews of the coming of Christ and prepare a people who would receive Him. John immersed in water for the remission of sins (Isa. 40:3-5, Mal. 3:1ff; Matt. 3:1-13; Mark 1:1-9; Luke 1:5-17). He taught people to believe in the One that God was sending, i.e. the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29-37).

"While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the upper country to Ephesus. Here he found some disciples. He asked them: 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' They replied, 'We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.' Paul then asked: 'Into what then were you immersed?' They replied, 'Into John's immersion.' Paul then said to them: 'John immersed with the immersion of repentance, telling the people they should believe in the One who would come after John whom God was

sending. His name is Jesus.’ When they heard this, they were immersed by the authority of Jesus Christ. Then Paul laid his hands on them, and the Holy Spirit came upon them. As a result, they spoke with tongues and prophesied. The number of those involved was about twelve men” (verses 1-7).

After Apollos was brought to the full truth regarding John and his ministry and the coming of Jesus, he moved on to Corinth and preached there for a time. During the time Apollos was in Corinth, Paul returned to Ephesus. There is no mention of Aquila and Priscilla being there when Paul came back, so we must assume they had moved on. Possibly they had returned to Rome when the ban imposed by the emperor, Claudius, had been removed (cf. Rom. 16:3-5).

Paul found some disciples who, like Apollos, had only received the immersion taught by John. Paul must have perceived there was something deficient in their knowledge for he asked them, **“Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”** Here Paul used the term “Holy Spirit” as a figure of speech known as a “metonymy of the cause.” The cause is stated but the effect is intended (Dungan, p. 271). The Cause is the Holy Spirit. The effect is the possession of miraculous gifts. Apparently, these disciples of John were like Apollos before he had been taught more fully. Their reply to him confirmed it when they said, **“We had not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.”** Paul then laid hands on them and conferred miraculous gifts such as Peter and John had done in Samaria (Acts 8:5-22). As a result, **“They spoke with tongues and prophesied.”**

There are three baptisms (immersions) in the New Testament that are often confused:

The baptism of John was an immersion in water (Matt. 3:1-6; John 3:23). It was a “baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4). It was exclusively for Israel to prepare them for coming of the Christ (Luke 7:24-30).

The baptism of the Great Commission is also an immersion in water (Acts 8:36-39; 10:47,48). It is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), to enter the church (1 Cor. 12:13), and to get into Christ where all spiritual blessings are found (Gal. 3:27; Eph. 1:3). It is for the whole world, every nation, and every person who is accountable until the end of the world (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16).

The baptism of the Holy Spirit was an immersion in the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11,12; Mark 1:7,8; Acts 10:44-48; 11:14-17). It was for the apostles to prepare them for their work (John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26; 16:7-14; Acts 1:1-8; 2:1-13; Mark 16:19,20). It was also for the household of Cornelius to persuade the Jews that the Gentiles were also to receive the Gospel (Acts 10:1-48; 11:1-18).

There is but one valid baptism required of us today (Eph. 4:5). It is not the baptism of John for it has been fulfilled, having served its purpose, and has been replaced by the baptism of the Great Commission (Acts 18:24-28; 19:1-5). Neither is the baptism of the Holy Spirit required today. The Word of God is complete having been fully revealed and confirmed by the apostles and by those upon whom the apostles had laid hands (1 Cor. 13:8-13). The only baptism required of us today to please God is the baptism of the Great Commission for it will endure until the end of the world (Matt. 28:19,20).

Sometimes the question is asked: **“Do I need to be baptized again?”** The answer is “yes” if I have not been Scripturally baptized. Many religious bodies practice sprinkling for baptism instead of immersion. The word from which baptism comes is the Greek word “baptismos.” This word comes from the root “bapto.” It means to dip, plunge, submerge, or immerse and should always be translated this way. “Sprinkling,” however, comes from the Greek word “rhantizo.” It is never used for baptism in the Bible! Others practice pouring for baptism, but the word for pour is “cheo.” It is never used in the New Testament for baptism (Thayer, pp. 94,95; Vine; pp. 96, 97)! It is a tragedy that earlier English translations did not translate “bapto” and “baptismos,” but instead transliterated them (made an English word out of the Greek words thus obscuring the real meaning of the word). As a result of the dishonesty of these early translators and the blessing of church officials, millions of people have lived and died thinking they have been baptized into Christ when they have not actually been baptized. Baptism is immersion and only immersion! Those who have not been immersed into Christ (Gal. 3:26,27) are not in Christ where all spiritual blessings are found (Eph. 1:3)! They are not saved for they are outside Christ. They must be immersed into Christ to be saved!

Those who have been baptized for the wrong reason need to be correctly baptized! Many denominations teach that one is saved at the point of faith alone without any further acts of obedience. Jesus plainly said: “He who has believed, and has been immersed, will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). Can words be any plainer than this? It does not need explaining! It needs to be obeyed! The Bible also says that baptism (immersion) is “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). If one has “prayed the sinner’s prayer” to be saved, he is not saved! If one has been taught that he was saved the moment he believed without further acts of obedience, he has been taught wrong! If one has been taught baptism is “only an outward sign of an inward grace,” he has been taught something that is no where found in the God’s Word! If one has been taught that he was saved, and then was baptized to enter a denomination, he has not been Scripturally baptized. Remember: **one cannot be taught wrong and baptized right!**

After the twelve men had been taught and immersed by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul then laid his hands on them and conferred on them miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. As a result the men spoke with tongues (languages they had not learned) and prophesied. Miraculous gifts were conveyed to others in the miraculous age of the church only by the laying on of an apostle's hands and in no other way (Mark 16:19,20; Acts 8:13-25; Rom. 1:11; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). Since we have no living apostles today, there can be no one possessing miraculous gifts today! Paul had foretold that when God's complete revelation was given, miraculous gifts would cease (1 Cor. 13:8-10).

“Paul went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months. He taught about the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. When various ones hardened their hearts and refused to believe, and spoke evil of the Way, Paul took the disciples and left the synagogue. He continued daily teaching in the school of Tyrannus. He did this for two full years. All the province of Asia heard the Word of God, both Jews and Greeks” (verses 8-10).

Paul followed his usual plan of going to the Jews first (Rom. 1:16). After three months of teaching about the kingdom of God in the synagogue, with many refusing to believe and speaking evil of God's Way of salvation, Paul realized it was time to move on. He took the disciples and moved to a school where he continued to teach daily. Tyrannus, the owner of the school, was likely a businessman who made his money renting his facility to philosophers and teachers. There is no indication that Paul was conducting any sort of “Christian school” as some have suggested. He was simply using an available facility as a public venue to teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He continued this outreach for two years. As a result the Gospel was spread throughout the entire Roman province of Asia.

“God performed special miracles by the hands of Paul. Handkerchiefs and aprons were taken from him to the sick and they were cured and evil spirits departed from those who were possessed. Some of the Jews who went about performing exorcisms began to call the name of Jesus over those who had evil spirits saying, ‘I command you by the Jesus whom Paul is preaching.’ There were seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva who did this. The evil spirit in the person spoke to them saying, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I know, who are you?’ The man possessed of the evil spirit leaped upon them and overcame them so that they ran out of the house wounded and with their clothes torn. This became known among both

Jews and Greeks who lived in Ephesus. They were afraid, but the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high esteem. Many of those who were believers came and confessed their deeds. A large number of those who practiced magic brought their books together and burned them publicly. When they added up the value of the books, they found it was about fifty thousand pieces of silver (more than US \$10,000). In this way the influence of the Word of the Lord greatly increased” (verses 11-20).

As an apostle, Paul had the ability to work miracles to confirm the message that he spoke. Here we learn about some unusual miracles that he did. This included handkerchiefs and aprons that he had used or had touched being taken from him and brought to those who were sick or possessed of demons. The sick became well and the possessed had the demons leave them. These miracles were akin to an earlier time in Jerusalem when the sick were laid out along the roads that the shadow of Peter might be cast over them and they were healed as a result (Acts 5:14-16).

Next we are told of some Jews who were making money by casting demons out of those who were possessed. Some of the Jewish exorcists began to call the name of Jesus over the possessed. Among them were the seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva. These sons of Sceva commanded the demons to come out of a possessed man who said, “I know Paul and I know Jesus but who are you?” Then he leapt upon them, beat them up, wounding them and tearing their clothes, and they ran out of the house. The influence of the Gospel spread ever more widely.

Many of those who believed in Jesus had been involved in the magical arts. When they had witnessed the true power of God, they came and confessed their deeds. Many of them brought their books of magic that would have had various spells and incantations in them, and burned them publicly. They were testifying by this means to the world that they were done with such rubbish and nonsense. When they had seen the power of God over demons and disease, they were made aware of the weakness of their man-made magic and got rid of it. Thus they were showing the true fruit of repentance (Matt. 3:8; 2 Cor. 7:10). They burned their books of magic publicly! They were making a powerful statement by doing this. This resulted in the spread of the Gospel.

“Now after these things had occurred, Paul made up his mind to visit the churches in Macedonia and Achaia and then go to Jerusalem. After that, he planned to go to Rome. He sent two of his associates, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, but he remained a little while longer in Asia” (verses 21, 22).

It is generally accepted among New Testament scholars that Paul wrote the first Corinthian letter during the latter part of his stay in Ephesus. He planned to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost and then he hoped to visit the churches of Macedonia. He would then come to Achaia and spend some time at Corinth (1 Cor. 16:1-9; see Hodge, pp. xi, xii).

From Corinth, Paul planned to carry the contribution from the Gentile churches to Jerusalem in order to help the needy saints and others (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8 & 9). Then Paul hoped to fulfill a long held desire to go to Rome to preach the Gospel (Rom. 1:13; 15:23-29). Paul sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia and Achaia ahead of his coming to gather the offering for the poor saints in Judea that he would carry to Jerusalem.

“While Paul remained in Asia a great disturbance arose about the Way. A silversmith named Demetrius, who made shrines of Artemis, brought a lot of business to the other skilled craftsmen. He called a meeting of these men and said: ‘Men, you know we have become wealthy from our trade. You also are aware that not only in Ephesus, but all over Asia, this man, Paul, has persuaded many people that these shrines made by our hands are not gods. Not only is our trade in danger of being held in contempt, but also the temple of the great goddess, Artemis, will become despised and her grandeur be destroyed, whom all Asia and the whole world worships. When they heard this they were filled with anger and began to cry out: ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians’ (verses 23-28)!”

The temple in Ephesus honored Artemis. The King James and New King James Versions refer to the goddess as Diana. However, Diana was a Roman deity, the goddess of the hunt. The name of the Ephesian goddess in the Greek text is “Artemis.” “Artemis of the Ephesians was not a Greek divinity but Asiatic.... She was not regarded as a virgin but as a mother and foster mother as is shown by the multitude of breasts in the rude effigy. She was undoubtedly a representative of the same power presiding over conception and birth that was adored in Palestine under the name ‘Astareth’” (Unger, pp. 483,84).

After Paul had sent Timothy and Erastus to Greece he remained in Ephesus for a time. A great disturbance occurred during this time. It was instigated by a silversmith named Demetrius who had become wealthy making shrines of the goddess, Artemis, and selling them to those who came to worship her at her magnificent temple in Ephesus. He called a meeting of all the other craftsmen who also made their living making and selling shrines of Artemis. He emphasized two points: (1) “We have our wealth from making shrines to Artemis but Paul is hurting our trade by persuading people that there are no gods who

are made by human hands;" (2) "Not only is our livelihood threatened, but the great temple of the goddess we and all of Asia, even the whole world, worships, will become despised and eventually destroyed."

Demetrius struck at the very hearts of those gathered. He incited them to take action by appealing to their purses and their religion. On lesser threats than these, wars have been started and battles fought. The fact that Demetrius laid the blame at the feet of Paul for people no longer believing in Artemis and worshipping at her temple is an indication of how successful Paul's ministry in Ephesus and in all Asia had been. By the time Demetrius had finished his speech the crowd had been worked up to a fever pitch of excitement and anger. They began shouting in unison: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

"Then the whole city was filled with confusion. With one mind the mob rushed into the theater and seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, who were Paul's co-workers. Paul himself wanted to go into the crowd, but his fellow disciples would not permit him. Some of the government officials who were friends of Paul sent word to him that he must not go into the theater. Some in the crowd cried one thing and some another, for the whole assembly was in a state of confusion. The larger part of them did not even know why they had come together. The Jews put forward one of their fellow Jews named Alexander. Alexander tried to speak and motioned with his hand to quiet them. However, when the crowd realized he was a Jew they continued to cry, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!' This lasted for two hours" (verses 29-34).

A mob may begin with one or two disgruntled individuals. The cause of their unhappiness may be real or imagined. It is often driven by a selfish motive or extreme dislike. The disgruntled instigators are often able to gather a large crowd of other disgruntled people. The people who are drawn into such a crowd may lose their individual ability to think and take on a "mob mentality." Such a crowd may easily turn violent. They may attack and beat the ones they find offensive. They may even resort to killing them. Often riot and rampage result. Demetrius' speech not only stirred up his fellow craftsmen but it filled the whole city with confusion. The Jews put forward a man named Alexander. When he motioned for the crowd to be quiet so he could speak, they saw that he was a Jew and cried out with one voice for two hours, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

"But when the town clerk finally was able to quiet the crowd, he said: 'You men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know the city of Ephesus is the keeper of the temple of the great goddess, Artemis, and of the image

which fell down from Jupiter? Since this cannot be denied, it is important that you quiet down and do not do something rash for these men you have brought here are not robbers of temples or blasphemers of your goddess. If Demetrius and the other craftsmen have a complaint against anyone, there are courts to hear their cases, or let them go to the authorities. But if you have questions regarding other matters, let it be settled by the lawful assembly for we are in danger now of being called to give an account of today's disturbance since there is no cause for it and we cannot give a reason for this gathering.' When he had said this, he then dismissed the assembly” (verses 35-41).

The town clerk silenced the people and began to speak. He reminded the people that it was widely known that the city of Ephesus was the keeper of the magnificent temple to Artemis and her image which came from Jupiter. Since these facts cannot be denied, he said, it is essential that they be quiet and take no rash action. The men they had brought were not robbers of temples or blasphemers of Artemis, Further, he told them that if they had a complaint against anyone they could go to court, or take it to the proconsuls. If there were other matters involved, let them be settled in a lawful assembly. The town clerk also reminded the crowd that they might have to give an account for the present disturbance since there was no legitimate cause for it. Having said this, he dismissed the assembly.

Review Questions

1. Name the other congregations besides Ephesus which were in Asia.
2. T - F: “Asia” refers to the entire continent of Asia in chapter 19.
3. For what was Ephesus best known in Paul's day?
4. When Paul left Ephesus after his first brief visit, whom did he leave behind?
5. Which one of the seven wonders of the ancient world was located in Ephesus?
6. Who was the eloquent preacher who came to Ephesus after Paul left the first time?
7. Why was it necessary for Priscilla and Aquila to teach Apollos the way of the Lord more accurately?

8. What question did Paul ask the twelve disciples he first met when he returned to Ephesus?
9. T - F: John the Immerser did not immerse but practiced sprinkling for baptism.
10. T - F: John's baptism was for the remission of sins.
11. T - F: A person can be taught wrong and still be baptized correctly.
12. How many valid baptisms are there in effect today?
13. Which baptism will endure to the end of the age (world)?
14. T - F: Paul operated a Christian school in the hall of Tyrannus.
15. What caused many believers in Ephesus to burn their books of magic?
16. After Paul visited Greece and Jerusalem, where did he plan to go?
17. Why was Paul going to Jerusalem after he had visited the churches in Macedonia and Achaia?
18. What was the the name of the goddess whose temple was in Ephesus?
19. How did the craftsmen in Ephesus make their living?
20. Why was the income of the craftsmen in jeopardy?
21. Who was the silversmith who created a great disturbance in Ephesus?
22. What or who was finally able to silence the protesters in Ephesus?
23. Give two specific examples of the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament? Give Scriptures where they are found?
24. Why did Paul lay hands on the twelve disciples in Ephesus?
25. What was the name of the goddess worshipped in Ephesus?
26. What is the difference between Artemis and Diana, or are they the same?

Chapter Twenty: JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

Paul had planned to leave Ephesus soon, but the tumult stirred up by Demetrius in protest against him and his preaching against idols, delayed it. He was taking up a great contribution among the churches of the Gentiles to carry to the saints in Jerusalem and Judea (2 Cor. 8, 9). He wanted to take it to Jerusalem and present it to the elders of the church who would disburse it to the poor and needy. However, he needed to visit the churches in Macedonia and Greece (Achaia) to get their contributions before going to Jerusalem. This made it necessary to “backtrack” and go west to the Grecian Peninsula and then sail eastward back to Asia.

“Now when the disturbance was over, Paul called the Christians together, embraced them and left to go to Macedonia. When he had visited the churches there and encouraged them with many words, he went to Greece (Achaia). He spent three months there and was getting ready to sail to Syria when he learned the Jews were planning to harm him. He decided, therefore, to return through Macedonia. He was accompanied by Sopater, the son of Pyrrhus, who was from Berea; Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica; Gaius from Derbe, and Timothy. Also Tychicus and Trophimus who were from Asia accompanied him. All of these had gone ahead of us and were waiting for us at Troas” (verses 1-5).

Paul’s farewell with the church at Ephesus, and with other saints in the province of Asia, ended one of the most fruitful periods of his ministry. He had spent one of the longest, if not the longest period of time of his ministry, in this area and it had been remarkably fruitful although attended with great opposition (cf. 1 Cor. 16:8,9). Paul sailed to Macedonia (northern area of Greece) where he visited the churches of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. He then went into Greece (Achaia) where he stayed for three months with the churches in Corinth and Cenchrea.

Paul was not traveling alone as he went to Asia for he was accompanied by representatives of the churches who had contributed to the fund for the poor saints in Jerusalem and Judea (cf. 1 Cor. 16:1-5; 2 Cor. 8:16-24). He was careful to “provide for honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord but also in the sight of men.” These representatives of the churches would insure this. Their number would also protect against the possibility of robbery, for the large amount of money they were carrying would surely be tempting to evildoers. The others had gone ahead and were waiting at Troas for Paul and Luke.

“After the days of Unleavened Bread, we sailed from Philippi to Troas in five days. We remained for seven days in Troas. When the disciples assembled on the first day of the week to break bread, Paul preached to them. He intended to leave the next day. He continued speaking until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where the church had gathered. A young man named Eutychus was sitting in the window. He went soundly asleep, and as Paul preached a long time, Eutychus fell into such a deep sleep that he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. Then Paul went down, fell on him and embraced him and said: ‘Don’t be concerned. He is alive!’ Then he went back upstairs and ate with the disciples, visited with them for a long time, and left at daylight. The brethren took Eutychus away alive and were greatly comforted. We had gone ahead and boarded the ship and sailed to Assos. There we intended to pick up Paul as he had arranged, for he had gone ahead on foot. We met him as planned and took him aboard, then sailed to Mitylene. From there we sailed the following day and were across from Chios; the next day we arrived at Samos; after a stop at Trogyllium, we came the following day to Miletus. Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so we would not lose time in Asia for he was in a hurry to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, if at all possible” (verses 6-16).

Luke, the inspired historian, carefully laid out the facts. The time of the event was just after the days of unleavened bread. The feast of Unleavened Bread commemorated one of the key events in the history of God’s Old Testament people. For four hundred years, Israel had sojourned in Egypt. The Egyptians became fearful of them and enslaved them. When their cry went up to the Lord, God sent Moses to deliver them. Pharaoh refused to let them go. God sent a series of plagues upon Egypt which devastated the land. The tenth and last plague was the death of all the firstborn, both of man and beast. The account is found in Exodus, chapters 10-14. See also Exodus 23:15; Leviticus 23:5,6; Numbers 33:3; Ezra 6:21,22.

The children of Israel saved their firstborn by applying the blood of the lamb to the doorposts and lintels of their houses. The Lord said: “When I see the blood I will pass over you” (Exodus 12:13). The feast of Unleavened Bread led to the Passover. In the first month of the Hebrew calendar, from the fourteenth day until the twenty-first day they were to purge their houses of leaven and eat no food containing it (Exodus 12:17-20).

The feast of Pentecost always came fifty days after the Passover (Exodus 34:22,23; Leviticus 23:15-21). It celebrated the first fruits of the harvest. Seven

sabbaths were counted from the sabbath following Passover and the day after the seventh sabbath, the first day of the week, would be fifty days, hence Pentecost (Vine, Vol. 3, p. 172). Paul was unable to be in Jerusalem for the Passover, but he hoped to be there by Pentecost for on that day thousands of the Jewish people would be gathered in Jerusalem to worship. It would be a convenient time to distribute the money contributed by the Gentile churches to help their Jewish brethren and others who were in need.

In spite of Paul's hurry to be in Jerusalem by Pentecost, when he came to Troas, he waited for the first day of the week to worship with the Christians. Contrary to the teaching of some sects today that keeping the seventh day sabbath of the Old Testament is still required of Christians, the New Covenant of Christ clearly teaches worship is to be held on the first day of the week. Christ arose on the first day of the week, and the early Christians met to worship on this day (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2,9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1,19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1,2). Some argue that the Roman emperor Constantine in the fourth century changed the day of worship for Christians from Saturday to Sunday, but that simply is not true! After Constantine became a believer in Christ, he set aside the day that Christians met for worship (Sunday, the first day of the week) and made it a legal holiday so they would not have to work on that day, and therefore could more easily assemble together.

"The disciples came together to break bread" on the first day of the week. On that occasion, the apostle Paul was the guest speaker. The other acts of worship in the New Testament are giving of one's means as God has prospered us (1 Cor. 16:1,2); singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:18,19; Col. 3:16,17); offering up prayers to God (1 Tim. 2:1,2,8); and preaching the Word of God (Acts 20:7; 2 Tim. 4:1,2). These five acts of worship constitute the Scriptural pattern of worship for the New Testament church.

The "breaking of bread" is a figure of speech known as a "synecdoche." A synecdoche is when a part of an act, or of a series of acts, is put for the whole of the act (Dungan, p. 303 ff.). The Lord's Supper involves eating the unleavened bread and drinking the cup to remember the body and blood of our Lord that was given on the cross as an offering for our sins. The "breaking of bread" stands for the whole of the communion even though only a part is mentioned. "Breaking of bread" in Acts 20:7 can also be thought of as a synecdoche because it stands for all of the acts of worship in the pattern of the New Testament church.

The Christians gathered for worship on the first day of the week. Attending the worship assembly upon the first day of the week is commanded of all able bodied Christians. The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish

Christians who were weak in their faith. They had not grown and developed as they should have (Heb.5:12-14). They were in actual danger of apostasy from the faith (Heb. 2:1-3; 4:1-11). The basis of their problem was that they had quit assembling with their fellow Christians (Heb. 10:23-31). Thus they were robbed of the teaching, fellowship, and strength that one can only gain from joining with his brethren worshipping God and studying His Word. No matter how urgent Paul felt his need was to be in Jerusalem by a certain date, he took time to wait for the Lord's day so he could assemble with his brethren to worship God with them!

Paul preached the Gospel on the Lord's Day to the assembly of his fellow Christians. A young man named Eutychus sat in the window of the crowded upstairs room during the worship. Paul evidently preached a long time and Eutychus fell asleep. He fell out of the window three stories to the ground and died as a result. However, Paul, just as the prophet Elisha had done many years earlier, raised to life the young man, Eutychus, by the power of the Holy Spirit (2 Kings 4:8-37).

In his haste to be in Jerusalem by Pentecost, Paul decided not to visit Ephesus though he would be sailing past it. No doubt, he had many friends in Ephesus and the surrounding areas who would want to see him. He could easily become so caught up in visiting with them that he would not arrive in Jerusalem in time for Pentecost. Therefore, he decided to sail by Ephesus and go on to the next port which was Miletus.

“From Miletus Paul sent to Ephesus and requested the elders to come to meet him. When they came he said: ‘You are aware of my behavior among you from the first day I came. You know that I served the Lord with all humility, tears, and trials which came as a result of the plots of the Jews. You know I did not hold back anything from you that was useful or needed and how I taught you both publicly and privately. You know that I testified to both Jews and Greeks that they must repent before God and have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Now I am going to Jerusalem, bound by the Spirit. I do not know what will happen to me there except that the Holy Spirit tells me in every city that bonds and suffering await me. I do not consider my life of any account or value to myself. I want to complete my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus to declare earnestly the Good News of the grace of God’ (verses 17-24).

Miletus was about thirty miles from Ephesus. It was a journey that could be made in a day by horseback. Paul sent for the elders to come to him where they could meet without interruptions from other acquaintances who might

interrupt a meeting if it were held in Ephesus where Paul had many friends and brethren.

Paul did not send for the preacher (minister) or the elders and deacons, but specifically for the elders. Let us note several things about the elders that are essential to an understanding of this important office in the church. First, the elders are a distinct body of men within the congregation. Second, there was not an elder, but a plurality of elders over the congregation (cf. Acts 11:30; 14:23; Phil. 1:1; Tit. 1:5). Third, these elders must meet certain qualifications before they can serve in this essential role in the congregation (I Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9). Fourth, the elders must be mature men for such is the meaning of the word “elder.” Elsewhere elders are called “bishops,” an old English word for “overseers” referring to the work they do for the congregation. Fifth, elders are also called “pastors,” an old English word meaning “shepherds” (Eph. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). Sixth, each congregation is to have its own elders. The elders selected by a congregation are only over that particular congregation (Acts 14:23; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).

Paul reminded the elders of his attitude and example when he worked with them. They were eyewitnesses of how he had conducted himself. He did not fail to teach them anything they needed to know in order to be faithful and fruitful in the Lord’s work. All the time he was with them he had to put up with the plots of the Jews who constantly harassed him and tried to stop efforts to proclaim the Gospel of Christ.

Paul did not hesitate to teach on any subject that was needed and useful. He taught both Greeks and Jews repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Some build a doctrine on the fact that repentance is listed before faith, but the passage is simply teaching that repentance toward God requires that one who would be saved must repent of his sins just as surely as he must believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God in order to be saved (Mark 16:15,16). It is obvious that one who has come to believe sincerely in Jesus as the Christ will repent of His sins. Paul had first preached in Ephesus in the synagogue to the Jews and Gentiles who attended there. They needed to repent of their sins so they would be prepared to receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ (see McGarvey, pp. 251, 252).

Paul, by influence of the Holy Spirit, knew that trouble awaited him in Jerusalem. However, he bravely faced whatever might befall him in order that he might finish the work that God had given him to do. He was willing, if necessary, even to lay down his life in order to declare the glorious Gospel of God’s grace.

“Now, behold, I know that all of you among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God shall not see my face again. Therefore, I testify to you this day, that I am free from the blood of all men for I did not hesitate to declare the whole counsel of God to you. Therefore, pay attention to yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to feed the church of God which he bought with the blood of His own Son, for I know that after my departure, savage wolves will enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and even from among yourselves men will arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them. Therefore, watch, and do not forget that for three years I did not cease warning everyone day and night with tears” (verses 25-31).

Paul was a man with a great heart. He truly loved the souls of men and sought with all his being to teach them the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to keep them faithful that they might be saved eternally. In this he is a good model for preachers of the Gospel today. To the Ephesian Christians who had become especially dear to him, he said (doubtless with tears in his eyes and his heart aching) “I know you will not see my face again.” Paul affirmed his conscience was clear regarding his work among them for he had taught them “the whole counsel of God.” There was no essential topic, no matter how sensitive or controversial, that Paul had failed to teach to the church. Unlike so many preachers today who are masters at “tickling ears” (2 Tim. 4:1-5), Paul did not try to avoid difficult topics. He wanted them to go to Heaven, and he also wanted to go!

Paul called upon the elders first to pay close attention to themselves and then to the church over which they acted as shepherds of the flock that they might spiritually feed the church which Christ had bought with His own blood. So many today minimize the church and say, “Jesus, yes!” “The church, no!” Or “Just believe in Jesus, the church does not matter.” Or, “There are many churches and one is just as good as another.” How can anyone say the church for which Jesus shed His own precious blood is not important? How can one who believes in Jesus belittle the church He himself built (Matt. 16:16-18) and died for, and is coming back for one day? How dare they say it is unimportant and unnecessary, and man-made churches are just as good?! Do they not know that when they are saved, they are added by the Lord Himself to the church (Acts 2:41-47)? Do they not believe they are baptized into the one body, which is the church of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:4-6; 1:22,23; Col. 1:18; Acts 2: 41-47)?

Jesus had warned His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount to “Beware of false prophets who come to you in the clothing of sheep, while inwardly they

are ravenous wolves” (Matt. 7:15). Paul echoed Christ’s warning when he told the elders that not long after his departure from them vicious, savage wolves would come into the flock at Ephesus to lead the people astray. They would teach false doctrine to draw away disciples. Even from among the elders false teachers would arise. For three years, with tears in his eyes and love in his heart, Paul had admonished the Christians to faithfulness.

“And now brethren, I commend you to God and to the Word which He has graciously given to you, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all who have been set apart for a holy purpose. I coveted no man’s money or possessions. You yourselves know that by my own hands I supplied not only my needs but also the needs of those who worked with me. I gave you an example how that by working you ought to help the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus Himself who said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (verses 32-35).

It is difficult for a missionary to leave a work that he has established by preaching, prayer, hard labor, tears and trials. The best thing he can do to ensure their continued faithfulness is to leave behind a good example of sacrificial labors and good, solid teaching of God’s Word. Paul did this and further commended them to God’s Word as the sure guide to keep them in the strait and narrow way that leads to Heaven.

After Paul had spoken of his sacrificial labors he admonished them to remember something Jesus had said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Parents who love their children and grandchildren understand clearly this statement of the Lord. Mature, Godly men and women who love the Lord gain great pleasure and satisfaction in making a contribution to feed the hungry, care for the homeless, or preach the Gospel to those who have never heard. This saying of Jesus is not recorded anywhere else in the Sacred Word. Paul received it by inspiration. Luke by inspiration recorded Paul’s words (1 Cor. 2:1-16).

“When he had said these words, Paul kneeled down with the elders and prayed with them. The elders wept and embraced Paul. They grieved most of all for his statement that they should not see him again. Then they all accompanied him to the ship” (verses 36-38).

These words were recorded by Luke by inspiration, but was Paul’s statement simply his opinion, or was he speaking by prophecy? The Bible sometimes records statements made by the Devil, false teachers, etc. They were not given by God’s inspiration, but are recorded by inspiration. A number

of conservative scholars have argued that Paul was simply stating his strongly held belief that he was nearing the end of his life. Acts ends abruptly with Paul dwelling in his own rented house, freely teaching the Gospel to all who came to him, while he waited to be called to testify before the emperor (Acts 28:30,31). Writers who were contemporary with Paul such as Clement say that Paul appeared before Caesar and was released. He proclaimed the Gospel in Spain (Rom. 15:24; Phil. 4:22), visited again the churches he had established including Ephesus, then was arrested during another period of persecution, and finally was put to death when he was about seventy years of age (Conybeare and Howson, pp. 737-747; Unger, 976, 977).

Review Questions

1. What delayed Paul's plan to leave Ephesus?
2. Who accompanied Paul as he traveled to Jerusalem?
3. What were the two functions served by the men from various churches who were traveling with Paul to Jerusalem?
4. What important event in Israel's history was commemorated by the Feast of Unleavened bread?
5. What saved Israel's firstborn from dying during the tenth plague in Egypt?
6. How was the date of Pentecost determined?
7. Why did Paul want to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost?
8. What New Testament event gave significance to the first day of the week?
9. On which day of the week did the church at Troas meet to observe the Lord's supper?
10. T - F: The emperor Constantine changed the day of Christian worship from the sabbath to the first day of the week.
11. Name the five acts of worship that must be done on the first day of every week.
12. Define synecdoche and give an example of its use in the New Testament.

13. Who fell asleep during worship at Troas? What happened to him as a result?
14. Why did Paul sail past Ephesus and go on to Miletus?
15. How far was it from Ephesus to Miletus?
16. For whom did Paul send to Ephesus and ask they come to Miletus?
17. T - F: The elders who oversee the church are simply the older men in the congregation.
18. What are the various names used for the overseers of the congregation?
19. Define the meaning of the various words used to describe the overseers of the congregation.
20. Who told Paul that bonds and suffering awaited him in every city?
21. True or False: It is Scriptural to have only one man as the elder over a congregation.
22. Give at least two passages that indicate each congregation must have a plurality of elders.
23. Why could Paul say he was “pure from the blood of all men?”
24. True or False: As long as one believes in Jesus, it does not make any difference which church (religious body) he attends.
25. Quote the warning of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount that was also given by Paul to the elders of the church at Ephesus.
26. What was Paul willing to do to declare the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ and fulfill his ministry?
27. How did Paul describe the church of Christ in his address to the elders of the church at Ephesus?
28. Where else is the statement “It is more blessed to give than to receive” found in the Bible? Who said it? Who quoted it?
29. Where does the Bible tell us to join the church of our choice?

Chapter 21:

ARREST IN JERUSALEM

As Paul and his companions hurried to Jerusalem in order to be there in time for Pentecost, they took advantage of the frequent stops the ships made to visit the Christians they found in nearly every port. The fact that there were now so many Christians in so many different places indicates the rapid growth of the church. This growth was largely the fruit of those who fled Jerusalem following the martyrdom of Stephen and the fury of Saul's persecution (Acts 8:1-4). It is ironical (or perhaps providential) that Saul, who had caused the Christians to flee from Jerusalem, was responsible for this rapid spread of the Gospel. Now Saul (the apostle Paul) was a sacrificial preacher of the Gospel and his efforts had carried the Gospel further than anyone else. He had become a victim of the persecution that he had originally instigated and advocated.

“After we had departed from them and sailed away, we ran a straight course and came to Cos. The following day we sailed to Rhodes and from there to Patara. We found a ship that was crossing to Phoenicia. We boarded it and sailed. When we came in sight of Cyprus, we passed it on the left and sailed to Syria, landing at Tyre where the ship was to unload its cargo. We remained at Tyre for seven days where we found disciples. They said to Paul through the Spirit that he should not go up to Jerusalem. But at the end of seven days, we departed and continued our journey. The disciples also accompanied us to the ship along with their wives and children. We knelt and prayed on the beach and embraced one another. Then we boarded the ship and they returned to their homes” (verses 1-6).

It is helpful to have a map of Paul's travels such as are found in the back of many Bibles. From Miletus Paul and his companions sailed southward to Patara in Lycia east of the island of Rhodes. From there they sailed in a southeasterly direction past Cyprus to the ancient Phoenician city of Tyre. Tyre was built on an island in the Mediterranean Sea just off the shore of Phoenicia. Its sister city, Sidon, was built on the mainland about twenty miles away. The ancient Phoenicians were traders and plied the Mediterranean in their ships. Far to the west on the African continent, the Phoenicians built the great city state of Carthage. They were among the first to develop an alphabet. Our alphabet is based upon it. Hiram of Tyre was a friend of David and Solomon and supplied materials which Solomon used in building the magnificent temple in Jerusalem (Pfeiffer, pp. 14, 37 ff; Unger, pp. 1311, 1312).

Just as they had at Troas, Paul and his companions remained in Tyre for seven days. Without doubt they worshipped with their brethren during this time. When they sailed, the entire congregation accompanied them to the ship. There

the apostle and his fellow preachers of the Gospel knelt and prayed with the saints, embraced them, and boarded the ship for the last part of their journey by sea.

“At the end of the the voyage from Tyre, we went down to Ptolemais and embraced the brethren. We remained with them for one day. The next day we departed, and travelled to Caesarea. Here we entered the house of Philip the evangelist who was one of the seven and lodged with him. Philip had four virgin daughters who had the gift of prophecy. We remained in Caesarea for several days. While we were there, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. He took Paul’s belt and bound his hands and feet. He said: ‘Thus,’ the Holy Spirit says, ‘in this way the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and will deliver him into the hands of the heathen.’ When we heard these things, we and also the members of the church in Caesarea, begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Paul replied: ‘What do you mean, weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus?’ When He could not be persuaded, we ceased pleading with him and said, ‘Let the will of the Lord be done’” (verses 21:7-14).

Paul and his company sailed from Tyre to Ptolemais, the first port in Palestine. This city was known as Acco in Old Testament times. It was a few miles north of Mt. Carmel. They took time to greet the church there before going by land to Caesarea the following day. Caesarea was the Roman capital of Palestine. It was also the home of Cornelius and his family and friends who were the first Gentile converts to Christ (see Acts 10:1-11:18). Too, it was in Caesarea that Philip the evangelist had made his home following his teaching and baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:39,40).

Philip here is called “the evangelist” and it is stated that he was “one of the seven.” This distinguished him from Philip the apostle. An evangelist is one who brings good news. It is used in the New Testament to describe preachers of the Gospel (Eph. 4:11). “One of the seven” refers to the seven men chosen by the church in Jerusalem to oversee the daily distribution of food to the needy widows (Acts 6:1-8). After the church was scattered by the persecution led by Saul, Philip had gone to Samaria and had a fruitful ministry there (Acts 8:4-25). He had married and become the father of four daughters. These four young Christian women possessed the gift of prophecy, a miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit. It is possible they received this gift from the apostles, Peter and John, when they were sent by the Jerusalem church to Samaria that they might “receive the Holy Spirit.” The context of Acts 8:14-24 makes it clear that

“receiving the Holy Spirit” in this context has reference to receiving miraculous gifts by the laying on of the hands of the apostles.

In Joel’s prophecy of the events which were fulfilled on Pentecost, it was stated that “your sons and your daughters shall prophesy” (Acts 2:14ff.). While some women had the miraculous gift of prophecy, they were forbidden to use it in the assembly when the men were present (1 Cor. 14:34,35; 1 Tim. 2:8-15).

While Paul was in still in Caesarea, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. This prophet some years earlier had come down from Jerusalem to Antioch to tell them of a great famine that was coming throughout the world. This prophecy was fulfilled during the days of the emperor Claudius. Now Agabus came from Judea to Caesarea with another prophecy. He took Paul’s belt and bound himself hand and foot. He said, “In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and turn him over to the Gentiles.” Those of Paul’s company as well as the Christians in Caesarea begged Paul not to put himself in danger by going to Jerusalem. He replied to their pleading, saying, “Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am not only ready to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” They could not persuade him to change his mind so they ceased pleading with him and said: “The Lord’s will be done.”

“After these days with the saints at Caesarea, we packed and traveled to Jerusalem. Some of the disciples from Caesarea also went with us. They took us to the house of Mnason who had been a Christian for a long time. It was arranged that we should stay with him. The brethren at Jerusalem gladly received us. The following day Paul went with us to James, and all the elders were also present. After he greeted them, Paul then related in order the things God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard these things, the elders praised God. They said to Paul: ‘Brother, you see how many thousands of believers there are among the Jews and they are all zealous for the law. They have been told that you teach those among the Gentiles that they ought to forsake the Law of Moses and not to circumcise their children or follow after the customs. What shall be done? They will surely hear that you have come. Therefore, we want you to do this which we will tell you. We have four men who have taken a vow. Take them and be purified with them and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads. Then everyone will know that those things which they have heard of you are not true, but that you yourself walk orderly, keeping the Law. In regard to the Gentiles who have become believers, we have written to them that they should observe none of these

things, but that they should abstain from eating meat offered to idols, and from blood, and from that which is strangled, and from fornication. The following day Paul took the men and was purified with them, and entered the temple to give notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of the men” (verses 15-26).

Several days were spent with the believers in Caesarea. Paul and his friends surely were tired from their long journey and many days of traveling. After this, they packed their baggage and traveled to Jerusalem. Whether they traveled on foot or on horseback we are not told. Some of the saints from Caesarea went with them and brought them to the home of an elderly Christian in Jerusalem named Mnason. Arrangement had been made for Paul and his party to stay in his home. Luke, the inspired author, includes himself among Paul’s companions. He may have used this occasion to hear the history of the church in Jerusalem from Mnason who, as an early disciple, would have been a witness and possibly a participant in some of the events recorded by Luke.

It appears there was some sort of a meeting of the Christians to welcome Paul and his companions. Then, the following day, Paul and his friends met with James with all the elders present. After giving the brethren greetings from himself and his friends, Paul may also have brought greetings from the various Gentile churches. He then related all the things that had happened to him as he labored among the Gentiles teaching them the Gospel, baptizing them, and setting in order the churches. The Jerusalem elders must have been impressed by what they heard. They gave glory to God for the good that had been done!

The elders then brought up a matter of great concern to them. Paul taught that God’s people are no longer under the Law of Moses (Rom. 8:1-4; 2 Cor. 3:1-11; Gal. 2:16; 3:8-11; 19:23-27; Gal. 5:4-6). However, many of the Jews who had become Christians apparently faulted Paul for this and continued to practice circumcision and keep Jewish sabbaths and holy days in addition to serving Christ (Gal. 4:9,10; Col. 2). They wanted Paul to prove that he was not an opponent of God’s covenant with the Jews under Moses. He could do this by participating with four men who were under a Nazarite vow (Num. 6:13-21). The reader is referred to McGarvey’s original Commentary on Acts for a full discussion of the issues raised by this proposal of the elders in Jerusalem (McGarvey, pp. 258-261).

Some have charged Paul with either dishonesty or hypocrisy because of his acceptance of the elders’ proposal. H. Leo Boles in his commentary on Acts correctly answered these and other charges brought against Paul: “... Paul had not taught Jewish Christians to disrespect the Law of Moses. In fact, Paul and

other faithful Christians among the Jews were the only ones who properly respected the Law. Christ fulfilled the Law: 'for Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth' (Rom. 10:4). The Law was given by Jehovah until the Christ should come; Paul understood this. He never thought that Christians had to keep the Law in order to be saved; neither did he at any time so act as though the keeping of the Law had anything to do with his salvation. Paul said: 'To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews; to them that are under the Law as under the Law, not being myself under the Law, that I might gain them that are under the Law; to them that are without Law, as without Law, not being without Law to God, but under Law to Christ, that I might gain them that are without Law. To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak: I am become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And I do all things for the Gospel's sake that I might be a joint partaker thereof' (1 Cor. 9: 20-23). The above quotation describes the conduct of Paul here as elsewhere; he never acted from mere policy, but was guided by principle. We are to understand his conduct here in the light of the above. Since the Law of Moses contained some ceremonial rites, these could be observed for the sake of peace and harmony without violating a principle" (Boles, p. 342).

Paul, accepted the Jerusalem elders' advice. He was becoming "a Jew to those that were Jews" that he might save them. The customs under the Law were customs which could be accepted or rejected. The Law, however, had to be kept while it was still in effect, but it was not binding on Christians or anyone else after the cross of Christ and the institution of His New Covenant (Heb. 8:6-13).

"When the seven days were almost ended, some Jews from Asia saw Paul in the temple. They stirred up all the people and seized Paul. They were shouting, 'Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people and the Law and this place. Besides this, he has also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.' Earlier they had seen Paul in the city with Trophimus, an Ephesian. They supposed Paul had also brought him into the temple. The whole city was in turmoil. The people laid hands on Paul and dragged him out of the temple. The doors were shut immediately" (verses 27-30).

Jews from Asia where Paul had previously had such great success in his three years of work in Ephesus recognized Paul. Immediately they began to stir up the crowds. They called on the crowds to help them and claimed Paul everywhere was teaching people against God's Law and His temple. To make matters worse, they even claimed he had brought uncircumcised Greeks (Gentiles) into the temple and thereby defiled it. They had seen Trophimus, a co-

worker of Paul's in Ephesus, in Jerusalem and jumped to the conclusion that Paul had brought an unclean, uncircumcised Gentile into the sacred area. Of course their accusation was false, but their concern was not truth but simply an attempt to prejudice the people against Paul and against Christianity. They had earlier seen Paul in the city with Trophimus and simply assumed that he had also brought him into the temple. Paul was roughly dragged out of the temple, and the doors were closed so no one could enter or leave.

“While they were seeking to kill Paul, a report came to the chief captain of the guard that all Jerusalem was in great confusion. He immediately took soldiers and centurions and rushed down upon them. When they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then the chief captain came near and took control of Paul and commanded that he be bound with two chains. The chief captain then inquired of Paul who he was and what he had done. Some of the crowd shouted one thing and some another. When the captain could not know for sure what the tumult was about, he commanded Paul to be brought into the barracks. By the time they reached the stairs, Paul was being carried by the soldiers to protect him from the violence of the mob. The majority of the people followed the soldiers bearing Paul and continually cried out, ‘Away with him!’” (verses 31-36).

“John Hyrcanus (ca. 125 B.C.) had built a fortress at the northwest corner of the temple enclosure on a rock rise that is about 20 feet higher than the level of the floor of the temple area. This fortress was rebuilt by Herod the Great and named Antonia in honor of his friend, Mark Anthony” (Reese, p. 803). One of the four towers of the fortress overlooked the temple area. During the major feasts of the Jews when there was most likelihood of an outbreak of violence, the fortress was supplied with troops and careful watch was kept on the temple area for any sign of a possible outbreak of violent behavior. The Roman officer in charge (called a “chiliarch” for he had ten centurions and one thousand soldiers under his command) at this time was Claudias Lysias (Acts 23:26). The soldiers soon became aware of the tumult and came down just in time to rescue Paul for he was in danger of being beaten to death by the mob in the temple.

The chief captain commanded that Paul be bound by two chains. It was a practice to chain a prisoner to two guards, one on either side to prevent his escape (cf. Acts 12:6). The chief captain inquired of Paul who he was and what he had done, but any answer that Paul might have given was drowned out by the angry shouts of the vicious crowd. Therefore, he commanded that Paul be brought into the fortress away from the crowd but as they mounted the stairs, the angry mob still tried to harm Paul. The soldiers had to carry him to protect

him from the violence of the mob. These were highly religious people who claimed to be the holy people of the one true God. They were in what they believed was God's own holy temple, the place where He met with His people, yet they acted like a pack of wild, savage beasts of the earth! Their shouts of "Away with him" meant that Paul was worthy of death and must be killed!

"As he was about to be brought into the castle, Paul asked the chief captain, 'May I speak to you?' The captain replied, 'Do you speak Greek? Are you not that Egyptian who incited a riot and led four thousand assassins into the desert?' Paul answered, 'I am a Jew, a citizen of Tarsus, an important city in Cilicia. I beg you to give me permission to speak to the people.' Permission was granted. Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd to be silent. When they became quiet, He began to speak to them in Hebrew" (verses 37-40).

The chief captain was surprised that Paul spoke to him in Greek for he had assumed already that Paul must be a certain Egyptian who had led a rebellion against Rome a few years earlier. According to Josephus this man had 30,000 followers among the Jews. The Egyptian leader promised them that they could march into Jerusalem and easily defeat the Romans. However, they were soon scattered by the Roman army, but their leader with some four thousand assassins had escaped into the desert (Reese, pp. 805-806).

Paul identified himself as a Jew and a citizen of Tarsus of Cilicia, a city of considerable size and importance. When he received the chief captain's permission, Paul then beckoned to the people for silence and he began to speak to them in the Hebrew language which seems to have immediately captured their attention. The result was a great silence as they waited to hear what he had to say.

Review Questions

1. True/False: On his way to Jerusalem, Paul seldom found churches in the places he visited.
2. True/False: The Phoenician city of Sidon was built on an island in the Mediterranean Sea.
3. What was the name of the city state in North Africa which was founded by the Phoenicians?

4. Who was the Phoenician king who supplied materials that were used to build Solomon's temple?
5. True/False: Caesarea was the Roman capital of Palestine when Paul visited it on his way to Jerusalem.
6. How was Philip in Caesarea distinguished from Philip the apostle?
7. Where did Philip the evangelist make his home after teaching the Ethiopian eunuch?
8. True/False: The daughters of Philip prophesied in the worship assemblies on the Lord's day.
9. Who was the prophet who foretold that Paul faced imprisonment if he went to Jerusalem? What was an earlier prophecy he had made?
10. What did the Jerusalem elders ask Paul to do so that the Jewish Christians would not think he opposed their keeping their Jewish customs?
11. True/False: The Law of Moses was still binding upon the Jews after Pentecost.
12. What were the two accusations the Jews brought against Paul in Jerusalem?
13. True/False: Paul had made the Jews angry when he brought Greeks into the temple.
14. True/False: Paul brought Trophimus the Ephesian and other uncircumcised people into the temple in Jerusalem?
15. Who was the chiliarch in the Fortress Antonio when Paul was mobbed?
16. When Paul asked for permission to speak to the mob, what language did he use?
17. When Paul actually spoke to the mob in the temple, what language did he use?
18. What did Paul mean when he said, "I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some?"

Chapter 22: DEFENSE BEFORE THE JEWISH MOB

Paul stood on the flight of stairs leading into the fortress of Antonia from the temple. He had been given permission by the chief captain of the Roman cohort to address the howling mob below. By choosing to ignore the many warnings which came to him on the way to Jerusalem that he faced bonds and suffering there, Paul was now given opportunity to bear witness of the Christ and how he himself had become a Christian.

“ ‘Men, brothers, and fathers, please hear my defense which I am now going to make to you.’ When the mob heard Paul speaking to them in Hebrew, they gave him special attention. Then Paul said: ‘I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but raised in this city at the feet of Gamaliel and instructed accurately in the Law of our fathers. I was zealous for God just as all of you are today. I persecuted this Way unto death. I bound both men and women and delivered them to prison. The high priest is also a witness to this as well as all the council of the elders. From them I also received letters to the brethren. Then I went to Damascus in order to lead those who were bound there to Jerusalem that they might be punished. It happened about noon on my journey as I approached the city of Damascus that suddenly a great light from Heaven shined around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ I answered, ‘Who are you Lord?’ And he said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’ Now those who were with me indeed saw the light. They were terrified, but they did not understand the voice speaking to me. Then I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ The Lord said to me, ‘Arise, and go into the Damascus, and you shall be told concerning the things which have been appointed for you to do’”
(verses 1-10).

Paul began to address the crowd below who had been crying out for his blood just a few moments before. He spoke to them in their native language and they gave him greater attention. He addressed them with respect and courtesy as men, brothers and fathers. They were fellow Jews, related by nationality and heritage. He sought further to establish a common bond between them by giving his credentials. He was a Jew and shared a common history with them including the same faith in the one true God, the respect for the Old Testament Scriptures and the common hope for the coming of the Christ. Further, he had been brought up in Jerusalem and educated at the feet of Gamaliel, a well known and highly respected teacher of the Law. He was a zealous advocate of God’s Law just as they were.

Another thing he had in common with them was his background in opposing “this Way,” referring to the Christian faith. In fact, he was the chief persecutor following the death of Stephen who was murdered by fanatical Jews (Acts 6:8-8:1). So zealous was he in his efforts to eliminate the church of Christ that he went from house to house and arrested both men and women of “the Way” and imprisoned them.

In his zeal to stamp out the faithful followers of Christ, Paul had even pursued them to foreign cities where there were settlements of Jews and among them were those who belonged to Christ. Paul related how he had gone to the chief priests to receive authority to go to Damascus to arrest Christians and bring them bound to Jerusalem.

As Paul and his party had approached the city of Damascus at midday, suddenly a great light from Heaven shined around him. He fell to the ground blinded by the light. A voice spoke to him saying, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” Saul responded, “Who are you, Lord?” “Lord” was a common term used for a master over servants. It was also polite way of addressing a man who was of higher rank and authority than oneself. The Lord replied, “I am Jesus of Nazareth who you are persecuting!” What a shock must have jolted Saul when he heard this! With all his fervent and righteous zeal Paul had opposed Jesus and His followers. He thought Jesus was an imposter and he was doing God’s service in his efforts to wipe out the Christian faith once and for all. Now he was suddenly aware of how badly mistaken he was!

The others who were with Paul also saw the great light and were terrified by it. They did not see the Lord. They heard His voice but did not understand what He spoke to Saul. Some claim there is a contradiction between Luke’s account of this incident in Acts 9:7 and Paul’s account in Acts 22:9. McGarvey explained this passage clearly: “Luke says they heard the voice; Paul says ‘they heard not the voice of Him that spoke to me.’ There is nothing more common, among all nations, than for one who is listening to a speaker, but, either from his own confusion or the indistinctness of the speaker’s articulation, only catches an occasional word, to exclaim, ‘I don’t hear you;’ although the sound of the voice reaches him continually. It is in this sense of the word *hear*, that the companions of Saul, in the confusion of their effort to escape from the scene, failed to hear the voice. They heard the sound, but did not understand the words” (McGarvey, p. 119).

In his shock and sorrow Saul cried out, “Lord, what shall I do?” This reminds us of the Jews on Pentecost who, when they learned they had killed the Christ, cried out, “Men and brethren, ‘What shall we do?’” (Acts 2:36, 37). It would have been easy for Jesus simply to have quoted His own words and

said “He who believes and has been immersed will be saved” (Mark 16:16), but He did not. Instead, He told Saul to go into the city and there he would be told what he must do. The Lord has committed the Gospel to men to teach and baptize (Matt. 28:19,20; 2 Cor. 4:9). Neither He nor His angels speak directly to men today. The faith has been once for all time delivered to the saints (Jude, v. 3). It must be heard, either by teaching and/or preaching or by reading the inspired Word of God (Rom. 10:17; Heb 11:6; Acts 8:26-38).

“Then, since I could not see because of the brightness of the light, those who were with me led me by the hand into Damascus. There, a devout man according to the Law named Ananias who was of good reputation among all the Jews of Damascus came to me. He stood before me and said: ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ At that very time my sight returned to me and I looked at him. Then Ananias said, ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will and see the Righteous One, and hear His voice because you are going to be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. Now, what are you waiting for? Get up and be immersed and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord’ (verses 11-16).

Saul, soon to be called Paul, related how he had been blinded by the light. He, the proud Pharisee who thought He was doing God’s will when he persecuted Christians by breaking into their homes, arresting them and dragging them away to prison, was now completely humbled. He found out that he was fighting against the very God he thought he was serving. In Damascus, God sent a disciple named Ananias to him. He found Saul fasting and praying (cf. Acts 9:19-11). He commanded him to receive his sight and it returned that very hour. Ananias explained that God had chosen him to see the Christ and to hear His voice. This was necessary for Saul was going to become a witness of what he had seen and heard, and therefore qualified to be an apostle of Christ (cf. Acts 1:21-26; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8).

Here, we have a definition of what a witness is, Biblically speaking. A witness is “one who has both **seen and heard** that of which he testifies.” Today, we hear people speak of “witnessing for Jesus.” They cannot do it in the Biblical sense! Actually, they cannot do it in the legal sense either! If one is called to be a witness to a crime, he is being called to testify of that which he has actually seen and heard. As the disciples of Christ today, our job is to teach and preach that which is revealed in the Word of God (Matt. 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 8:4; 2 Tim. 4:2). We have the testimony of the actual witnesses of Christ revealed to chosen men who by inspiration of the Holy Spirit have recorded it for us.

Saul was asked, "What are you waiting for? Get up and be immersed and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." In the New Testament, sinners were told by inspired preachers to be immersed (baptized) at the very time when they became believers. Why was it so urgent for them to be immersed? The answer was given by Jesus in Mark 16:16. It was in order to be saved. The inspired apostle Peter said essentially the same thing on Pentecost when the Jews who believed asked "What shall we do?" They were told to "repent and be immersed **for the remission of sins**" (Acts 2:38). As one old time preacher of the Gospel expressed it: "In the examples of conversion in the book of Acts, when sinners truly believed in Jesus as the Christ the Son of God, they never ate a bite or slept a wink until they were baptized." One is still lost in his sins until he is immersed for the remission (forgiveness) of his sins. "Calling on the name of the Lord" describes what one is doing when he "arises and is baptized to wash away his sins" (cf. I Pet. 3:21).

"It happened when I had returned to Jerusalem and was in a trance while praying in the temple that the Lord appeared to me and said: 'Hurry, and get out of Jerusalem quickly for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.' Then I said, 'Lord, they are aware that I beat those in the synagogues who believe in you and threw them into prison, and when your faithful martyr, Stephen, was killed, I stood by and held the coats of those who stoned him. Then the Lord said to me, 'Go for I am sending you faraway to the Gentiles.' They listened until this point and then began crying out, 'Take this man away from the earth for such a person is not fit to live.' Then, as they continued to cry out and tear off their outer garments and throw dust into the air, the commander ordered that Paul be brought into the barracks so that he could examine him by scourging and learn why they were shouting against him" (verses 17-24).

Paul then related how he was praying in the temple after he had returned to Jerusalem as a Christian. The Lord appeared to him in a trance to warn him that the Jews would not accept him and his testimony. Therefore, he was going to send Paul faraway to preach to the Gentiles. Paul, it appears, protested and recalled how he had been a persecutor of God's people but God had a plan for him. He was to be a special ambassador of the Gospel to the Gentile nations.

When Paul related this, the mob stopped listening to him. The very suggestion that God would send someone to the Gentiles was repugnant to these hide-bound, hard-hearted, narrow-minded Jews. They cried out demanding that he be put to death, for such a person, in their estimation, was not fit to live upon the earth. They began throwing off their outer garments as if preparing to stone Paul. Not finding stones they could use to carry out their

angry, vengeful task, they threw handfuls of dust in the air in frustration. At this point, the commander ordered his soldiers to bring Paul inside. He wanted to know why Paul's fellow Jews were so angry at him so he decided to force Paul to tell the truth by beating it out of him.

Scourging was a horrible form of torture. The victim was bound by both of his hands to a short stake in the ground forcing him to be bent over nearly double. Thus his back was fully exposed to the whip. His clothes were torn from his back so that the stripes might inflict the greater pain. The whips used by the Romans were short handled with long leather straps attached. The straps often had pieces of sharp metal embedded in them. The back of one tortured in such a cruel way would soon be a bloody mass with the skin lacerated and bits of flesh torn away. The loss of blood was great. Many of those who were scourged died during the beating or later in the damp, dark, dirty prison into which they would be thrown.

“As they were stretching and binding him, Paul spoke to the centurion who was in charge asking: ‘Is it according to the law to scourge a Roman citizen who has not even been tried and found guilty? When the centurion heard this, he went to the chief captain and warned: ‘Be careful what you are doing for this man is a Roman citizen.’ The commander came to Paul and asked: ‘Are you a Roman citizen?’ Paul replied in the affirmative. The commander said: ‘I bought my citizenship for a large sum of money.’ Paul replied, ‘But I was born a citizen.’ Those who were preparing to scourge Paul left him immediately. When the commander learned that Paul was a Roman, he was also afraid, especially since he had already bound him. Therefore, he set Paul free the following day. However, wanting to know what the Jews had against Paul, he ordered the chief priests and all the council of the elders to assemble. He then brought Paul down and seated him before them” (verses 25-30).

Not everyone who lived within the boundaries of the Roman Empire was a Roman citizen. Those who were born of Roman parents were citizens by birth. One might buy his citizenship for a large sum of money. One might also receive Roman citizenship by performing some great service for the empire. Those who had served in the Roman army for many years had the privilege of settling in one of the cities under Rome's direct control. There the citizens were Romans and enjoyed certain other privileges. It is suggested that Paul's father or grandfather had been awarded Roman citizenship perhaps because of some great service rendered to the empire. Roman citizens enjoyed special privileges. They could not be bound or beaten unless they had had a fair trial and had been found guilty. They also had the privilege of making an appeal to the emperor if they felt

they could not otherwise receive a fair hearing. Paul later used this privilege in order to receive justice and not be turned over to the Jews who likely would have put him to death (Harrison, pp. 341,342). Paul saved himself from a terrible beating as well as the indignity and stigma associated with it by using his right as a Roman citizen to appeal.

To find out the reason for the Jews' enmity for Paul, the commander ordered the Jewish Sanhedrim to assemble the following day. He seated Paul in the midst of them so he could be questioned by them.

Review Questions

1. What caused the mob to pay special attention to Paul's speech?
2. What did Paul have in common with this mob who wanted him dead?
3. What was the question Saul asked the Lord when he appeared to Him on the road to Damascus? What was the Lord's reply?
4. T - F Saul thought he was serving God when he persecuted Christians?
5. T - F Those who accompanied Saul to Damascus also saw the Lord.
6. T - F Those who were with Saul heard the voice but did not understand it.
7. When Saul asked, 'Lord, what shall I do?' what did the Lord tell him?
8. Why did not the Lord Himself tell Saul what to do to be saved?
9. Who was sent to Saul in Damascus? How was he described in relationship to the Law?
10. How does the Bible define the word "witness?"
11. Why was it necessary for Saul both to see and to hear the Lord?
12. Can we "witness for Jesus" today? If not, why? If so, how are we qualified?
13. Can we have apostles today in the same sense that Peter, James, John, Andrew, etc. were apostles? If so, how? If not, why?
14. When was Saul baptized? Does it matter when one is baptized? Why?

15. What is the literal meaning of “baptize” in the Bible?
16. Why was Saul baptized?
17. T - F. One is still lost in his sins until he has been immersed for the forgiveness of his sins.
18. If one has been baptized for some other purpose than the forgiveness of sins (such as to enter a particular denomination, or as an ‘outward sign of an inward grace’ or some other reason not stated in the Bible), has he been Scripturally baptized?
19. What “state” was Saul in when the Lord appeared to him in the temple as he prayed?
20. How did the Roman commander propose learning why the Jews were so angry at Saul?
21. Describe scourging?
22. What did Saul say to the centurion in charge that stopped the preparation to scourge him?
23. What were the different ways one could become a Roman citizen?
24. How might Paul’s father, grandfather or other ancestor gained Roman citizenship for his family?
25. What were some of the special privileges Roman citizens enjoyed that were not given to others in the Roman Empire?
26. What did the Roman commander do next in order to learn the cause of the Jews’ enmity against Paul?
27. Discussion question: “Is it wise to put off one’s baptism for any reason?”
28. Discussion question: “Should Paul have heeded the warnings he was given that he faced prison and suffering if he went to Jerusalem?”
29. T - F The Lord often appears to sinners to tell them they are saved.

Jewish worshippers in the temple became an angry mob who attempted to kill Paul. Having been rescued by the Roman cohort stationed in the fortress adjacent to the temple, Paul was permitted by the commander to address the mob who were once again howling for his blood. Paul calmed his audience when he spoke to them in Hebrew, their native tongue. They listened attentively as he related how he had persecuted Christians, but had become a believer when the Lord appeared to him. They continued to listen until he related how the Lord had told him He would send him far away to preach to the Gentiles. Then the mob became violent again. Paul was rescued once again by the Roman soldiers. The following day, the Roman commander ordered the chief priest and the Council (the Sanhedrin) to convene. Paul was brought before them and allowed to make a defense.

“Paul looked intently at the Council and said: ‘Men and brethren, I have lived before God with a good conscience all my life.’ Ananias, the high priest, ordered those who stood close to Paul to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to the high priest, ‘You whitewashed wall! God is going to strike you! You sit to judge me according to the Law, but you violate the Law by commanding me to be struck!’ Those who stood near said: ‘Do you revile God’s high priest?’ Paul replied, ‘I did not know that he was the high priest, for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of the ruler of your people.’ When Paul realized that the Council was made up partly of Sadducees and partly of Pharisees, he cried out: ‘Brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. It is for the hope of the resurrection that I am being judged.’ When he had said this, the Sadducees and Pharisees began to quarrel and the Council was divided because the Sadducees deny the resurrection as well as rejecting the existence of angels and spirits. However, the Pharisees accept all of them. There arose a loud outcry. Then the scribes who were Pharisees stood up and said: ‘We find no evil in this man. What if an angel or spirit has spoken to him? Let us not fight against God!’ After further argument, the commander feared Paul was going to be pulled apart by the Council and by the scribes as they argued. Therefore, he ordered his soldiers to take Paul by force and bring him into the fortress. The next night the Lord appeared to Paul and told him to ‘Take courage, for just as you have testified of me in the Jerusalem, you will also testify of me in Rome” (verses 1-11).

Paul began his defense by stating that he had always striven to live with a clear conscience. He was not claiming that he had never sinned. He was

simply stating that he had always tried to do what was right in God's sight. All human beings have a conscience. When we do what we believe is right, our conscience does not bother us. When we do what we believe is wrong, our conscience troubles us. Paul had persecuted the church. At the time, he believed he was doing God's will. He was acting according to what he had been taught. However, he had been taught incorrectly. He was forgiven by God when he learned better and obeyed the Gospel (1 Tim. 1:12-14). A conscience taught according to God's revealed Word will do what is right. However, some habitually go contrary to their conscience and eventually their conscience becomes hardened and no longer troubles them when they do evil (cf. 1 Tim. 4:2).

The high priest showed his bias against Paul when he immediately commanded him to be struck in the mouth for what he had just said. Paul was justly angered at the hypocrisy of a high priest who was supposed to uphold God's law, yet he commanded one being tried to be mistreated for making his defense. When Paul called him a "whited wall," he was in effect calling him a hypocrite. A "whited wall" is one that has had the marks and smudges and dirt, etc. covered up. They are still there but are hidden and the wall appears to be clean when it is still dirty underneath. Instead of upholding the Law and going according to it, the high priest was actually violating it.

Others on the Council asked Paul: "Are you reviling God's high priest?" Paul replied, "I did not know he was the high priest, for it is written: "You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people." Paul is using sarcasm to expose the hypocrisy of the high priest. Sarcasm is defined as "A keen, reproachful expression; a satirical remark uttered with some degree of scorn or contempt; a taunt; a gibe; a cutting jest" (Webster). "In Paul's anger at the high priest in Jerusalem (Acts 23:3-5), he gives vent to his feelings by the use of this figure" (Dungan, pp. 318, 319). Paul is simply saying, "How could I know he is the high priest of God when he commands something to be done which is clearly contrary to God's Law?"

When Paul became aware that the Council was divided between Sadducees and Pharisees, he used this to his advantage. He called out "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: for the hope and the resurrection of the dead I am being judged." Just as the faithful in Israel had hope of being raised from the dead, so Christians have this same hope (Job 19: 25-27; Psa. 16:8-11; Acts 2:29-32). Our Lord had exposed the fallacy of the Sadducees' denial of the resurrection (Matt. 22:23-33). The Pharisees were correct when they taught the resurrection of the body as well as the existence of angels and spirits. The Sadducees were dead wrong when they denied it. Not only was the resurrection a belief of the faithful in Israel, it is one of the three

foundation teachings of the Gospel of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4). The Pharisees and Sadducees, who were united when it came to their hatred of Jesus and their desire to be rid of him, were divided on whether there was a resurrection of the dead. It was a “hot” topic between them. Paul knew this and got them so involved in it that they turned on one another and away from their mutual hatred of him.

It appears Paul was caught between the two opposing sides with the Sadducees on one side and the Pharisees on the opposite. One side pulled on him and then the other. The commander feared that Paul would be pulled in pieces so he sent soldiers down to rescue him and bring him back to his custody where he would be safe for the time being.

The following night the Lord stood by Paul and told him, “Take courage, for as you did testify concerning Me in Jerusalem, so you must do also in Rome.” This was not the first time the Lord had spoken to Paul when his life was in danger nor would it be the last. When Paul first preached in Corinth the Lord had spoken to him in a vision at night saying: “Do not be afraid but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city” (1 Cor. 18:9,10). Later, when Paul was a prisoner on a ship bound for Rome and the ship was about to be wrecked, the Lord sent an angel to assure him that there would be no loss of life among those on board the ship (Acts 27:21-24).

“When morning came, the Jews conspired together to kill Paul. They placed themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed him. There were more than forty men who were a part of this conspiracy. They came to the chief priests and the elders and said: ‘We have bound ourselves under a curse to taste nothing until we have killed Paul.’ They asked the elders to have the Council request the commander to bring Paul down to meet with them that they might examine him more fully. ‘Before he arrives,’ they said, ‘we are prepared to kill him.’ However, Paul’s nephew, the son of his sister, came upon them and heard their plotting. He went to the fortress and told Paul. Paul then called one of the centurions to him and asked him to take his nephew to the commander for he had something to tell him. The commander took him aside privately and inquired: ‘What is it that you want to tell me?’ He said: ‘The Jews have agreed among themselves to ask you to bring Paul down to meet with the Council tomorrow as if they wanted to inquire more specifically of something about him. Do not agree to their request for more than forty of them will be lying in wait to kill him. They have bound

themselves with a curse not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are ready and are just waiting for word from you” (verses 12-21).

One wonders how many lies have been told and how many murders have been committed by men who believed they were doing God’s will when they committed these vile sins! Paul persecuted the church by beating Christians, putting some in prison and killing others, in the belief he was doing God’s service. When he became a Christian, then he became the victim of zealous, misguided souls who persecuted him just as he had once persecuted others.

More than forty Jews took a pledge to kill Paul and placed themselves under a curse if they failed. They vowed that they would not eat a bite or drink a drop until Paul was dead. They asked the elders to lie to the Council and ask them to bring Paul down to meet with them that they might question him further. They planned to lie in wait along the way and fall upon Paul and kill him before he reached the Council.

Somehow, Paul’s sister’s son learned of their plot. Doubtless, this was God’s Providence at work on behalf of Paul. He went to the barracks in the fortress of Antonia where Paul was being held and told Paul. Paul arranged for him to be taken to the commander where he conveyed the same message to him.

“The commander dismissed Paul’s nephew after charging him not to tell anyone that he had told him of these things. The commander then called two centurions and told them to prepare two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea along with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen at nine o’clock that night. Animals were to be provided for Paul in order to take him safely to Felix, the governor. The commander also wrote a letter which read as follows: ‘Claudius Lysias to the most excellent governor, Felix. Greetings! This man was seized by the Jews and was going to be killed by them, but I happened to come upon them with armed men and rescued him from them when I learned he was a Roman. Wanting to know why they had accused him, I brought him before the Council. I found he was accused about questions of their law. However, there were no charges against him that were worthy of punishment by death or by imprisonment. When it was revealed to me that the Jews were plotting against this man to kill him, I decided to send him to you right away. I have also ordered his accusers to bring their accusations against him to you. Farewell!’” (verses 22-30).

It was important that the plan of the Jews to murder Paul be kept quiet. The commander did not want the perpetrators to know they had been found out. The commander sprang into action to save Paul and to see that Paul, as a Roman citizen, received a proper hearing. Not knowing the actual strength of the enemy, he wisely planned a security force that likely could not be overcome by anything the Jews could muster on short notice. Two centurions were called to organize it. Two hundred foot soldiers, seventy cavalymen, and two hundred spearmen made up the force to accompany Paul to Caesarea. Perhaps this shows how much value was attached to the life of a Roman citizen. For the ease and comfort of Paul, animals were to be provided for his transportation. The Greek word for “animal” here simply means “a beast of burden” without specifying the particular animal. It could have been a horse, a donkey or even a camel.

The commander then wrote a letter to Governor Felix. We learn his name was Claudius Lysias for he, according to the then prevalent custom, began the letter by identifying himself. After the customary greetings to one of higher rank and social standing, the commander explained how Paul had come to be in his custody. He simply dealt with the facts except that he did not quite tell the whole truth. He made it appear that he purposely came to rescue a Roman citizen, when, in fact, he did not learn Paul was a Roman until after he had him in custody. The commander correctly revealed that the Jews had a plot to kill Paul and that he had commanded those who accused him to come to Caesarea to make their accusations before the governor.

“Therefore the soldiers did as they were commanded and brought Paul by night to Antipatris. The following day they returned to the Fortress of Antonia in Jerusalem. The seventy cavalymen continued on with Paul to Caesarea. They delivered the letter to Governor Felix and turned Paul over to his custody. When the governor had read the letter, he asked them what province Paul came from. They informed him Paul was from Cilicia. Felix then said to Paul: ‘I will fully hear your case when your accusers have come.’ He ordered that Paul should be kept in Herod’s praetorium” (verses 31-35).

Antipatris was an ancient city on the way from Jerusalem to Caesarea. The exact location of it is debated today, but we may assume it was about halfway between the two cities. The soldiers and spearman returned to Jerusalem, but the cavalymen continued on to Caesarea. The letter from Claudius Lysias was delivered to Governor Felix who inquired of Paul’s home province. He then stated he would hear Paul’s case whenever His Jewish accusers came down from Jerusalem.

Review Questions

1. What did Paul say that provoked the high priest to demand that he be struck on the mouth?
2. What did Paul call the high Priest? Why?
3. What was a major difference in belief between the Pharisees and the Sadducees?
4. For what reason did Paul say he was being judged?
5. Why did the commander order his soldiers to take Paul by force and bring him back into the fortress?
6. Give three examples of the Lord's assuring Paul that he would be safe from those who would harm him?
7. What was the plot of the Jews to kill Paul?
8. What was the curse under which the conspirators placed themselves?
9. Who overheard the plot and told Paul about it?
10. What did the commander do to save Paul from his would be assassins?
11. What was the commander's actual name?
12. What was the lie Claudius Lysias told to the governor?
13. T or F: The commander found no charges against Paul that were worthy of death or imprisonment.
14. T or F: Claudius Lysias rescued Paul from the Jewish mob in the temple because he knew Paul was a Roman citizen.
15. Who was the Roman governor over the Jews at this time?
16. Where was the seat of the Roman government over Judea located?
17. How did the commander provide for Paul as he traveled to Caesarea?
18. Discussion question: Was Paul wrong for reprimanding the high priest?

Chapter 24:

DEFENSE BEFORE FELIX

Paul was rescued from a Jewish mob the second time by Claudius Lysias, commander of the Roman cohort in the Fortress of Antonia overlooking the temple grounds in Jerusalem. Having learned of a plot to kill Paul by more than forty Jews who had placed themselves under a curse neither to eat nor drink anything until they had killed Paul, the commander sent Paul to Caesarea under heavy guard to be tried by Felix who was the governor of the Roman province that included Judea. Felix waited until the Jewish Council came to Caesarea to put Paul on trial.

“After five days Ananias, the high priest, along with the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, came down to Caesarea to accuse Paul before the governor. Tertullus, representing the Council, spoke first. He began his speech by thanking Felix for the peace they enjoyed under his rule, and for the worthy deeds Felix had done for the Jewish people. He then said: ‘Lest we waste your time, we beg you to hear us briefly according to your kindness.’ Tertullus then stated the Jews’ case against Paul by accusing him of four things: (1) He was a pestilent fellow; (2) He stirred up the Jews throughout the world to rebel; (3) He was the chief leader of the Nazarenes, a sect among the Jews; (4) He had attempted to defile the temple of the Jews. Tertullus further claimed that they wanted to judge Paul according to their laws but Lysias had interfered, and with great force, had taken him out of their hands. He went on to say, ‘When you have examined Paul yourself, you will see that this is true. All the other Jews joined in the charges against Paul affirming this was the truth’ (verses 1-9).

Five days after Paul had been sent by night under armed guard to Felix, the governor and Ananias, the Jewish high priest, along with other members of the Sanhedrin and their spokesman, Tertullus, came to Caesarea to present their case against Paul. Tertullus began by praising the governor for the peace they enjoyed under him. This was somewhat of a hypocritical compliment since the Jews were quick to oppose the governor and easily aroused to opposition, even violence, against Roman rule.

After his hollow words of praise, Tertullus stated the Jews’ case in four major charges: First, Paul was a pest. The word in the original might also be translated as “plague” as in the NKJV, or as “trouble-maker” (McCord). Second, Paul had stirred up dissension among the Jews all over the world. Third, Paul was one of the main leader of the sect of the Jews known as “Nazarenes.” Fourth, Paul had even attempted to desecrate the temple of the Jews. They had

arrested him intending to judge him according to their law (actually, to beat or stone him) when Lysias had interfered. He took Paul away from them and demanded they appear before the governor. The accusers also told Felix he could find out these things for himself by questioning Paul. The other Jews all chimed in and affirmed this was the truth.

“When the governor gave him permission to speak, Paul answered: ‘Since I know you have been a judge of this nation for a long time I gladly defend myself before you. You can easily confirm that it has not been more than twelve days since I came to Jerusalem to worship. They neither found me debating anyone or stirring up the people either in the temple or in the synagogues or in any city. Further, they cannot prove any of the things of which they have accused me’ (verses 10-13).

Paul was courteous and respectful as he presented his defense. He stated his confidence in Felix because he had been a judge over the Jewish people for several years and therefore was aware of their history, customs, and religion. Paul said he had only been back in Jerusalem for a few days, not long enough to do any of the things of which he had been accused. His purpose in being in the temple was to worship, not to cause trouble. In fact, he was actually there to complete a Jewish vow when the mob of Jews in the temple had taken him. Paul had neither engaged in a discussion or debate or was doing anything else to stir up the people when he was arrested in the temple. Further, the high priest and the Sanhedrin had no proof whatsoever to substantiate their charges against him.

“But this I will confess that according to the Way which they call a sect, I do serve the God of our fathers. I believe all things which are written in the Law and the prophets. I have the same hope in God which they also have. I believe there will be a resurrection of all the dead, of both the just and the unjust. Because of this I strive always to keep my conscience clear toward God and men. After several years, I came bringing gifts and offerings to my people. While doing this they found me purified in the temple. I was not involved with a mob nor stirring up a tumult. Some Jews from Asia saw me there. They ought to be here to accuse me if they believe I have done anything wrong. Let them say what crime they found in me when I stood before the Council unless it was my statement, ‘This day I am being judged by you regarding the resurrection of the dead.’ Felix, however, having more accurate knowledge of the Way, adjourned the proceedings saying, ‘When Lysias, the commander, comes down, I will make a decision in your case.

He also gave orders to the centurion to keep Paul in custody, but to let him have liberty and not to forbid any of his friends to visit him or take care of his needs” (verses 14-23).

Paul continued his defense before Felix. He admitted that he served God according to “the Way.” The Jews called the Way a sect. The Greek word translated “sect” is the word from which our English word “heresy” comes. A sect is a religious party or faction that is centered around a particular teaching that is not emphasized by the majority of the adherents of a religion (see Webster; also Vine, p. 335). Heresies are listed by the apostle Paul among the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21. Here it is speaking of those who have departed from the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

“The Way” has reference to the church of Christ which was promised by the prophets (Joel 2, Isaiah 2, Daniel 2) and fulfilled on Pentecost (Acts 2). Jesus is the builder of His church (Matt. 16:16-19). He bought it with His own blood (Acts 20:28). He is its head and it is His body (Eph. 1:22,23; 3:10,11; Col. 1:18). He has only one body (Eph. 4:4-6). He is the Savior of His body, the church (Eph. 5:23) He alone is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” the only Way to God (John 14:6). Apart from Him there is no salvation (Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:11,12). To be saved is to be in Christ (Gal. 3:26,27). To be in Christ is to be in His church (Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 12:13). Those outside of Christ are outside of His body, the church. Therefore, they are lost unless they obey the Gospel.

The unbelieving Jews considered the church of Christ to be merely a heresy that had sprung out of the Jewish religion. They denied that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, despite the overwhelming evidence of the miracles worked by Jesus plus His own resurrection from the dead (John 20:30, 31). Jesus was the Hope of Israel! Since Jesus is the Savior and is coming again to raise the dead and judge all who have ever lived, Paul strove always to keep his conscience clear so he would be ready to meet the Lord (Matt. 25:31-46; 2 Cor. 5:10).

Felix listened to Paul up to this point. He had a general knowledge of Jesus and the church already. He delayed making a decision. He simply told Tertullus, the high priest and the Council, “When Lysias comes down I will inquire into the matters again” and dismissed them. He then gave orders to the centurion who was in charge of Paul that he was to allow him a certain amount of freedom. After all, Paul was a Roman citizen and he had not yet been convicted of any of the charges brought against him. Felix also told the centurion that he must allow Paul’s friends free access to him and permit them to assist him in anything he needed.

“After some time had passed, Felix and his wife, Drusilla, a Jewess, sent for Paul and heard what he had to say about the faith in Christ Jesus. As Paul reasoned of righteousness and self-control, and the coming Judgment, Felix was terrified. He told Paul: ‘Go your way for the present time and when I have a convenient time I will send for you.’ At the same time he hoped Paul would give him money in order to gain his freedom. Therefore, he sent for Paul frequently and talked with him. After two years had passed, Felix was replaced by Porcius Festus. In order to please the Jews, Felix left Paul in bonds” (verses 24-27).

Felix, once a slave who had been freed, was described as one who “during his governorship indulged in all kinds of cruelty and lust, exercising regal power with the disposition of a slave” (Unger, p. 405). Drusilla, his third wife, was a princess, the daughter of King Agrippa I who had James the apostle killed and had taken Peter prisoner. For his sinful deeds he died by the judgment of God. He died a very painful death being eaten by worms (Acts 12). Drusilla was the sister of Herod Agrippa II who will be mentioned in chapter 25. She was considered to be a very beautiful woman. She had originally been married to King Azizus of Emesa, but was lured away from him by Felix.

Felix and Drusilla called for Paul to come before them to inform them about the faith in Jesus Christ. Paul used the occasion to convict the adulterous couple of their sins and of the fact that they would one day be judged by the God who created all things. Paul reasoned first of righteousness. The only way for sinful men and women to become righteous is by the Gospel of Christ by which our sins can be forgiven (Rom. 1:16; 16:17,18; 1 Cor. 15:1-4). He then reasoned of “temperance” (KJV) or “self-control” (NKJV). Self-control is a Christian grace that must be added to a Christian’s virtues (2 Peter 1:5-7). Finally, Paul reasoned of “the Judgment to come.” When the Lord comes again with His holy angels, He is coming to “judge the world in righteousness.” Every person who has ever lived to an age of accountability will have to give an account of himself before God (Romans 14:12). One’s eternal destiny will be determined by the outcome of that judgment (Eccl. 12:13,14; Rev. 20:12).

Luke does not relate the reaction of Drusilla to Paul’s preaching but he tells us that Felix was terrified! However, instead of repenting, Felix dismissed Paul saying, “Go your way for now, but when I have a more convenient time, I will call for you.” Felix had an evil motive in calling for Paul from time to time. He perhaps remembered how Paul had said he had brought “gifts and offerings” for his people (v. 17). Felix often sent for Paul hoping that he would be given a bribe by either Paul or his friends for Paul’s release. Two years passed and Paul

was still imprisoned. A new governor came to replace Felix, but Felix left Paul in custody to gain favor with the Jews!

Review Questions

1. T - F Twice Paul had to be rescued by Claudius Lysias from a Jewish mob in the temple.
2. What are the four accusations Tertullus made against Paul?
3. T - F Paul was in the temple to complete a Jewish vow when the mob took him captive.
4. Name the four reasons Paul gave to show he was innocent of the charges brought against him.
5. Why did Paul always strive to keep his conscience clear before God?
6. What is "The Way" that Paul spoke of?
7. T - F Those outside of the Lord's church are outside of His body.
8. When Paul reasoned of _____, self control and _____ before Felix and his wife, what did Felix tell Paul? _____

9. When Felix was replaced by another governor, why did he leave Paul in custody?
10. Every person who is of an age of _____
_____ will be judged by the Lord at His second coming.
11. What was the name of the governor who replaced Felix?
12. Who was the father of Drusilla?
13. What did Felix hope he would receive by keeping Paul in custody and sending for him often?
14. How long was Paul imprisoned in Caesarea?

Felix, like a true politician, left Paul as a prisoner when he was replaced by Festus as the Roman governor. He did this for a favor to the Jews. He knew Paul was not guilty of any of the charges brought against him by the Jews, but he had kept him imprisoned hoping that either Paul or his friends would give a bribe for his release. When this failed, Felix thought the Jews would feel more kindly disposed toward him if he left Paul in custody.

“Three days after Festus came to the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. The chief priests and the elders came before him and brought charges against Paul. They appealed to Festus and requested that as a favor to them he would command Paul to be brought to Jerusalem to answer their accusations against him. They planned to ambush him on the way and kill him. Festus, however, answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea and he himself would return there very soon. Festus said: ‘Let those among you who are able, go down with me to Caesarea and accuse him there. Then we will see if this man has done anything wrong’” (verses 1-5).

Caesarea was the Roman capital of the province that included Judea. Jerusalem, however, was the site of the great Jewish temple and therefore the center of the Jewish religion. The leading people among the Jews were to be found there and good will had to be maintained with them if the governor was to succeed in his job. Therefore, Festus visited Jerusalem and stayed several days after he had arrived. Paul’s Jewish enemies had planned to assassinate him on his journey to Jerusalem. However, Festus refused their request to take his prisoner to Jerusalem to stand trial. Since he was returning to Caesarea in a few days, Festus asked them to come and he would convene a hearing so that they could bring their charges against Paul. Their plan being foiled, Paul’s accusers had no choice but to go to Caesarea to testify against him.

“After Festus had been in Jerusalem eight or ten days, he returned to Caesarea. The next day, he sat on the judgment seat and ordered Paul to be brought before him. When Paul was brought in the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him. They laid many serious charges against him but they lacked proof for any of them. Paul defended himself saying: ‘I have not broken the laws of the Jews, or committed any offense regarding the temple. Neither have I committed any offense against Caesar.’ However, Festus, wanting to please the Jews, asked Paul: ‘Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem, and there answer the charges about

these matters?’ Paul replied: ‘I am standing before Caesar’s judgment seat where I ought to be judged. You know very well that I have not done any wrong to the Jews. If indeed I am a lawbreaker or have done anything worthy of death, I am willing to die, but if there is no truth in the things of which they accuse me, no one has the right to turn me over to the Jews just to please them. I therefore appeal to Caesar!’ When Festus had conferred with his advisors, he declared to Paul: ‘You have appealed to Caesar. Therefore, to Caesar you shall go!’” (verses 6-12).

Festus completed his introductory visit to Jerusalem in eight to ten days and returned to Caesarea. The following day, he convened the court and had Paul brought before him. The Jews from Jerusalem made many charges against Paul but could not prove any of them. Paul then summed up his defense: ‘I am not guilty of breaking any of the laws of the Jews or committing sacrilege against the temple. Neither have I broken the law of the Romans.’ This should have ended the matter. However, politics interfered and justice was not done. Festus, like Felix before him, wanted to please the Jews. He made a last desperate effort to do so. ‘Are you willing to go back to Jerusalem and answer these charges?’ he asked. Paul now realized that he had no hope of receiving justice from a corrupt Roman governor or a biased Jewish council. However, he had one last hope left. As a Roman citizen, he had the right to demand a hearing before the Roman emperor himself. He decided to do it. How shocked and angry his Jewish accusers must have been when they realized they had lost their opportunity to get rid of Paul, a hated traitor in their minds! Festus had shown the Jews he was partial to their cause when he asked Paul to go to Jerusalem and face his accusers as the Jews requested. Most likely he was happy that he would soon be relieved of any responsibility for Paul.

“After some days had passed, King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus. Several days later, Festus discussed Paul’s case with the king saying: ‘There is a certain man who was left in custody by Felix. When I was in Jerusalem, the chief priests and Jewish elders asked me to hand down a judgment against him. I told them that it was not the custom of the Romans to condemn anyone to die who had not first had the opportunity to face his accusers and defend himself against the charges brought against him. When the Jews came down to Caesarea, I convened the court and commanded the accused man, Paul, to appear. His accusers did not bring such charges as I imagined they would. Instead, they had accusations about their own religion and also about a man named Jesus who had died, but whom Paul declared was alive. Because I had no idea what to do about such questions, I asked Paul if he would be willing to go up to

Jerusalem and there be judged. Paul, however, appealed to be heard by Caesar. I have kept him here until I can send him to Rome. Agrippa replied to Festus: 'I have been wanting to hear this man.' 'Then you shall hear him tomorrow,' Festus replied' (verses 13-22).

There are several members of the family of Herod the Great mentioned in the New Testament. It would be wise for the reader to go to a Bible dictionary to refresh his memory of this influential family. The Herod Agrippa mentioned here is Herod Agrippa II. He was the son of Herod Agrippa I who killed the apostle James (Acts 12). He was the brother of Drusilla, the wife of Felix, the former governor (Acts 24:24). He was also the brother of Bernice who came with him to visit Festus. Herod Agrippa II was only 17 years old when his father died. He was brought up in the royal household with Claudias Caesar. When Claudias became emperor, Agrippa II was made king of two territories that had formerly been ruled by Philip and Lysanius (Luke 3:1). This area was north and east of the Sea of Galilee. The capital city was Caesarea Philippi.

Bernice was married to her uncle, Chalcis, by whom she had two sons. She then lived with her brother Agrippa II in what was commonly believed to be an incestuous relationship. Later, she married Polemon, the king of Cilicia, but left him and returned to Agrippa II. Still later, she became the mistress of Vespasian and then of his son, Titus. Vespasian began the siege of Jerusalem, but left the completion of it in the hands of his son, Titus, when he was called to Rome to become the emperor (Unger, 563-565).

It was customary to welcome a fellow ruler who had been recently appointed. Journeys were long so visits were seldom brief. Governors and kings would "talk shop" just as those in other occupations do when they visit with members of the same profession or trade. After his visitors had been with him for a long time, Festus told Agrippa about Paul, the prisoner that Felix had left in his custody. Paul was waiting to be sent to Rome to appear before Caesar, but Festus was at a loss to know what to charge against him. He hoped that Agrippa with his Jewish background would have a better understanding of the beliefs of the Jews, and therefore would be able to help him formulate charges against Paul.

When Agrippa heard that Paul was Festus' prisoner, he exclaimed: 'I have been wanting to hear this man!' 'Then tomorrow you shall have the opportunity,' Festus replied. He must have been elated that now at last he would have specific charges against Paul which would justify sending him to appear before the emperor.

“On the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice arrived with great pomp and ceremony, they entered the auditorium accompanied by the officials and leading citizens of the city. Then at Festus’ order, Paul was led in. Festus declared: ‘King Agrippa and all who are present, look at this man against whom all the multitude of the Jews have brought complaints, here and in Jerusalem. They insist that he is deserving of death! I have not found that he has done anything deserving death, but because he has appealed to be heard by the emperor I determined to send him. I have nothing definite to write to my superior about why I am sending him. I have brought him before all of you and especially King Agrippa so that after hearing him I may have something to write. It seems unreasonable to me to send a prisoner without indicating the charges against him” (verses 23-27).

Whether or not Paul had advance notice that he was going to appear before such a large and affluent crowd, we are not told. He may not have had opportunity to prepare any remarks for the occasion. However, as an apostle, having been miraculously endowed by the Holy Spirit, he would always be prepared, for Jesus had told His apostles: “When they deliver up, do not take any thought about how or what you will say for it will be revealed to you in that hour what to speak because it will not be you who are speaking but the Spirit of your Father who is speaking through you” (Matt. 10:19, 20; Luke 12:11,12).

Festus introduced Paul to King Agrippa and the other guests, the officers of the army, government officials, and the “upper crust” of the society in Caesarea, the provincial capital. The Lord had told Ananias when He spoke to him to send him to Paul: “Go, because he is my chosen vessel, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:22). Here is an occasion when Paul is speaking before a king, a governor, and various army officers and other folks who would be among the leaders in society. Before the book of Acts ends, Paul will be in Rome, capital of the mighty Roman Empire, awaiting an appointment to appear before the emperor himself.

Review Questions

1. Why did Felix leave Paul in custody when he was replaced as governor?
2. T - F: Felix hoped that a bribe would be given to him to release Paul.
3. T - F: Jerusalem was the Roman capital of the province that included Judea.
4. Why did the Jewish leaders want Paul brought to Jerusalem for trial?

5. Paul said he had not broken the laws of the _____ or committed any offense regarding the _____ or committed any offense against _____.
6. What was Paul's last hope to be set free?
7. How had Festus shown his partiality toward the Jews who wanted to kill Paul?
8. Who was the father of Herod Agrippa II? What evil deed had he (the father) done? How did he die?
9. What was Bernice's relationship to Herod Agrippa II?
10. What was Bernice's relationship to Drusilla, the wife of Felix?
11. Why did Festus want Agrippa to hear Paul?
12. How was Acts 9:15 fulfilled when Paul defended himself before Festus and Agrippa?
13. Name another ruler before whom Paul would eventually be tried?
14. T - F: Festus was at a loss to know what the charges against Paul were.
15. Besides Agrippa, Festus and Bernice, who were the other people who were invited to hear Paul's defense?
16. Why didn't Paul have to prepare his defense? Who had foretold this? Where is the Scripture found where this is related?
17. What did Paul do when he realized he would not receive justice from a Roman governor?
18. Over what territory did Herod Agrippa II rule?
19. Besides her brother, Herod Agrippa II, who were some of the other lovers of Bernice?
20. To whom only was the right given to appeal to the emperor?
21. T - F: Festus did not believe Paul had done anything that required the death penalty.

Governor Felix had been recalled by Rome and Porcius Festus took his place. Felix had left office with Paul still a prisoner. Festus now had to decide what to do with Paul. The Jewish leaders demanded that Festus send Paul to Jerusalem to be tried before the Sanhedrin. Their intent was to lie in wait and kill him on the way from Jerusalem. Instead, Festus insisted they come to Caesarea and he would hear their complaints against Paul. The Jews made many accusations against Paul which they could not prove. Festus should have released him but he wanted to please the Jews. Therefore, he asked Paul if he was willing to go to Jerusalem to be tried once again. Paul realized he was not going to receive justice from the hands of Festus. As a last resort, he exercised his right as a Roman citizen to be heard by the emperor himself. He remained in custody in Caesarea until arrangements could be made to send him to Rome. When King Agrippa II came to visit the new governor, Festus arranged a meeting where Paul would be given a hearing. After hearing Paul, he hoped Agrippa could help him formulate some charges against him.

“Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘You may speak for yourself.’ Paul gestured for silence and began. He said: ‘King Agrippa, I am pleased to make my defense before you regarding all the accusations the Jews have made. I am especially pleased to do this since you are acquainted with all the customs and questions among the Jewish people. I ask you therefore to please hear me patiently. My manner of life from my earliest days among my own nation as well as in Jerusalem is known to all the Jews. They could testify of this if they would that I was a Pharisee, the strictest of all the sects among the Jews. I am standing here now to be judged for the hope of the promise God made to our ancestors. This is the promise that our twelve tribes who earnestly serve God day and night hope to receive. Why should it be thought incredible by you that God should raise the dead?’” (verses 1-8).

Festus had convened the meeting, but it appears that Agrippa was in charge. He gave Paul the opportunity to make his defense. Paul was very courteous in everything he said. He complimented Agrippa by mentioning that he was an expert in the religion of the Jews. His father, Agrippa I, was known for his rigid observance of Jewish rituals. His son would have received a thorough training in the essentials of Judaism in his early years. Paul then stated that his life was well known to the Jews. He had been brought up as the son of a Pharisee and was himself a Pharisee, the strictest sect among the Jews. It is important to remember that the Sadducees were the chief adversaries of the Pharisees and they were in the majority in the Sanhedrin.

They differed with the Pharisees for they denied the resurrection of the body, the existence of angels and the presence of a spirit in man (Acts 23:8).

Paul said he was being judged because he believed in the promise God had made to Israel. The promise was of a Savior, the Messiah, who would make salvation possible for man (Isa. 53). Jesus fulfilled this promise. The cardinal proof of it was His resurrection from the dead (Psa. 16:8-11; Acts 2:24-32; John 20:1-29; Rom. 1:1-4; 1 Cor. 15:1-4). He was being opposed by his fellow Jews because he taught the very hope that God had promised their ancestors for generations. Paul then turned his attention directly on Agrippa and asked, "Why do you have trouble believing that God can raise the dead?" Why should the Jews have a problem believing in Jesus' resurrection? If God could create man from dust and give him life, why would it be any more difficult for Him to raise him from the dead?

"Indeed, I thought I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. These things I did in Jerusalem. With full authority of the chief priests, I arrested many of the holy ones and put them in prison. I also gave my approval for putting them to death. I punished them in the synagogues and forced them to blaspheme. I was so angry against them that I pursued them even in foreign cities. For this purpose I was on my way to Damascus with authorization from the chief priests when at mid-day I saw a light from heaven. It was exceedingly bright, even brighter than the sun. It shined around me and those who were with me. All of us fell to the earth. I heard a voice speaking to me in Hebrew. The voice said to me, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' Then I said: 'Who are You, Lord?' He answered, 'I am Jesus Whom you are persecuting, but get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you for the purpose of making you a servant and a witness, both of what you have seen already, and of the things in which I will appear unto you. I will deliver you from the people and from the Gentiles unto whom I am now sending you. You will open their eyes in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God so that they may receive the forgiveness of their sins and an inheritance among those who are set apart by faith in Me" (verses 9-18).

Paul believed with all his fervent being that Jesus was a false Messiah, an imposter, who was leading God's people astray. Believing he was doing God's will he did everything in his power to destroy the church of Christ. With full authorization from the chief priests, he put Christians in prison. He voted for their execution. He forced them to blaspheme, which they did if they denied

that Jesus was the Christ, the only begotten Son of God, man's only Savior. His fury against the Christians was so great that he even went to foreign cities and hunted them. When he found them, he brought them in chains to Jerusalem to stand trial. When they were convicted of being Christians, he voted for them to be killed.

Paul also related that he was on his way to Damascus in the neighboring nation of Syria on a commission from the chief priests to arrest Christians when suddenly he and those with him were blinded by a great light from heaven. It was even brighter than the noonday sun. He and those with him fell to the earth. He heard a voice speaking only to him. In Hebrew the voice asked why he was persecuting Him. Paul cried out, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply was one that Paul surely never forgot: "I am Jesus, Whom you are persecuting!" Jesus is the head of His church which is His body (Col. 1:18). If one harms the members of His body, He is guilty of harming the Lord. To persecute a follower of Christ is the same as if one were to persecute the Christ Himself!

Jesus told Saul to stand up. He told him that He had appeared to Him to make him a servant (minister) and a witness of what he had seen and of the things He would reveal to him. Further, He would send Paul to the Gentiles to turn them from the darkness of sin and ignorance to righteousness and truth, and from serving Satan to serving God. They would receive the forgiveness of their sins and an inheritance in Heaven along with the others who would be set apart by faith.

"I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, O King Agrippa, but I declared to those in Damascus, Jerusalem, Judea, and to the Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God, doing works to show they had repented. Because of this work, the leaders of the Jews seized me in the temple and violently attacked me intending to kill me. God helped me and I am still alive to this day and have continued testifying to small and great what Moses and the prophets had foretold, that the Christ would suffer and be raised from the dead and proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles" (verses 19-23).

Paul was baptized into Christ to have his sins washed away (Acts 9:18; 22:16). He then began a ministry of preaching the Gospel in Damascus, Jerusalem, Judea and to Gentile lands. Eventually, he preached in Rome and perhaps even further west in Spain before he died as a martyr. He taught that both Jews and Gentiles must repent and turn to God {be baptized} (Acts 2:38). They must then show their repentance by faithful Christian living revealing their faith by their works (James 2:14-26).

When Paul came to Jerusalem to bring a collection from the churches among the Gentiles to aid their needy brethren and others, he was violently seized by a Jewish mob in the temple who would have killed him if he had not been rescued by the Roman soldiers from the nearby Fortress of Antonia. In spite of this Paul had continued to proclaim only that message which Moses and the prophets had foretold of the coming of the Christ and His resurrection from the dead.

“While Paul was making his defense, Festus called out in a loud voice, ‘Paul, you are insane! Your great learning has driven you insane!’ Paul replied, ‘I am not insane, most noble Festus, but I am speaking words of truth and sanity. The king to whom I now speak freely understands these things. I am sure none of them are hidden from him for these things have not been done secretly. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe!’ Then Agrippa said to Paul: ‘Do you think you can persuade me to become a Christian in such a short time?’ Paul replied, ‘I could wish to God that - whether in a short or a long time - not only you, but also everyone who hears me today would become as I am, except for these bonds’ (McCord, p. 282). The king, the governor, Bernice and those who sat with them stood up. When they had gone aside privately, they talked among themselves. They agreed that Paul had done nothing worthy of death or even of being imprisoned. Agrippa said to Festus, ‘This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to be heard by the emperor!’” (verses 24-32).

The audience must have been startled by the outburst of Governor Festus! Festus, however, was a pagan if he was religious at all. What Paul was saying about the resurrection of Jesus and the hope of the resurrection was not commonly believed among the heathen in the Roman Empire in that day. It simply seemed crazy to Festus. Perhaps he felt he had heard enough of what he considered to be nonsense? He erupted, and loudly interrupted Paul as he continued speaking. The apostle was gracious and diplomatic. He did not become angry or scold Festus in any way. He turned his attention to Agrippa saying, “I am sure the king is aware of these things for they have not happened secretly.” He then asked the king, “King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?” Without waiting for a reply, Paul said: “I know that you believe.” Perhaps the look on Agrippa’s face told him of the king’s faith in the writing of the prophets?

Agrippa’s reply to Paul has often been quoted as it is given in the King James Version of the Bible: “Almost, thou persuadest me to be a Christian.”

This translation has often been challenged and has been changed in most, if not all current English versions. H. Leo Boles wrote: “The Authorized Version has Agrippa saying, ‘Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.’ ‘En oligio’ does not mean ‘almost,’ but it is not clear what it does mean. Some think it may refer to ‘time’ ‘in little time,’ while others think that it means ‘with small effort you are trying to persuade me to be a Christian;’ while still others think Agrippa is speaking ironically, but not unpleasantly. He seems to push it aside for the time being, as if to say: ‘Do you think you can make me become a Christian by your speech making?’” (Boles, pp. 409, 410). Paul’s reply seems to indicate that the translation “Do you think that in a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?” is most likely the correct translation. More recent translations such as the New American Standard Bible, the English Standard Bible, and McCord’s Translation support this.

Paul graciously replied to Festus’ outburst by saying, “I wish that - whether in a long time or a short time- not only you, but everyone who hears me today would become such as I am, except these bonds” (McCord). Paul was still a prisoner even though he was addressing a king and a governor and others of high social standing. He would have been chained by one arm to a Roman soldier but had one arm free with which to gesture (cf. v.1). He desired that all would become Christians, but he did not desire that they become prisoners.

At this point King Agrippa stood up and the others with him followed his example. As they discussed the occasion later, they all agreed that Paul was an innocent man. He was not guilty of any of the things of which he was accused. Agrippa summed up the feeling of everyone when he said: “This man might have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar!”

Review Questions

1. Why did the Jewish accusers want Festus to send Paul to Jerusalem?
2. Why did Festus want Agrippa to hear Paul’s defense?
3. T - F The Sadducees were the strictest of all the sects among the Jews.
4. Who was the father of Herod Agrippa II? What do you know about him?
5. What were the the chief differences between the Sadducees and the Pharisees?
6. What is the cardinal proof that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?

7. Who gave Paul authority to arrest Christians and put them in prison?
8. How did Paul force Christians to blaspheme?
9. T - F Paul heard a voice speaking to him in Greek when the Lord appeared to him on the road to Damascus.
10. T - F Paul was guilty of persecuting Christ when he persecuted Christians.
11. Why did the Lord appear to Saul on the road to Damascus?
12. A minister is a _____.
13. T - F To persecute a follower of Christ is the same as to persecute Christ.
14. What had Moses and the prophets foretold about the Christ?
15. Why was Paul baptized into Christ?
16. Name the places (nations, provinces, cities, etc) where Paul preached the Gospel?
17. How does a follower of Jesus show he has repented of his sins?
18. God sent Paul to the Gentiles to turn them from darkness to _____ and from the power of _____ to _____.
19. Paul had been brought up by his father who was a _____.
20. Why couldn't Paul be set free since all agreed he was not guilty of the things he was accused of by the Jews?
21. Festus accused Paul of being _____ because of his great _____.
22. Discuss Agrippa's statement: "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (KJV). Is it the best translation? Is the translation in modern versions such as the New American Standard Bible and the English Standard Version more accurate?
23. T - F: Paul taught what Moses and the prophets taught about the Christ.

Chapter 27:

PAUL'S VOYAGE TO ROME

After Paul's hearing before King Agrippa, Bernice, Festus, the chief captains and the principal men of the city of Caesarea, Agrippa summed up the case against Paul by saying, "This man might have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar." However, he had appealed to Caesar and therefore Festus was obligated to send him.

"And when it was determined for us that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul as well as some other prisoners to a centurion named Julius. Julius was of the Augustan regiment. We embarked on a ship from Adramyttium which was about to sail to ports along the coast of Asia. We then put out to sea. Aristarchus from the Macedonian city of Thessalonica accompanied us. The following day we arrived at Sidon where Julius kindly permitted Paul to go ashore to receive care from his friends. When we put out to sea from Sidon, we sailed under the shelter of Cyprus because the winds were against us. After we had sailed over the sea off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. There the captain found an Alexandrian ship bound for Italy, and he put us on it" (verses 1-6).

As we read of Paul's long and dangerous journey across the sea on the way to Rome, it is helpful to follow it on a map. Maps of Paul's voyage are found in many Bible dictionaries and geographies as well as in the back of most editions of the Bible. Paul was not alone on this journey. There were other prisoners also being sent to stand trial in the great city which presided over the largest and most powerful empire the world had known up to that time. A Roman centurion named Julius was in charge of the prisoners. He was assisted by other soldiers as is later indicated (cf. v. 32).

Julius was possibly a citizen of Rome for he bore the name of the first emperor, Julius Caesar. Centurions are frequently mentioned in the Gospel accounts as well as the book of Acts. They were the backbone of the Roman army commanding the basic unit of one hundred soldiers. We meet several centurions in the New Testament and all appear to be good, noble men. Among them were centurions who interacted with Jesus. Of one, Jesus said, "I have not found so great a faith in Israel as his" (Matt. 8:5-13). The centurion who presided over the crucifixion, though he must have been a hardened man, was convicted by Jesus' behavior during that terrible ordeal as well as the unusual disturbances in nature and confessed: "Surely this man was the Son of God" (Matt. 27:50-54). Perhaps the most outstanding example of a centurion was Cornelius who was said to be "a devout man, and one who feared God with all

his house, and who gave alms to the people and prayed to God always” (Acts 10:1,2).

When the ship carrying the prisoners landed at the port of Sidon, Paul was permitted by Julius to go ashore to receive care from his friends. Undoubtedly, this shows he had great respect for Paul. Later, Julius prevented his soldiers from killing the prisoners to keep them from escaping. His reason for doing this was that he wanted to spare Paul (ch. 27:42,43).

It was late in the season that was suitable for sailing the Mediterranean Sea. As a result, difficulties were experienced almost from the beginning. At Lycia, Julius found a ship from Alexandria in Egypt. Egypt was the chief supplier of grain to Rome. The fertile fields and plentiful waters of the Nile River made grain Egypt’s major export. The city of Rome depended upon it. Large vessels carrying grain and passengers traveled the sea between Alexandria and various Italian ports. Julius found passage on this vessel for himself and his soldiers and the prisoners they were escorting to Rome.

“We sailed slowly for many days and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind hindering our reaching it. Then we sailed under the shelter of Crete opposite Salmone. We passed it with difficulty and came to a place known as Fair Havens near the city of Lasea. Since much time had passed and sailing had now become dangerous (and the fast was past), Paul advised them, saying, ‘Men, I perceive this voyage is going to suffer great damage and much loss, not only of the ship but also of our lives.’ However, the centurion was influenced more by the owner of the ship and its captain than by the words of Paul” (verses 7-11).

Cnidus was a port on the southwestern tip of Asia Minor (present day Turkey). Facing strong winds, the ship was unable to enter the harbor. They turned to the south in the direction of Crete. Crete is a large island. It is about 140 miles long and 35 miles wide. It is located about the same distance from Asia, Africa and Europe. Known as Caphtor in Old Testament times, it was the home of the Philistines who invaded Canaan (Jer. 47; Amos 9:7) and later became bitter enemies of Israel in the days of the judges and early kings of Israel (Pfeiffer, p. 221). The ship on which Paul was a passenger sailed with difficulty past the port of Salmone and came to a place called Fair Havens near the city of Lasea.

The season for safe sailing was now past. Paul was already a seasoned sailor. During his extensive travels, he had been shipwrecked three times and was often in perils in the sea (2 Cor. 11:25,26). He knew from experience the

dangers of traveling the sea in the winter months. He advised his fellow travelers it was dangerous to continue their journey. He could see that not only the ship and its cargo, but the lives of the passengers were in danger if they continued. Paul's warning went unheeded. The centurion was eager to get his prisoners to Rome. The captain and the owner of the ship were willing to risk the lives of the passengers in order to get their cargo to Rome. Therefore, they continued on their hazardous journey.

“Now because the harbor was not suitable for spending the winter, the majority of the passengers expressed a desire to sail from there, and if possible, reach Phoenix and spend the winter where there was a Cretan harbor which faced southwest and northwest. When the south wind blew gently, they supposed they had achieved their purpose so they weighed anchor and coasted as close as possible to Crete. Not long after, a violent storm, a northeaster, swept down. The ship was unable to resist the strong wind. We gave way to the wind and were driven before it. Running along the shelter of a small island called Clauda, it was difficult to secure the ship's boat. We hoisted it aboard and used the ropes to help undergird the ship. Because they were afraid they would run aground on the sand banks of Syrtis, the sailors lowered the mainsail and were driven before the wind. The next day we began to throw the freight overboard for we were greatly storm-tossed. On the third day, the crew threw the ship's furniture overboard. For the next several days, neither sun nor stars appeared and a great tempest beat down upon us. All hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned” (verses 12-20).

No suitable place could be found where the ship could remain throughout the winter and resume her journey in the spring. The passengers, it appears, took command of the ship for their lives were at stake. They voted to go to an island called Phoenix where they had difficulty securing the skiff. They lifted it up out of the water, taking it on board, then used the ropes to undergird and strengthen the ship. They were afraid they would be driven by the winds to Syrtis, a great sand bank along the north coast of Africa where they would run aground and be lost (Unger, p. 1236). They continued this way for several days with the wind pushing the ship slowly in a northwestward direction. There were no stars at night nor sun to be seen in the daytime. They were in the midst of a typhoon. The incessant storm and darkness left them without hope!

“After they had gone without eating for a long time, Paul stood in the midst of them and said, ‘Men you should have taken my advice and not left Crete and you would not have suffered this damage and loss. Now I urge you to

take courage for there will be no loss of life among you, but only the loss of the ship. There stood by me this night an angel of the God I serve and to Whom I belong. He said, 'Fear not, Paul; you must stand before Caesar and behold, God has given you all those who are sailing with you.' Therefore men, be encouraged for I trust God that it will be just as He has said to me. However, we will be shipwrecked on a certain island" (verses 21-26).

When it seemed that all hope was lost, Paul once again stood before the occupants of the ship and addressed them. The rough seas must have caused seasickness even among the heartiest of the sailors. In addition to this, the despondence they felt at the thought they would all surely die, as well as the continual darkness, strong winds and constant downpour of rain, had all combined to cause them to lose their desire for food.

The apostle Paul now rose up from the midst of them and addressed them. He began by saying, in effect, "I told you so" for he reminded them that they had not taken his advice and stayed in Crete until the sailing season came again. He then related he had that very night received a message from an angel of God Whom he served and to Whom he belonged. The angel told him: "Do not fear for you must stand before Caesar. Besides this, God is giving you all the lives of those who will be shipwrecked with you. There will be no loss of life but only of the ship, but you will be shipwrecked on a certain island." Paul exhorted them to "Take courage for I trust God that it will be just as He has said."

"Then on the fourteenth night, while we were driven along in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight, the sailors believed they were approaching land. They took a measurement and found a depth of one hundred and twenty feet. After a little while, they took another measurement and found the depth to be ninety feet. Because we were afraid we might run aground on some rocky coast, they let down four anchors from the stern. Then we longed for the day to come. Then the sailors lowered the boat (skiff) into the sea. They were planning to escape from the ship while letting down anchors from the prow. Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, 'Unless these men remain in the ship, you cannot be saved.' Then the soldiers cut the ropes off the boat and let it fall away" (verses 27-32).

Two weeks had passed after Paul had revealed to his shipmates the message from God's angel regarding the future of those on board the ship. At midnight the ship was being driven about in the Adriatic Sea. The sailors suspected they were approaching land. We are not told how they knew but they

may have noticed a difference in sea currents. They took a measurement to check the depth of the sea and found it was 120 feet. A little later they measured again and found the depth was only 90 feet. The more shallow sea indicated they were getting closer to land. Because the ship was being carried along by the wind, the sailors feared it might run aground on rocks causing damage or injury. Therefore, they slowed the movement by letting down the anchors from the rear of the ship into the sea.

The sailors lowered the skiff into the sea. They were planning to get out before the ship sank or ran aground. Paul saw what they were doing and brought it to the attention of the centurion and his soldiers. He stated: "Unless these men remain in the ship, you cannot be saved!" This was a condition imposed by God. Salvation was in the ship just as it was in the ark in Noah's day. All outside it were lost. Today salvation is in the church of Christ which was bought by the precious blood of our Savior. One must be in His church in order to be saved (Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:38-47; 20:28; Eph. 5:23). Paul alerted the soldiers who cut the ropes and let the boat fall into the water. We must be saved in God's way or we cannot be saved at all!

"While the day was dawning, Paul encouraged everyone to eat. He said: 'This is the fourteenth day you have been keeping watch and have not eaten anything. Therefore, I beg of you to eat. This is necessary for your safety for not a hair of the head of any of you will perish. After he said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God for it in the presence of all on board. Then he broke it and ate. They were all encouraged and ate. There were 276 men on board the ship. After they all ate and were satisfied, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea. When morning came they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a certain bay had a beach. They planned to run the ship aground there if possible. They cut away the anchors and let them fall into the sea. At the same time they loosened the ropes of the rudders and raised the foresail and headed toward the beach. However, we fell into a place where two currents met. The sailors ran the vessel aground and the prow stuck fast and could not be moved. Then the stern was broken apart by the violence of the waves" (verses 33-41).

When it became apparent that they soon would be shipwrecked, Paul urged the men to eat. They needed strength and stamina to endure the shipwreck and whatever hardships might follow. Paul then set the example. He asked for bread. Food was brought and Paul gave God thanks for it in the presence of everyone.

Besides the cargo that had been on the ship, there were 276 soldiers,

sailors, prisoners and passengers. They carefully planned running the ship aground so no one would be hurt. They dropped the anchors into the sea. The rudder controlled the movement and direction of the ship. They loosened the ropes on it and left it to itself. The ship ran aground. The prow stuck fast and could not be budged. The stern was soon broken apart by the violence of the waves.

“The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to keep any of them from escaping by swimming away. However, the centurion constrained them from doing so because he wanted to save Paul. Therefore, he ordered those who could swim to jump into the water first and make their way to land. The ones who remained then left the ship on boards and other debris from the ship and made their way to land. Everyone reached the land safely” (verses 42-44).

Roman soldiers who were in charge of prisoners did not dare let them escape for they would be punished severely. Roman law required that if a prisoner who was under arrest escaped, the soldier who was guarding him would have to pay the penalty the escaped prisoner would have received. Any prisoner being taken to Rome would likely have been accused of a very serious crime. The penalty for such could have been outright execution or else having to face wild animals or powerful gladiators in the arena. The soldiers therefore were protecting their own lives by their plan to kill all the prisoners lest they escape. The nobility of Julius is seen in his preventing it because of his respect for Paul and his belief that Paul was innocent of the charges brought against him. Being a just man Julius wanted to save Paul (Reese, p. 917).

Julius ordered the ones who could swim to jump into the sea and swim to shore. Those who could not swim were told to find boards or other floating debris from the ship and paddle their way to shore. This plan was followed and everyone was saved.

Review Questions

1. What was King Agrippa's opinion about Paul's guilt?
2. Who was the centurion who was in charge of Paul on the voyage to Rome?
3. Who among the Christians accompanied Paul to Rome?
4. How did Julius show special kindness to Paul?

5. Besides Julius, who are some of the other noble centurions mentioned in the New Testament?
6. Which African nation supplied grain to Rome and other Italian cities?
7. What was the Old Testament name for Crete?
8. Discussion Question: Why do you think the advice of the captain and the owner of the ship was followed instead of the more sensible advice of Paul?
9. T - F An angel of God spoke to Paul and assured him there would be no loss of life on the journey across the Mediterranean Sea to Rome.
10. Fill in the blanks: "Unless these men _____ in the ship you cannot be _____."
11. T - F Paul had already been shipwrecked at least three times by the time he left on the voyage to Rome to appear before Caesar.
12. Where was Aristarchus from? What else does the Bible tell us about him?
13. Fill in the blanks: Today salvation is in the _____
14. T - F It is necessary to be in the Lord's church to be saved.
15. How many passengers were on the ship on which Paul was taken to Rome?
16. Why did the Roman soldiers fear their prisoners would escape?
17. Why did Julius oppose the plan of the soldiers to kill all the prisoners when the ship wrecked?
18. How did both swimmers and non-swimmers manage to make it to shore when the ship wrecked?
19. What did the angel tell Paul?
20. What are the banks of Syrtis? Where are they found? ?

After a tumultuous journey across the Mediterranean Sea, the grain ship from Alexandria on which the apostle Paul and his companions, Luke and Aristarchus, were traveling was shipwrecked on an island called Melita (present day Malta). Just as the angel of the Lord had promised Paul, not a single one of the 276 passengers on board was lost. The natives of the island (were friendly and hospitable to the cold, wet passengers.

“When we had escaped the ship we learned that the island upon which we had wrecked was called Melita. The local people received us with great kindness. They built a fire and brought us to it because of the cold and because the rain was setting in. As Paul was gathering a bundle of sticks for the fire, a snake came out because of the heat and fastened its fangs in Paul’s hand. When the natives saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to one another, ‘This man surely is a murderer who, though having escaped from the sea, justice has caught up with him and will not permit him to live.’ However, Paul simply shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no injury. The barbarians waited for Paul either to swell up or to suddenly fall down dead. They waited a long time. When nothing out of the ordinary happened to him, they changed their minds and said: ‘He is a god’” (verses 1-6).

The island known in ancient times as Melita is now called Malta. The shipwreck occurred on the northeastern shore of the island. Today this area is known as “St. Paul’s Bay” in honor of this Biblical event. Malta is 62 miles south of Sicily. The ancient seafaring nation of the Phoenicians originally settled the island and made it an outpost of their far flung trading empire. As the centuries unfolded, Malta was ruled by a succession of empires including Phoenician, Greek, Carthaginian and Roman. Paul and the other passengers from the shipwreck spent the winter on Melita (Pfeiffer, p. 222).

Paul was not one to sit down or stand back and let others do the work. He joined in the effort to gather dry wood to keep the fire going. A snake was hiding among some sticks he had gathered. When he brought them near the fire the snake was enlivened by the heat and bit Paul’s hand. Apparently, it sank its fangs into Paul’s hand and was hanging from it. Paul simply shook it off in the fire and continued his work. The natives watched Paul carefully. They expected he would swell up from the poison of the snake’s venom in his body and would soon die. In their pagan view of things, the gods would see that justice was done. They suspected Paul was guilty of a great sin such as murder and that somehow he had managed to survive the shipwreck, but the gods had

caught up with him. When Paul did not die, they changed their minds and decided that Paul must himself be one of the gods. They did not know that he was an apostle of Jesus Christ and had been baptized with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, he possessed miraculous gifts of the Spirit. Jesus had said of the apostles: "They will take up serpents and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them" (Mark 16:17,18; NKJV).

"Nearby were lands which belonged to the chief man of the island whose name was Publius. He welcomed us into his home and kindly entertained us for three days. It happened to be the case that Publius' father was in bed suffering from fever and dysentery. When Paul entered his room, he prayed for him and laid his hands on him and healed him. When this was done, others on the island brought their sick and they also were healed. The people honored us with many gifts. When we sailed, they supplied us with the things we needed" (verses 7-10).

Publius was said to be the "chief of the island." This means he was the chief Roman official or the governor. The name "Publius" likely has reference to his position rather than being his personal name (Unger, p. 1050). The father of Publius was ill with a malady such as malaria which is characterized by high fever and dysentery. Paul prayed for the healing of the man. He then laid his hands on him and the man was healed. Healing is one of the miraculous gifts possessed by the apostles and by those upon whom the apostles had laid hands to confer such gifts to them (Acts 8:14-24; 19:1-6; 1 Cor. 12:9). Word of this miraculous healing soon spread. Others on the island brought their sick to Paul and he healed them. In gratitude the people gave many gifts to Paul and the other shipwrecked sailors. When the time came for them to leave, the people of the island brought the supplies needed for the remainder of their journey to Rome.

"Three months later, those who were shipwrecked sailed on a ship from Alexandria which had also spent the winter on Melita. The figurehead of the ship was The Twin Brothers. They sailed to Syracuse where they stayed for three days. From there they made a circuit and came to Rhegium. After a day there, a gentle south wind began blowing, and a day later we came to Puteoli. There we found brethren who persuaded us to remain with them seven days, and afterward we went toward Rome. Now from Rome, brethren who heard about us came out as far as the marketplace of Appius Forum and Three Taverns. When Paul saw them he thanked God and was encouraged. When we arrived in Rome the centurion delivered the prisoners to the commander of the camp, but Paul was

permitted to dwell by himself with a soldier who guarded him” (verses 11-16).

The winter months passed and sailing the sea became safe once again. It so happened that another ship from Alexandria, possibly another grain ship, had wintered in Malta. Julius was able to book passage for himself and his soldiers and Paul and his companions, Luke and Aristrachus, on it. The figurehead of a ship was the head of a pagan god or goddess carved on the bow. This ship was dedicated to Castor and Pollox, the twin sons of the pagan god, Zeus, also known by the Romans as Jupiter (see v. 11 in the KJV). Pagans believed they kept travelers safe on their sea journeys (Unger, p. 215).

The ship bearing Paul and his friends sailed to Syracuse on the island of Sicily, the largest island in the Mediterranean. Here they remained for three days before continuing their journey. From Syracuse, they turned toward the boot-shaped peninsula of Italy. Crossing the Straits of Messina they arrived at Rhegium at the “toe” of the Italian “boot” (Pfeiffer, p. 222). They then sailed on to the port of Puteoli which was a major terminal for the grain ships from Africa. The church was already established in Puteoli. The brethren persuaded Paul and his company to remain with them for a week. Afterward they continued on their journey to Rome.

Apparently, word was sent ahead to brethren along the way that the apostle Paul was coming to Rome. Brethren in Christ came out as far as Appius Forum and Three Taverns to meet him. Surely, Julius and his soldiers and the other prisoners must have been impressed with Paul and his friends and the welcome they were being given as they journeyed toward Rome and an uncertain future.

When they arrived in Rome, Julius delivered the prisoners to the commander of the camp where they were to be kept until they were tried. Paul, however, was permitted to live separately along with the soldier who guarded him. It is likely that Luke and Aristarchus were received into the homes of the members of the congregations in Rome.

“After three days, Paul called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had assembled, he said to them, ‘Brethren, although I had done nothing against the people or the customs of our ancestors, I was delivered into the hands of the Romans in Jerusalem. After they had examined me they were planning to release me, for they had found no crime I had committed that was worthy of death. But when the Jews opposed it, I had no choice but to appeal to Caesar, but not because I had any accusation to bring against my

nation. Therefore, this is the reason I have asked you to come so that I could see you and speak to you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.’ Then they said to Paul, ‘We did not receive any letters from Judea about you. Neither did any of the brethren who came speak evil about you. We want to hear from you what you are thinking, for indeed as concerning this sect we know it is spoken against everywhere” (verses 17-22).

Once Paul was settled in, he sent word to the leaders of the Jews in the various synagogues in Rome to come to him. He referred to them politely as “brethren” for they were all Jews, descendants of Abraham and all shared the same hope of the coming of the Christ. He made it clear that he had done nothing against the Jewish people or their customs, but he was nevertheless delivered up by the Jews in Jerusalem to the Romans. The Roman authorities had examined him and found nothing that he had done that merited capital punishment. Therefore, they would have released him. When the Jews opposed it, the only recourse left to Paul was to use his privilege as a Roman citizen to appeal unto Caesar.

The Jews said they had not received letters about Paul nor had any others come to them speaking evil of him. They appeared to have an open mind for they assured him they simply wanted to hear what his thoughts were regarding the church. They described the church of Christ as “this sect which is spoken against everywhere.” Perhaps they regarded the church as merely another separatist group of Jews like the Pharisees, Sadducees, or Herodians or some other division among the Jews.

“A day was appointed to meet. Many of the Jews came to the place where Paul was living. He explained the kingdom of God to them, testifying and persuading them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and the Prophets from morning until evening. Some of them were persuaded by Paul’s words, but others of them did not believe his message” (verses 23, 24).

Paul had much experience teaching his fellow Jews about Jesus by proving from the Old Testament Scriptures that He was indeed the long-awaited Christ. He had preached this in many synagogues for it was always his custom to take the Gospel to the Jew first and then to the Gentiles (Rom. 1:16; Acts 13:46; 17:1,2). Paul spent the entire day teaching and showing that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies. He convinced some that Jesus was the Christ, but others refused to accept it.

“And when they did not agree among themselves, they left after Paul had spoken one final comment: ‘The Holy Spirit has rightly spoken to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet, saying, Go to this people and say, ‘In hearing you will hear, but you will not understand, The heart of this people has grown dull and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have closed their eyes lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts, and should turn again, and I should heal them. Let this be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles and they will listen.’ When he had said these things, the Jews departed discussing these things among themselves” (verses 25-29).

Paul had closed his part of the discussion by quoting a warning from Isaiah, the prophet, to the unbelieving Jews of his day: “Go to this people and say, ‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand; and seeing you will see, and not perceive.’ For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them” (Isaiah 6:9,10). Jesus had quoted this same passage to unbelieving Jews during His ministry on earth (Matt. 13:14,15). As the Jews left Paul, they continued discussing the things Paul had said and disputing about them.

“Paul lived for two full years in his own rented house and received all who came to see him. He preached the kingdom of God to them and taught them about the Lord Jesus Christ. This he was able to do freely with no restraint whatsoever on him” (verses 30,31).

Luke ended his treatise to Theophilus with a few brief words telling us that for two years Paul was allowed to dwell by himself in his own rented home where Christians, Jews and unbelievers could freely visit him. He preached the kingdom of God to them and taught them about Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, God’s Son. No restrictions were placed upon him to keep him from freely preaching the Gospel even though he was under “house arrest.” During this period of time he wrote the letters to the churches of Ephesus, Philippi and Colossae as well to Philemon, a Christian. Acts ends abruptly here. What happened to him at the end of these two years? Did Paul appear before Caesar and was sentenced to die? Or was he set free for a time and arrested again later? Various teachers, writers and scholars have differed on this and the debate has continued for centuries.

The most widely accepted view of conservative writers, and the view of the writer of this commentary, is that at the end of two years, Paul finally was

tried before Caesar's court. He was acquitted and set free. He visited the churches of Macedonia and then traveled to Ephesus, Colossae and Laodicea to spend time with the churches there. Paul then fulfilled his earlier expressed desire to take the Gospel to Spain (Rom. 15:22-24). He returned from Spain after some years, and visited again his beloved brethren in the churches he had earlier established. Paul was arrested again during this time when Nero was placing the blame for the burning of Rome on the Christians. He was taken to Rome where he was condemned to die and imprisoned awaiting his execution by beheading. During this imprisonment he wrote the "Pastoral Epistles" (1, 2 Timothy and Titus). In his second letter to Timothy, his final message to his beloved son in the faith, Paul made it plain that he was soon to be killed (2 Tim. 4:4-6). The death of Paul by beheading would have taken place in 67 or 68 A.D. According to Clement of Rome, Paul was buried in the catacombs under Rome. (For a fuller discussion see Unger, pp. 976, 977; also Conybeare and Howson, pp. 781-783).

Review Questions

1. Where was Paul buried according to Clement of Rome??
2. What is Melita called today?
3. Who were the first settlers in Melita?
4. T - F The natives on Melita thought Paul was a murderer who had escaped justice.
5. Who was Publius?
6. Whom did Paul heal on the island that caused others to bring their sick to him to be healed also?
7. How did those who were healed show their gratitude to Paul and those with him?
8. Healing was one of the _____ gifts possessed by the apostles and those upon whom they laid _____.
9. T - F Most of Italy is a peninsula which is shaped like a boot.
10. T - F Melita (Malta) is the largest island in the Mediterranean Sea.
11. Where were the prisoners taken when Julius and his soldiers arrived in

Rome? Where did Paul live?

12. Where did the Christians persuade Paul and his companions to stay with them for seven days?
13. With whom did Paul meet just three days after his arrival in Rome?
14. Paul told the Jews who met with him in Rome that the Romans had found no crime in him that was _____ of _____.
15. Why did Paul refer to the Jews as “brethren?”
16. How did the Jews describe the church of Christ?
17. Where did Paul go in the Scriptures to teach the Jews about Jesus?
18. Paul explained the _____ of God to the Jews and persuaded them about _____ from the _____ and the _____.
19. T - F It was always Paul’s custom to take the Gospel to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles.
20. T - F. The Jews who came to Paul in Rome were all convinced that Jesus was indeed the Christ.
21. T - F Melita (Malta) is 62 miles from Sicily.
22. The area where Paul was shipwrecked is called “_____” today.
23. Jesus in _____ (Scripture) predicted that the apostles could drink deadly poison or pick up serpents and would not be harmed.
24. The pagan god _____ was also known as Jupiter.
25. _____ was located at the “toe of the Italian boot.”
26. T - F Two of the Christians from Rome who came to meet Paul were Caster and Pollox.
27. Zeus was known to the Romans as _____.

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