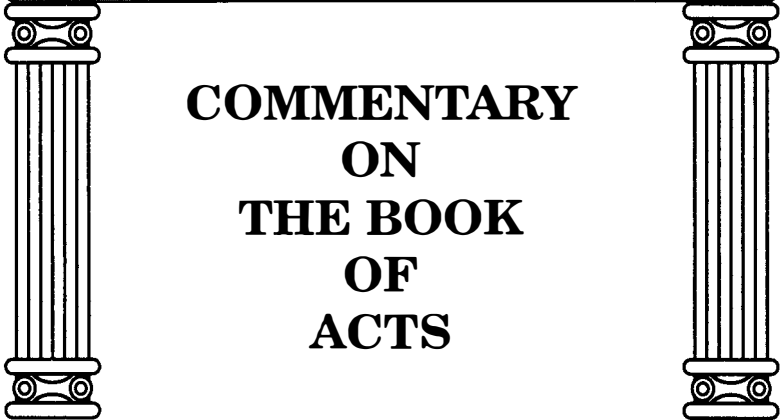


GOD'S MESSAGES BIBLE COMMENTARY SERIES

VOLUME 3

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense,
and caused them to understand the reading.
(Nehemiah 8:8).



COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF ACTS

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2000

2000
Printed in the United States of America

A Product Of
Sain Publications
P. O. Box 616 • Pulaski, TN 38478
931 ~ 363-6905

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Dedication

This volume of the
Bible Messages Commentaries
is dedicated
to

Brother Harris J. Dark

who was my first Bible Teacher
at David Lipscomb College.

Brother Dark taught the book of Acts.
He made it crystal clear that
GOD HATH SPOKEN.
And when God has spoken,
our duty is to hear and obey.

It is not our privilege to ignore Him,
To add to God's Word,
To take from God's Word,
Or to modify it to suit our own will.

The reader of these commentaries
is urged to keep such truth in mind.
They are intended to help in understanding
what the Lord has said,
And to make application in our lives.

To God be the honor, the glory and the power.

~ Leon Stancliff

Introduction

I. Author of Acts.

The book of Acts does not carry the signature of an author. However, the statement in chapter one that the author had written a former treatise of the things that Jesus began to do and to teach points to Luke as the writer. There are other evidences that Luke is the author. The book seems to be a continuation of the twenty-fourth, and last, chapter of Luke's account of the gospel. Late in the book of Acts there are a number of passages where the word "we" is used. These so-called "we" passages fit with what we know about Luke having accompanied Paul during the time period being discussed. It is also true that Luke was a physician. This book contains a greater emphasis upon the miracles of healing, along with the type of careful detail which would be characteristic of a physician. In spite of these strong evidences, we must admit that we do not have absolute proof that Luke is the penman. A very respected teacher of mine once gave all the evidence for Luke as the author and then told us it was wise when someone asked us the identity of the author of this book to reply "Luke, I think."

II. The Date of Writing.

There is very general agreement that the book was written during the time just before Paul's first imprisonment in Rome. Acts breaks off very abruptly at its close. This corresponds with the drastic change in

Paul's daily pattern of life from traveling missionary to confinement under guard. If this is the correct explanation, the book was written in either A.D. 63 or A.D. 64. Paul was kept, however, by a soldier and had his own private house for two years.

III. The Purpose of the Book.

The intent of the book is evident from both the first few verses and also from the general content of the work. It is addressed to Theophilus, meaning "lover of God." The lover of God would no doubt be interested in the activities of the apostles and the early Christians as they carried out the great commission given by the Lord. The establishment of the church and the spread of Christianity from the day of Pentecost until the destruction of the earthly temple in Jerusalem is a critical time period. It links the life of Christ to the later work of the church. The reader catches the enthusiastic dedication of the earliest Christians. If they were capable of establishing the body of Christ in a pagan world, we ought to be able to spread it to the ends of the earth.

IV. Themes running through the Work.

The main point of the book is the establishment of the church and its early spread from Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth. But we also see a number of other very important changes taking place.

- A. There are at least ten examples of conversion, giving us a divinely approved pattern.

- B. We see the prophecy of Joel fulfilled as the Holy Spirit is poured out upon both Jew and Gentile.
 - C. We see the Jewish temple being replaced by the spiritual temple of God, the church.
 - D. The New Covenant Replaces the Old.
 - E. The earthly nation of Israel is replaced by the Kingdom of God.
- V. A Skeletal Outline of the Book.
- A. Matthias replaces Judas.
 - B. The Holy Spirit poured out.
 - C. The Gospel preached in Jerusalem.
 - D. The Gospel preached in Judea.
 - E. The Gospel preached to the Samaritans.
 - F. The Gospel preached to the Gentiles.



**The Book Of
ACTS**



Chapter 1

ACT 1:1 The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

The former treatise is almost certainly Luke's account of the Gospel. It was also addressed to Theophilus. In addition, this first chapter of Acts is a natural continuation of the last chapter of Luke.

The name Theophilus could be that of a personal acquaintance of Luke, or it could be a reference to any man or woman who is a lover of God. The name was certainly not unknown at that time. On the other hand, I feel that Luke intended this book to be valuable to far more than a single individual. I think it is addressed to any person who is a lover of God, anywhere and in any age.

It is doubtful that the writer felt he had made a complete record of every word and deed of the Lord. At the conclusion of the book. The writer said the world could not contain the books which should be written if one attempted to make such a record. Luke probably meant to say that he had presented enough of the record of the life of Christ to thoroughly furnish the lover of God unto every good work.

It will be noted that the words **do** and **teach** are tied tightly together. Jesus did not teach one thing and do another. His teachings and his life were in perfect harmony. There was no sin in his life nor any guile in his mouth. Such harmony should be found in the words and deeds of every lover of God.

ACT 1:2 Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:

The book of Luke had presented the record of Christ's life until the time of his ascension into heaven. Jesus had carefully taught his apostles for forty days from the time of his resurrection until his ascension to heaven from the Mount of Olives. The Lord had been teaching through the Spirit of God. The commandments which he gave to the disciples originated in the mind of God.

ACT 1:3 To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:

The critics of the Bible today point out that Jesus did not appear to men and women in random fashion after his resurrection. He appeared only to those who were in sympathy with him. These critics feel that he should have appeared to some of those who opposed him if he really wished to establish the reality of his resurrection. But, remember dear reader. Jesus told the rich man that even if one had returned from the dead to preach to men, there were those who would not believe.

The proofs of his resurrection are truly infallible. It is quite inconceivable that over five hundred persons could all be simultaneously deceived into

thinking they had seen him when they had not.

During those forty days, Jesus instructed the apostles concerning things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. They still had much to learn. Up to this point they had been convinced the Messiah would be an earthly ruler and would break the yoke of the Romans off their shoulders. Jesus found it necessary to remove such mistaken ideas from their minds and replace them with the true picture of the spiritual kingdom.

ACT 1:4 And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.

With all of the apostles present except for Judas, who had committed suicide, Jesus reminded them of the great commission which he had given them to go preach the gospel to every creature under heaven. This was to begin in Jerusalem. However, all was not ready yet. Jesus had told them of a promise God had made from heaven that power would be given to them to help them in their task.

What was this promise of the Father for which they were to wait? It was the promise that the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon all flesh. It was given in the second chapter of Joel. It was repeated by Jesus in the twenty-fourth chapter of Luke and was also referred to at the time of Jesus' baptism by John in the river Jordan. Let's notice each of these three passages.

First, Joel 2:28-32:

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.

Second, Matthew 3:10-12

And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor; and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Third, Luke 24:45-49

Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them,

Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.

The promise of the Father, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit are all very closely related. This will be seen more clearly when we discuss chapter two.

The apostles were going to need far more skill and wisdom than their own human abilities could provide. With the help of God all things are possible. The entire world had to hear the message of salvation. Could the small band of disciples meet the challenge? They could with the help of the Father in heaven. They must wait for proof that such help was available.

ACT 1:5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

It was true that John the baptist had baptized men in water for the remission of sins. It is very likely that some of the apostles were among those whom John had baptized. The baptism of John would not be sufficient. They were going to need the power of God which would come through his Divine Spirit. They were not to begin preaching until that power arrived.

ACT 1:6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

Now they asked a very important question. If Christ was the promised Messiah, he would be responsible for establishing a Kingdom which would reach over the entire world. Was he ready to begin that kingdom? Would the power they were to wait on be the beginning of that Kingdom? We can hear echos of the attitude of Peter when he cut off the ear of the servant of the High Priest at the time Jesus was being arrested. Peter was ready to take up arms in support of Christ. It was when Jesus told him to put up his sword, and when he saw Jesus being abused, that he lost heart and denied knowing him. The question here shows that not all of that type thinking had been dispelled. The Israel the apostles were asking about was earthly Israel, not spiritual Israel.

ACT 1:7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

Jesus replied that there were things which are not revealed until God is ready. It is interesting to compare this verse with Daniel 7:25. *And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time.* The apostles were a bit too anxious as to how

much power they were to have. God would do things his way and in his own time. They were simply to wait until the Father was ready.

ACT 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Nevertheless, the promise would be kept. The power would come when the Holy Spirit came upon them. Then, and only then, were they to begin their witnessing for Christ. Once they did begin, they were to start in Jerusalem and spread the Word of God to the farthest islands of the sea.

The statement that Jerusalem would be the beginning point agrees with the prediction of Isaiah.

The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:1-3).

Any religious group that claims to have begun at any other time and in any other place than in Jerusalem in 33 A.D. is a false religion. It is not a part of the true Kingdom of God.

ACT 1:9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

After commanding the apostles to wait for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the help that would be given through that outpouring, Jesus disappeared into the clouds of heaven. The text does not tell us whether this was a cloud similar to that which led the Israelites through the wilderness. Some commentators suggest that was the case. I think he simply rose from the earth and disappeared into the normal clouds which one might see from day to day.

I do believe we see the other end of this journey by Christ as we read from the fifth chapter of the book of Revelation where Jesus came to the throne of God and took the sealed book from the right hand of the Father. By the time Peter preached his sermon recorded in the second chapter of Acts, Jesus is said to have been seated on David's throne at God's right hand. His death upon the cross had qualified him to reign as King of kings and Lord of Lords.

ACT 1:10 And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

What a sight that must have been! The apostles were so astonished they were spellbound. Their paralysis did not last long. Two angels appeared to them to give them further directions. Angels have several times appeared in the likeness of men, but clothed in white garments.

ACT 1:11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

Although these events were taking place in Judea, near Jerusalem, the apostles were from the region of Galilee. Peter had been told that his speech betrayed him and that they knew he was a Galilean.

It is was not enough to stand in amazement, looking up into the clouds where Jesus had disappeared. He would return from heaven, and they must be ready to meet him when that took place. There was work to do. Other places where Jesus is mentioned as returning and appearing in the clouds are: Mark 14:62 and Rev. 1:7.

ACT 1:12 Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey.

Jesus and the apostles were apparently on the east side of the Mount of Olives. Jerusalem is on the west of the Mount of Olives and Bethany is on the east. The Mount is not a very high elevation. They would have been able to make their way fairly rapidly to Jerusalem. A sabbath day's journey is said to be about three thousand feet, or three fifths of a mile.

ACT 1:13 And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew,

**James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes,
and Judas the brother of James.**

Having come back to the city of Jerusalem, the apostles went into an upper room. Some believe this upper room was the same as that in which Jesus gathered them to institute the Lord's Supper. This may or may not be true. We do not know for certain. At any rate, we have a list of the apostles. Of course the list does not include Judas who had killed himself after betraying the Saviour. There is a Judas, but it is not Judas Iscariot.

**ACT 1:14 These all continued with one accord
in prayer and supplication, with the women,
and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his
brethrén.**

The apostles were not the only persons present. During Jesus earthly ministry there were a number of dedicated women who supported his cause with great sincerity. It appears that the apostles had made contact with some of these women and let them know marvelous things were about to happen. It is no surprise that Mary, the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus had told John to care for her as he would his own mother. Mary had been told to consider John as if he was her son.

Also, the brethren of Jesus were there. This is a bit of a shock. The church was not yet established. These were not brethren in the Lord. These must have been the half brothers of Jesus; brothers through Mary but not through Joseph. I say it is a bit of a shock because there was a time when Jesus' brethren

considered him to be mentally incompetent (See Mark 3:21). The names of Jesus' brethren were James, Joses, Simon and Judas (Matt. 13:55). What changed their minds? Could it be that they were convinced by his resurrection?

ACT 1:15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,)

The number of disciples who were present in this upper room was about one hundred and twenty. There must have been a state of hushed anxiety. What exactly were they waiting for? How would the apostles know the power Jesus had promised had come and the Holy Spirit had been poured out?

Now we see Peter beginning to take a prominent part in the activities. He stood up and began to address the group.

ACT 1:16 Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.

Peter told the assembly there was a prediction that someone would do just the sort of thing Judas had done. Peter was going to make it clear just what this prediction was as he proceeded with his speech.

ACT 1:17 For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.

Judas had been an important part of the group in the beginning. He was even trusted with the money bag from which they all shared. The fact that he was numbered with the rest of the twelve says to me that he was faithful when Jesus picked him to be one of the twelve. If this is true, it is a sharp warning to all of us who believe ourselves to be immune to the power of Satan. If Satan was able to invade the heart of one whom Jesus chose to be one of his closest associates, he can do the same to you and me.

ACT 1:18 Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.

Judas was very much ashamed after he saw the consequences of his foolish actions in leading the Roman soldiers to their prey. He tried to take the money back and give it to the priests in the temple. They replied that it was blood money, and they wanted no part of it. When Judas cast it on the floor of the temple, they took it and purchased a potter's field which was used to bury the poor. Judas then hanged himself. We do not know what caused his bowels to gush out. It could have been that he fell from the support for enough distance that this happened. It could also be that he hung there long enough that his body decayed and his bowels fell to the ground.

ACT 1:19 And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field

is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood.

Everyone in the area of Jerusalem knew of Judas' end. His gruesome death led them to call the field where he died "the field of blood." It was a field of blood for two reasons. Judas death was a bloody death. And the field was purchased with blood money.

ACT 1:20 For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take.

Peter said the things which had taken place were predicted. Who made this prediction? Where is it found? David was the one who predicted it, and it is found in two of the Psalms: (Psa. 69:25 and Psa. 109:8). The word bishoprick can be translated as office of a bishop. Thus the prediction is that Judas place of life would be left empty, and his office as an apostle would be filled by someone else.

ACT 1:21 Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

A replacement had to be found for Judas. It could not be just anyone. There were certain qualifications which must be met before one could be named as an apostle. In the case of this replacement for Judas, it had to be someone who had been close to the apostolic

band throughout Jesus work with them. The person had to have observed Jesus' daily walk of life.

ACT 1:22 Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

Nor was it enough to have known the Lord for a short period of time. The person chosen must be one who had been familiar with his life and teachings throughout his entire ministry, from Christ's baptism to his resurrection.

This brings up an interesting point. Paul later was called to be an apostle to the Gentiles. He did see the Lord, but he was not closely associated with him through the time span mentioned in this verse. How then could Paul qualify as an apostle? Perhaps the answer is found in Paul's having been caught up into the heavens and personally taught by the Lord. It is enough for us to know that Jesus considered him qualified. Paul himself said he was an apostle "out of due season."

ACT 1:23 And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

Two men were selected from the one hundred twenty. Both of these met the qualifications. It is not necessary to conclude that these two were the only ones who met the qualifications. Sometimes elders are selected when there are others in the congregation who are also qualified.

ACT 1:24 And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen,

Only one man was needed. Two were available. How was the choice to be made between the two? The problem was laid before the Lord. Prayer was made to seek help from God. God had the wisdom to know the hearts of both men. He could make the proper choice when humans could not.

ACT 1:25 That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.

The office to be filled was very, very important. The man selected was to be one of the foundation stones for the spiritual temple of God. If I am correct, he would be one of the twenty-four elders seated on thrones around the mighty throne of God himself, as described in the book of Revelation (Rev. 4:4).

What was Judas own place? It was certainly not a place which God had pre-ordained for him and which he could not escape because of fore-ordination. It was a place which he made for himself by his traitorous actions. Was Judas bound for the lake of fire and brimstone? It seems likely. Some have asked the question, "Did Judas repent? If he did, could he have escaped eternal torment?" I do not think he repented. I think he was sorry things turned out the way they did. I believe he thought Jesus had sufficient power to repel any soldiers who came to arrest him. When Judas saw this was not going to happen, I think he

was shocked beyond measure. But, I do not see any proof that he genuinely repented.

ACT 1:26 And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

The method used to determine which of the two men was the choice of the Lord to take the place of Matthias was the drawing of lots. We are not told if they drew straws, or if some other means was used. Whatever was done, God made it clear that Matthias was his choice. He then became an apostle.

It is strange that we do not hear another word about Matthias. Several of the other apostles are named and their activities are spelled out. The scriptures are silent with respect to any further details in the life of this man.

Chapter 2

ACT 2:1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

Pentecost was one of three major feasts observed by the Jews. A vast multitude of them assembled in Jerusalem from many different portions of the Mediterranean world. All adult male Jews were expected to attend these feasts if at all possible. The name “Pentecost” came from the fact that this feast was scheduled fifty days after the Feast of Passover.

Those who were assembled in one place probably refers to the apostles, even if there was a total of one hundred twenty present. It was the apostles whom Jesus had commanded to remain in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high.

The apostles had not always been of one accord. A number of them became distressed when James and John desired to have the right and left hand positions in the kingdom. It is good to know that at this very critical time, they were harmonious.

ACT 2:2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

The wait was over. A sound like a rushing mighty wind was heard. It may be of importance that this was not a powerful rushing wind. It was a sound **like** a powerful rushing wind. This was an indication that the Holy Spirit was being poured out from heaven.

The word which is translated into the English word spirit is the Greek word *pneuma* which can also be translated as breath or wind. We see a number of English words reflecting this, including the words *pneumatic* and *pneumonia*.

Apparently those outside the house did not hear this sound. Verse six talks about it being noised abroad, as if the event was reported by conversation rather than having been directly heard.

ACT 2:3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

A second phenomenon followed. Cloven, or forked tongues, like flames of fire appeared and sat upon each of them. Again, it does not say these were flames of fire. It says they were like fire. Fire is associated with energy. Thus, we have two strong evidences that the power from on high had arrived; the power of wind and the energy of fire.

ACT 2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

There is no indication that the rest of the one hundred twenty were given the power to speak with other tongues. This appears to have been limited to the apostles. There was a particular reason for them being given this ability. They were going to speak to men who spoke these various tongues, and they

needed to be understood by those who did not speak the Galilean language.

These were languages which they had never been taught. They could only speak them through the power of the Spirit of God. Long centuries before this time, God had confused the language of those who were building the tower of Babel. He had scattered them over the world. Now the matter is reversed. He had gathered people from many nations and had allowed those speaking the various languages to be able to communicate the gospel.

ACT 2:5 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.

The Jews who were present in Jerusalem were not permanent residents. They had come from their homes in the various nations to attend the Feast of Pentecost. This was a very important feast. It came at harvest time and devout Jews gave thanks to God for his blessings by coming together from afar for praise and sacrifices.

ACT 2:6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

It did not take long for the masses to hear of the excitement which had occurred at the upper room. We can almost feel the energy of the crowd as they moved toward the band of apostles.

When they arrived, they were in for a surprise. They heard the apostles preaching to them, and they understood them. The reason this was surprising was that the apostles were from Galilee. The Galilean language would not have been understood by most of those who had come from other areas.

A question has long been discussed as to whether the apostles were speaking in many different languages, or whether they were speaking in their own Galilean tongue and the people were hearing them in the listener's language. I do not know that the grammar of the verse reveals which was true. There may be a clue in the fact that Peter seems to have been understood later when he was speaking to a large assembly that probably included many foreign Jews as well as those from the city of Jerusalem. In that instance, Peter could not have been speaking many languages simultaneously. He must have spoken Galilean and have been heard by each listener in the listener's own language.

ACT 2:7 And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans?

In either case, the audience was astounded. They had been able to understand men who were unschooled fishermen, etc. Yet they were able to hear and understand. They struggled for a possible explanation of the things which were taking place.

ACT 2:8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

This verse seems to substantiate what was said above. It does not say the speakers were speaking in the various languages. It says the listeners heard in their own tongue; as if the miracle was performed on the listener's ear rather than the speaker's tongue. Either way, it was shocking and required an explanation.

ACT 2:9 Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia,

ACT 2:10 Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,

ACT 2:11 Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

This list of geographic areas was a complete cross section of the area around the Mediterranean Sea. At least seventeen different nations are represented. The apostles were preaching. They were declaring the works of God, and not glorifying themselves. Those who claim to speak in tongues today tend to focus the attention on themselves rather than glorifying God.

ACT 2:12 And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?

The listeners had mixed reactions. They disagreed as to the cause of these strange things. Everyone was amazed. Some had one explanation. Some had another.

ACT 2:13 Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.

There were some who believed the apostles were drunk. This seems to have been very poor logic. Here were men who were making perfectly good sense as they spoke languages in which they had never been trained. That is not the the pattern of the drunk. He usually has trouble speaking the language he has spoken from his infancy. The suggestion that this was the result of drunkenness is pure folly.

ACT 2:14 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words:

Peter did not leave the matter in suspense. He stood up with the other eleven and began to make the correct explanation.

Some make a point that Peter stood up with the eleven. Were there not twelve apostles? Of course there were. The other eleven and Peter made twelve. Matthias was at this time one of the group, having replaced Judas Iscariot.

Remember, this is the same Peter who denied the Lord three times within a short period of time. What now caused him to stand courageously before this assembly and preach Christ when he had failed so miserably before? The difference is that he had now seen the resurrected Christ. He was ready to die for him now. If Jesus was raised from the dead, Peter

knew he could be also.

Peter spoke specifically to the Jews of Judea and Jerusalem. Nevertheless, I believe the three thousand who responded to his sermon, and were later baptized, included Jews from many of the nations listed above. I believe he spoke Galilean and was understood by all who were present.

ACT 2:15 For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.

Peter left no possibility that these men were drunk. It was only the third hour of the day. The Jews counted time in two different ways. Sometimes they counted the day as beginning at sundown. Other times they counted from sunrise. This time, it is obvious that Peter is counting from sunrise. This would place the time at about nine o'clock in the morning. Nine o'clock in the evening would have been a most probable hour for drunkenness. Peter felt his point was made. The apostles were not drunk because people just did not get drunk at nine in the morning.

ACT 2:16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;

How would Peter explain these strange happenings? If they were not drunk, what was going on?

The apostle began to preach from the prophets. This was a forceful way of preaching in Peter's day,

and it is still a source of power for preachers of today. Only through the power of God can truths such as Peter was about to discuss be declared centuries before they take place.

The prophet to which Peter appealed was Joel. Joel had prophesied hundreds of years before this. (Perhaps as much as 850 years before.) His words had been quite clear.

ACT 2:17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

There are three great dispensations. The first is the Patriarchal age. The second is the Mosaic age. The third is the Christian age. We live in the last days. The last days will culminate in one last Day of the Lord. Joel's prophecy had pointed to wondrous things that would happen in the Christian age.

God promised that he would pour out his Spirit upon all flesh. This would include the old and the young, the men and the women, the Jew and the Gentile. When God's Spirit was poured out, humans would be empowered to do things that they would not otherwise be capable of doing. These supernatural abilities would be evidence that God was ready to begin a new day under the rulership of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps a word should be said about the difference between dreams, visions and prophecies. Any teaching which came from God directly to man was a prophecy.

Sometimes these truths came through dreams which occurred at night. Other times they were delivered through visions which could occur during the waking hours. The point of this verse is that God would speak through a variety of persons, and this new age would not be restricted to the Jewish nation.

ACT 2:18 And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:

The very lowliest of the people would be able to share in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The servants as well as the masters would be included. Even the female handmaids would be provided with such gifts.

Does the language of this passage say it was the Spirit itself which was poured out, or does it say something was poured out by and from the Spirit? Were these abilities gifts from the Spirit, or were they evidence the Spirit itself had come upon the recipients? If we go back to the original prophecy, as it was given in the book of Joel, we find that it does not say God will pour out **of** his Spirit. It says he will pour out his Spirit. There is no **of** or **from** in Joel's prophecy. It was the Spirit itself which was poured out. When the Spirit was poured out, those who received it sometimes received the power to dream dreams, see visions and do other wonders.

ACT 2:19 And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke:

What were these wonders in heaven and signs in the earth? Do you remember that when Jesus Christ died on the cross, the sun went out in the middle of the day? A report from outside the Bible says that the moon was red as blood. At this same time, there was a great earthquake. Some of those in the grave rose and walked in the streets of Jerusalem. What greater fulfillment could we expect?

ACT 2:20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and notable day of the Lord come:

It is tempting to think of the great and notable day of the Lord as being the day of judgment. That is not the case here. The great and notable day of the Lord is the day when the Church of Jesus Christ was established and when his reign as King of kings and Lord of Lords was preached, beginning in Jerusalem and spreading out to the uttermost parts of the earth.

ACT 2:21 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

In that great day of the Lord, any man or woman who had been persuaded that Jesus Christ was the Son of God and the Saviour of the world would be enabled to break the shackles of sin. The prior requirement was that they be willing to call upon the name of the Lord. Just how may one call upon the name of the Lord? He may do so by recognizing the

authority and the power of Jesus and rendering obedience to his gospel. Saul of Tarsus reached that point when Ananias told him he needed to arise and be baptized, and wash away his sins, calling upon the name of the Lord.

With this great coming of the day of Jesus Christ, both Jew and Gentile would be solicited as members of God's chosen. From this time on, the promise of blessing through the Seed of Abraham would be available to any man of any tongue, kindred, tribe or nation. The reader should remember this statement of verse twenty-one when he begins to reflect on the meaning of verses thirty-eight and thirty-nine of this chapter.

ACT 2:22 Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:

The gospel was preached first to the Jews. They had been God's special people for a very long time. In his foreknowledge, God knew they would reject his Son. He forecast this in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. In spite of this, they were to be given the first opportunity to react to the gospel.

Peter reminded his listeners of the many wondrous works Jesus had performed in their midst. They were miracles because only through the power of God could they be done. They were wonders because they astonished those who beheld them. They were signs

because they pointed to Jesus as the Great Physician, the Bread of Life and the Resurrection. There was no way these Jews could deny the fact of the miracles. They well knew what had happened. Even at the time of his baptism, the Father had opened the heavens for the Holy Spirit to descend in the form of a dove and alight upon the Christ. God stated his approval at the time by saying, *“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”* Only a man who had deliberately shut his eyes and stopped his ears could deny what was so clear.

ACT 2:23 Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:

Even though God had so clearly approved of Jesus Christ by all these signs and wonders, the Jews set about to destroy him. Their actions were not those of careless shortsightedness. They had very deliberately determined to eliminate the Saviour. For over three years they plotted to quench his influence. This had all reached its climax when Christ was arrested, mocked and crucified. No doubt Satan thought he had carved out a final victory.

Peter was calling the Jews murderers. They were not only murderers, they were cold blooded murderers. The murder was the most hideous possible. They had murdered the very Son of God. Even more; God knew it was going to happen long before it actually happened.

ACT 2:24 Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

They had killed Jesus. But his Father had raised him up from the grave. Satan's wages is death. Jesus had not sold his life to Satan. It was not possible that Satan could hold his body in the ground, nor his soul in hades. Jesus was provided with the keys to death, hell and the grave. The gates of hell could not prevail against his power, nor can they prevail against the faithful of his church.

ACT 2:25 For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved:

The quotation is from Psalm 16:8-10. David often spoke in the first person concerning Jesus Christ. It was as if he were Jesus himself, and was experiencing some of the things Jesus was to experience during his lifetime on earth.

David saw the Father in heaven supporting the Christ. The support was so strong that Christ should not faint nor turn back from the tasks that were before him. He is also there for the support of Christ's followers throughout time.

ACT 2:26 Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope:

Even when he was crucified, Jesus remained poised. He had predicted his death, his burial and his resurrection to his disciples before each of these things occurred. His tongue spoke out in optimism. His flesh would not forever rest in the grave. He would break through the doors of death.

ACT 2:27 Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

This breakthrough would take place because the Father would not allow either his soul or his body to see an eternal imprisonment. His soul would escape from the hadean world, and his body would be raised from the grave before it began to corrupt.

ACT 2:28 Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.

Jesus had emptied himself of the glory which he had in heaven before he came to earth. He had learned obedience by the things which he suffered. After enduring the pain and trials of life on a sin stained earth, Jesus would be made joyful by being taken into the presence of God in heaven where he would behold the face of God.

ACT 2:29 Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.

David was not talking about himself. He was talking about his descendant, Jesus Christ. If anyone wished to question the fact, Peter could point to the tomb of David which stood in Jerusalem at the time he was speaking. It is hard to deny that kind of proof.

ACT 2:30 Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne;

David was prophesying when he made the statements in the sixteenth Psalm. God had made an oath to David that his seed would be enthroned over Israel for ever and ever. *And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever (2 Sam. 7:12-13).*

ACT 2:31 He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.

Through the help of God, David had been able to foresee the resurrection of the Lord. The resurrection was indisputable. Jesus had been killed. He had been buried. And he had been raised up from the grave. Too many witnesses had observed him after his resurrection for the fact to be successfully denied.

ACT 2:32 This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.

I do not believe Peter meant to say that every person to whom he was talking had been a witness of the resurrected Christ. Certainly all of the apostles had seen him. It is quite possible that some among his listeners also had seen him. Peter was very likely talking about all of the apostles being witnesses. Even though the Jews may not have seen the risen Christ, they must have heard from those who had seen him.

I have heard some teachers and preachers come down hard on any person who says they are a witness of Christ. This is usually pointed toward those who call themselves “Jehovah’s Witnesses.” The claim is that if one is a witness he must have obtained direct empirical information through his five senses. He must have seen, heard or touched the Son of God before he can be called a witness of Christ. This goes a little too far.

A witness is one who tells that which he knows. I know there is a God. I can witness to that fact. I am certainly not a direct eye witness. However, I can tell that which I know about God. That makes me a witness. I can be a witness for Jesus Christ. That does not mean I have personally seen or heard the Lord. It does mean I can tell that which I know to be true about him.

ACT 2:33 Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

God raised his Son up from the grave. He then raised him up into heaven and there he placed him on the throne of David. He has a name above every name. He rules today as King of kings. We need not wait for his second coming to subject ourselves to him. Those who expect him to descend from heaven and take up a throne upon the earth will wait in vain.

When Jesus was enthroned at the right hand of God, he received the power to pour out the Holy Spirit upon all flesh. Because that is true, the Jews were able to see the signs and wonders which were being done by the apostles. Jesus had said in John 7:39 that the Spirit would not be given until he had been glorified. (*But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.*) After he had ascended and had been glorified, he was enabled to see that the prophecy of Joel was fulfilled.

ACT 2:34 For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,

David had certainly not ascended into heaven. His body still rested in that grave in Jerusalem. It might some day be raised. But at that time it still remained in the earth. The one of whom David spoke was the Son of God. It was he who would be raised to sit at God's right hand and rule over God's Kingdom.

ACT 2:35 Until I make thy foes thy footstool.

This verse is a most powerful statement. Christ is King. And he will be King until he has vanquished every foe of Jehovah. Ancient kings sometimes placed their foot upon the neck of the kings they defeated to show complete power over them. That is the picture here. Jesus will one day place his foot upon every enemy who rises up in defiance against his Father. This same promise is made by Paul in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:22-26). Death will be the last enemy to be defeated.

ACT 2:36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

The power of Peter's words is awesome. Here is what you have done. Here is what God has done. God gave his own Son. You killed that Son. God raised his Son. He is now the king of the earth. What do you expect will happen to you??

ACT 2:37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

The case was undeniable. In the face of the evidence, many of the Jews were conscience stricken. What can a man do who has murdered the Son of the Living God? It would be absolute spiritual suicide to

continue in rebellion. The only possible course of action would be to throw one's self upon the mercy of God and ask if anything could be done to appease his anger.

ACT 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

There was something which could be done. Peter laid it out before them. God would be willing to forgive their sins if they would repent of those sins and be baptized in the name of Christ. They could expect two blessings from God if they did those things. Their sins would be remitted, and they would receive the Holy Spirit as a Comforter to guide and strengthen them in living a holy life.

How simple this plan is. Believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Repent of your sins. Be willing to confess to others that he is the Christ. Be baptized, or immersed in water by his authority and rise from the water to walk a holy life. Then God will wash away the guilt of your sin, and will provide the help you need to live a righteous life of service to him.

ACT 2:39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

Yes. The promise which was made to Abraham, and the promise which was made through the prophet

Joel are both now in the process of fulfillment. To Abraham, God made the promise that through his Seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. That Seed is Christ. Through Joel, God promised that the gift of the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon men and women who called upon the name of the Lord. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life. The blessedness which comes to all families of the earth from the Son of God is the gift of eternal life.

Notice that the promise Peter spoke of was not restricted to the apostles. The promise was surely that spoken of by Joel, yet it reached out to anyone who would call upon the name of the Lord. The Holy Spirit does different things for people at different times. The apostles needed the ability to do miracles in order that all might know their message was from the Lord. The multitude of Jews to whom Peter spoke did not need such abilities. What they did need was help in living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. God offered that help through his Spirit.

There are two basic groups of people in this world. There are those who defy God and try to live by their own wisdom and their own power. There are others who realize the need for spiritual help and turn to God for that help. The eighth chapter of Romans describes the two groups as those who walk by the flesh and those who walk by the Spirit. As many as are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. They have come to spiritual life, and if faithful, they will be eternally blessed.

ACT 2:40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

We do not have the entire sermon that Peter preached. There were many other words. All of them led toward the one critical decision which had to be made. Would they accept Christ as the Son of God and follow him, or would they be swallowed up in the unholy mob who raged in fury against the Saviour? An untoward generation is one that does not move toward the proper goal in life. They move in crooked and winding paths that lead to separation from God. That is eternal death.

ACT 2:41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

The words of Peter had plunged deep into the hearts of some three thousand of the Jews. They knew their condition was hopeless unless they followed the instructions of Peter. They did believe Christ was God's Son. They were grieved in heart that they had offended God. They readily confessed that Jesus is the Christ and God's own Son. They gladly accepted the conditions Peter had laid out before them. They were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins.

Who was added to whom? Some believe the church

began in the days of John the baptist and that these three thousand were added to those who had been baptized with the baptism of John. But, those who had been baptized by John had not been baptized into Jesus Christ. No one is a Christian until he or she has been baptized into Christ. Christ is the head of the church. The church is his body. You are not a part of the church until you are a part of the body of Christ. You become a part of the body of Christ by being baptized into him (Gal. 3:27).

The three thousand were added, or aggregated together, into the Church, which was born on that day. When the Spirit of God came upon the body of Christ, that body came to spiritual life. The blood of Christ then cleanses every part of that body constantly, as long as the Christian continues to walk in the light as Christ did (1 John 1:5-7).

ACT 2:42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

“They” in this verse refers to the large number of converts who had been added to the church as a result of Peter’s sermon. If men had followed this same route through the centuries, we would not have hundreds of contradictory doctrines taught in every part of the sectarian world. The apostles doctrine came from the mind of God. It did not contain contradictions.

The breaking of bread is associated with prayer here because this fellowship involved worship services. They came together to worship God and edify one another in the business of the Lord. The

fellowship which was enjoyed in their assemblies gave them strength and direction in the service of Jehovah.

ACT 2:43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

This was not a paralyzing fear which freezes one into inaction. It was exactly the opposite. Perfect love casts out the paralyzing fear. The fear which came upon these early Christians was a deep respect for the power and wisdom of God. The apostles were confirming the gospel message with miraculous deeds which could only be accomplished by those who had the authority of the Creator behind them.

ACT 2:44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

There was such a strong union among these believers that they were quite willing, perhaps even eager, to see that no one had needs which were not met. They still owned their possessions, but they were happy to share with their brethren. The attitude was, “If you are in need and I have the wherewithal to supply that need, I will help you.”

ACT 2:45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

The first year I was in college at David Lipscomb, I returned home after having carefully considered the

material in this chapter. I stated at the evening meal that the early Christians sold their possessions and shared all things in common. This was in a time when Russian Communism was being placed under the greatest scrutiny by members of our own congress. My father became very disturbed and told my mother late that night that he would not have a Communist at his table. Mother had quite a time trying to get things straightened out between us.

There are vast differences between the type of Communism that reared its ugly head in Russia, and the community of Christians in the first century. Russian communism was not voluntary. Christian sharing was voluntary. Russian Communism was godless and blasphemous. The Christian community of the first century praised God. The leaders of the Russian Communists lived at the expense of the people. The apostles gave their lives to save the souls of men. The contrast is like that of night and day!

ACT 2:46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

The temple was the center of religious activities for the Jews. We cannot conclude from this verse that these Christian Jews mixed the observances of the law of Moses with those of the New Covenant under Jesus Christ.

The relationship between the Christians of the first century and the temple is interesting. From A.D. 33 when Christ died, until the destruction of the temple and the Jewish nation, there are some

indications of difficulty in separating themselves from the law that had been nailed to the cross. Paul constantly dealt with Christian teachers who felt that the new Christians must first be circumcized in the flesh before they could be approved by God as disciples of Christ.

The breaking of bread mentioned in this verse is not the breaking of bread mentioned in verse forty-two. This time it is visitation from house to house as the new Christians enjoyed a warm friendship and great joy in the rich blessings they had found among one another.

ACT 2:47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

It seems that at this point the Judean community had not yet developed the animosity which later became so vicious that many of the Christians were driven out into other parts of the world. The verse could be referring only to all the people who were Christians. I believe, however, that they had been accepted by the common people, even though the leaders among the Jews may even this early stage have been planning opposition.

It is wise to remember that these Christians had not “joined the church” in the sense that it was in their power to determine their membership. It was God who added them to the church as a result of their obedience to the conditions he had set out for them. Men who today feel that they can set up a church of their choice, and invite anyone they please to join that church, do not understand that they do not have the

right to create a church, nor do they have the power to determine who can and cannot become a member of the Lord's church.

When men are saved, they are added to the church of the Lord. There are no saved people outside the church, or body of Christ. God knows who has met his conditions of salvation. He makes no mistakes.

Chapter 3

ACT 3:1 Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.

The church had now been established. The apostles had been given the power they needed to begin the fulfilling of the great commission. Peter and John went to the court of the temple as the Jews were gathering for their afternoon prayers. The ninth hour would have been 3 p.m. It was not unusual for Christians to go to the temple during the worship hour. This did not mean they still considered themselves bound by the law of Moses. It meant they saw the temple area as an appropriate place to draw close to God. The court of the temple also afforded them contact with those Jews who needed the gospel preached to them.

ACT 3:2 And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;

Apparently this man, who had been lame for an entire lifetime, had been accustomed to coming to the gate of the temple for a long time. He was, no doubt, known to all of the regular worshippers. The Beautiful Gate of the temple was one of nine gates belonging to that structure. Do not confuse these gates with the gates of the city of Jerusalem. There were numerous gates to the city. There were also several gates to the temple area. The temple gates were much adorned.

This particular gate must have been unusually beautiful; therefore the name.

The lame man was completely powerless to walk. He had to be carried and laid at the gate by others. Because of this there would be no question later about the truth that a miracle had been performed. The power that made this man able to rise up and walk had to come from God. I remember a man who sold pencils on Church street in the city of Nashville. He had small shriveled legs. He placed a small container in front of him where passersby could drop a coin and take a pencil. Most just dropped a coin, and did not bother to pick up a pencil. They were happy to help the man out with what must have been a very meagre life. Sights like this are not easily forgotten.

This lame man who sat at the Beautiful Gate had found a place where many persons passed through. Some of them would be generous enough to offer him a coin or two.

ACT 3:3 Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.

Peter and John passed through the gate together. That is not unexpected. They had been fellow fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. Now they were fishing together for the souls of men.

As they passed him, the lame man asked them for help. I am sure he was hoping to receive some small donation of money.

ACT 3:4 And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.

Peter was often the one who first spoke when more than one of the apostles had gathered. That was the case here. As they turned to the man, Peter invited the man to give them his attention. This was probably unusual. Most would have just dropped a coin, or handed him one, and then walked on.

ACT 3:5 And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

I am certain his hopes must have been lifted somewhat when the two apostles paused and began to speak to him. He would have anticipated some sort of donation. Little did he know just how great a contribution he was to enjoy at their hands.

ACT 3:6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

Peter must have greatly surprised the beggar when, instead of handing him a coin, he took a quite different course of action. The apostles had little money. Jesus had said the foxes had holes and the birds had nests, but the Son of man had no place to lay his head. Jesus followers would have shared in his very limited supply of this world's goods. Nevertheless, they had something far more valuable than metal coins. Through the power of Jesus Christ, they were able to offer this man health which he had

never known from the day of his birth.

There are many persons who would trade their worldly goods for excellent health. It is said that John D. Rockefeller, who was one of the richest man in the United States, was riding on a railroad pullman car. A porter came to serve him his noon meal. The porter spoke of his own poverty and said he wished he had just a small portion of the riches of Mr. Rockefeller. Rockefeller is reported to have told the porter he would trade his entire fortune for the stomach of the porter if he were able to eat the meal before him without discomfort. Rockefeller suffered severely from stomach ulcers.

Peter said the apostles had no silver and gold to offer. They were quite willing to offer the man what they did have. What they had was power through the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to bring a sound pair of legs to the man. Peter made a very simple statement. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. That name had the power to heal the lame man. It has power today to heal the spiritually lame, the spiritually blind and the spiritually deaf. Oh, if only men would recognize their needs and call upon the name of the Man from Galilee!

ACT 3:7 And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ancle bones received strength.

As Peter called upon the name of Christ, he reached out and took him by the hand. **Immediately** strength began to pour into those weak ankles. As

Peter lifted, the man realized he was able to stand by himself for the first time in his life. Those legs which had been frail and weak suddenly became straight and strong. It did not take months, or even weeks for this to occur. In a matter of seconds the man was perfectly well. The miracles done by the apostles left no doubt as to the source from which they derived their power. That power came from God. The miracles were done before a multitude of persons, and they were of such nature that no man could deny them.

From his earliest infancy Granville Brown had been unable to walk without crutches. One of the famous “faith healers” passed through the Nashville area near where Granville lived. Some of the brethren decided to take Granville and see what would happen if he was presented to the man who claimed to be capable of miraculous healing through the power of God. The assistants who were responsible for choosing which persons would be allowed to come before the “healer” were quick to make a decision. Granville was not allowed to come near the the fake healer.

How different this was from the healing of the lame man by the apostles! They deliberately choose just such a man as Granville in order that no doubt could exist as to their divine support and authority. This man did not suffer from headaches, rheumatism or stomach pains, all of which are invisible. Only God could have healed him!

ACT 3:8 And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

The man became deliriously happy. He not only stood. He leaped about and walked. he went into the temple with the others, praising God for the great blessing he had received.

ACT 3:9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God:

The healing was not done in a corner where false claims could be made. We have no way of knowing just how many persons were gathering for the hour of prayer. We are not talking about one witness who claimed to have seen a vision in the wee hours of the night. This miracle was indisputable.

ACT 3:10 And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.

The public knew this man. Everyone had been accustomed to seeing him sitting there day by day, unable to rise to his feet. They were completely amazed at what had happened. This was quite common for Jesus and his followers. The listeners who heard Jesus present the sermon on the mount were filled with wonder that he spoke with authority and not as the scribes and lawyers. Throughout the life of Jesus, and continuing on through the lives of the apostles, men like Nicodemus exclaimed that no one could do the wonders Christ did unless God was with him.

ACT 3:11 And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.

It was only natural that the man was clinging to the apostles. How greatly his life had been changed in just a few minutes of time!

It does not take long for such excitement to spread. Can you imagine what would be heard on the news broadcasts this evening if someone had walked into one of the local hospitals and healed a patient on whom the doctors had operated unsuccessfully. Let us suppose this was a woman who had been seriously injured in an automobile accident and was covered with blood, and who had an arm completely severed from her body. If someone were to walk into the operating room and lay their hand upon her, saying, "In the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, be whole once more."; followed by a complete healing of all her injuries, what do you suppose the results would be? It would not wait for the evening newspaper, or the ten o'clock television. The report would move like a bolt of lightning through the entire city.

And so people soon gathered in great excitement at the porch of the temple known as Solomon's porch. Their curiosity was enormous.

ACT 3:12 And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?

Peter took full advantage of their amazement. Here was another opportunity to preach the gospel in all of its power. It was neither through the power of Peter and John, nor because of the perfection of their lives that they had been enabled to heal the lame man.

It is very common for humanity to over react to that which is unusual. When Paul was bitten by a viper after the shipwreck on the way to Rome, the people thought he must be a vicious criminal who was being punished to make certain he paid for his sins. Then when he did not die, they changed their minds and decided he must have divine nature.

ACT 3:13 The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go.

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was very special to the Jews. He had made them his chosen people. They were to be a model before the rest of the world in showing the saving power of Jehovah. This God, Jehovah, had sent his Only Begotten Son to deliver men from their sins, and he had first introduced him through the Jews. What was their response to the favor which God had bestowed upon them? They had cried out for his death and had insisted upon that action, even though Pilate had decided to free him.

ACT 3:14 But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you;

Jesus was the only absolutely sinless person who ever lived upon this earth. Yet, when the Jews had the opportunity to make a choice between this perfect man and one who was a murderer, they chose to send the perfect man to his death and release the sinner. Woe unto those people who call evil good, and good evil.

ACT 3:15 And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.

The name used here is significant. Jesus was the Prince of life. He was the Way, the Truth and the Life. No man may come to the Father of Spirits except through him. All men are condemned to the second death without the redeeming power of his perfect life and death.

Now Peter produced the same contrast he had made so clear on the day of Pentecost. He compared what the Jews had done with what God had done. The two actions were completely opposed to one another. God gave life. They had chosen death. The witnesses were sufficient. The evidence was sufficient. The Son of God himself had been slaughtered, and they had encouraged it.

ACT 3:16 And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see

and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

It was no ordinary thing which had happened when the lame man was made to walk. This wonder only came about through the power of the same Christ whom they had crucified. There was miraculous healing power which could be had through calling upon him.

Moderns who claim to have healing power often excuse their failures by saying it was the lack of faith upon the part of the one who sought to be healed that prevented the cure. This is not true. This lame man did not know who Peter and John were. He only knew they were passing by him on their way into the temple. It was not his faith in Jesus Christ which brought about the miracle. It was the faith of Peter and John that made the healing possible.

ACT 3:17 And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.

Certainly they had been ignorant of the enormity of their deeds. Jesus agreed with this statement when he looked down from the cross and said, "*Father forgive them for they know not what they do.*" Neither the mob, nor their rulers realized the awful nature of this murder. Yet that does not take away from its seriousness.

ACT 3:18 But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.

The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus Christ (Rev. 19:10). Every prophet of God in the Old Testament pointed to the great Prophet which was yet to come. Jesus said, *These are they which testify of me*. As an example of this we turn to the words of Isaiah 53:5-8.

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

ACT 3:19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.

The proper course of action for the Jews was to see the need for turning their lives around and listening to the words of the Lord. With the coming of Christ there is the possibility of having one's sins

blotted out as if they had never been committed. This is only possible when the sinner recognizes his dangerous condition and is willing to take the prescription of the Great Physician.

But what are these times of refreshing? When do they come? It is assumed by many that the times of refreshing began when the gospel was preached on Pentecost and men were invited to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins. I do not believe that is the entire story. Notice that these times of refreshing were still ahead at the time Peter was speaking.

ACT 3:20 And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you:

The times of refreshing were to come when Jesus Christ is sent. The words **shall send** are used. Christ had been preached from the time of the prophets. He had come into the world. He had lived, died, and been resurrected. However, the times of refreshing still waited.

ACT 3:21 Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

The times of refreshing are the same as the times of restitution of all things spoken by the prophets. That time will come when every enemy of God has been defeated, including death. Everything the prophets had predicted concerning the Messiah must come to pass. Then Jesus Christ will return from

heaven to conclude the restitution and bring about the times of refreshing.

There are many mysteries related to the end time. How are the new heaven and the new earth related to the present heaven and earth? How will the new spiritual bodies compare with the present fleshly bodies? The answers to some of these questions will only be answered when the time comes. Only the Father knows when that will be.

ACT 3:22 For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.

The great prophet Moses spoke of another prophet who would arise from the Jews. As Moses had led Israel out of the bondage of Egypt, this prophet of the last days would lead them from the bondage of sin.

That could only take place if the Jews were willing to hear the Word of God through his lips. Moses warned that everything he said must be heard and obeyed.

ACT 3:23 And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.

If a man would hear the Messiah, he would be counted among the chosen of God. If any man rejected

his counsel and walked in his own stubborn ways, that soul would be cut off. He would no longer be an heir to the riches of the Father.

ACT 3:24 Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.

You may pick up any book of prophecy in the Old Testament and find Jesus in its pages. The prophets tell of a day when the sins of Israel may be removed and the Kingdom of God will be established, never to pass away. The Jews should have been able to recognize the Prophet of whom Moses spake when he arrived among them. He had come, and they had failed to recognize him.

ACT 3:25 Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

These Jews to whom Peter was speaking were direct descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They should be very much aware of the covenant made to those revered ancestors. The good news should have been passed down from parents to children. It was incredible that they had let the great promise of God dim in their memories until they could murder the very Messiah for whom they had prayed and hoped.

ACT 3:26 **Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.**

The Jew had been privileged to hear the Word of redemption before the Gentile. Jesus had come as one of them, but they had not received him. John said, *“He came unto his own, and his own received him not.”* In the last chapter of this book of Acts, Paul will say to the Jews, *“We will turn to the Gentiles and they will hear.”*

The wonderful promise which had been made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was the promise of eternal life for those who are willing to receive it. Those who will follow the faith of the Son of man, and become spiritual Jews today, may look forward to eternal life. Those who refuse to follow the Christ, will die in their sins.

Chapter 4

ACT 4:1 And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them,

The Jewish leaders had been jealous of the influence of Christ from the time he preached the sermon on the Mount and the people marveled at his speech. They realized Jesus taught with far greater authority than their Rabbis, or themselves. They arrived on the scene very quickly when they heard of the healing of the lame man. This could have grave consequences. Their prestige was in danger.

ACT 4:2 Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

The Pharisees believe in the possibility of a resurrection. The Sadducees did not. Just as many men and women today think life after death is a figment of human imagination, these Sadducees were much more interested in political power than they were in getting souls ready to meet their God in the judgment.

ACT 4:3 And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide.

Their line of action harmonized with their political philosophy. Force was the answer. It would be difficult to deal with the large number of people who had seen

the lame man leaping and praising God. The quickest way to quench the matter would be to arrest Peter and John.

It was late in the afternoon. The miracle had occurred at the 3 p.m. hour of prayer. The apostles could be dealt with the next day. The most convenient plan was to put them into the jail over night and get back to them the next day. If the Sadducees had realized it was the power of God behind the miracle, they would have thought a second time before imprisoning the two. This simply shows how shallow their own religion was. Miracles and supernatural power had no place in their way of thought.

ACT 4:4 Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.

It was too late. The impact of the miracle and the preaching of the Word of God had already penetrated into the hearts of thousands of the Jews. I believe we can add these five thousand to the three thousand who were added to the church on the day of Pentecost. This means there was a total of at least eight thousand Christians in the city of Jerusalem. The Christians were going to be a force to contend with from that day on. Paul said he was not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation. The word which is translated “power” is *dunamis*, the word from which we get our English word dynamite. The dynamite had gone off in Jerusalem. The explosion would be heard round the world for thousands of years to come.

ACT 4:5 And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes,

Peter and John waited in the prison until the next day before they were removed and brought before the Jewish court. The array of dignitaries which they faced would have been enough to strike fear into the hearts of men with less conviction. But, these apostles faced their accusers without wavering. They understood that the power of God and of his Son were far greater than any possessed by the Jewish office holders.

ACT 4:6 And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.

Annas and Caiaphas were the most influential men in Jerusalem. Along with their kindred, they expected men with lesser reputations to quake and tremble when they spoke. What would happen when the simple fishermen were brought before them? Certainly it should not take very long for them to learn not to create such a stir in the city of David.

ACT 4:7 And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?

The rulers demanded to know who had given the apostles the right to do what they had done. What authority did they have to bring about so much chaos.

They would, of course, have seen it as political chaos rather than the power of God in action. They were to be very much surprised when they heard the answer to their bold question.

ACT 4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,

Remember that Peter was now surrounded by some of the most powerful and influential leaders of the Jews. Before the resurrection of his Lord, he would have cowered in fear. Now it was different. Christ had risen from the grave. Power had come upon Peter and the other apostles. There was no need to fear what men could do unto them. Even if death came, the same God who raised Jesus could also raise them.

Peter was not refilled with the Holy Ghost. The meaning is that he retained the power which had been already been poured out upon him and the others.

ACT 4:9 If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole;

Peter went straight to the point. If they were interested in the source of his authority, he would spell it out unmistakably. The problem facing the Sadducees was that they refused to believe in spiritual realities. They placed their confidence in human political power. Spirits and life after death did not have a place in their manner of thinking.

That was, however, the true source of both the authority and the power that Peter and John had

tapped in healing the lame man. The Sadducees knew very well that the healing of a lame man by miraculous means was not a satisfactory cause for punishing the two men. It had been a good deed. And those who sought to oppose such deeds placed themselves in opposition to the God of heaven, as well as his Son, Jesus Christ.

ACT 4:10 Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.

The deed had been done through the divine power of Jesus. Not only that; it was this same Jesus whom they had caused to be arrested and crucified. What they had done was the greatest of all crimes. While Peter and John had committed no crime at all in the healing of the lame man, the Sadducees had murdered God's own Son.

God had raised his Son from the grave. The same power that raised him from the grave had been demonstrated in making the lame man whole. Over and over, the apostles will be preaching this same sermon with only slight variations. Peter preached it on Pentecost. Now he was preaching it again. Later, we will find Stephen preaching the same basic theme. God sent his Son. You crucified Him. God raised him from the dead. It is time for you to repent.

ACT 4:11 This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

In Psalm 118:22 King David had recorded a prophecy concerning this very thing. He said, *The stone which the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner.*

Isaiah spoke of this same cornerstone in Isaiah 28:16. *Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste.*

If one takes away the chief corner stone of a building, that building is in serious trouble. The references above inform us that the Jews were expecting to build God's great temple without building it upon the Rock of Ages. God had provided the stone which would support the rest of his spiritual temple. The Jewish leaders had cast it aside and snorted at it. This situation would not last. The time had even then arrived when the Christ would be recognized by many as the rock upon which God's building must rest. The Jews had refused it. Peter and John had begun to build upon it. The foolish man builds his house upon the sand. The wise man builds his house upon the **Rock!**

ACT 4:12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

All things done in the name of true and pure religion will be done in the name of Jesus Christ. No man on earth has ever had the authority which he has. Why do men wish to carry the names of humans, or of processes. We are to do all things in the name of the Lord. Men cannot save. Only the power of God is

able to prevent eternal destruction. We deceive ourselves when we set up either men or organizations in the place of the pattern set out by our Father in heaven. Luther cannot save. John the baptist cannot save. John Wesley cannot save. Only Christ can save.

The very strong inference here is that the Jews needed saving. They were guilty of murder. Only Christ could remove the guilt of their sin.

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

The Sadducees were shocked. These two men had not been trained in the oratory of the day. They were simple fishermen. They had not attended the finest of the schools for the Rabbis. Yet, here they were speaking out with great power. It was clear that they had received this power and these truths from the Christ whom the Saducees hated. What were they to do?

ACT 4:14 And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

Perhaps the greatest hindrance to dealing with the apostles was the fact that the healed man stood there in their midst. If they went too far in chastizing or punishing the apostles, they were afraid they would face the ire of the people who had seen the effects of the miracle.

ACT 4:15 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves,

The first thing that had to be done was to get off by themselves where they could agree on the actions which were to be taken. They sent Peter and John out of the presence of the Jewish court and set about to see what could be done to stop any further interference with their established positions.

ACT 4:16 Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it.

True miracles cannot be denied without sacrificing logic. Such miracles are done in public. They are witnessed by numerous persons. And they are undeniably performed only through the power of God. This was a true miracle. The people knew it, and the leaders knew it. But they were unwilling to bow their knee before the King of all the earth.

ACT 4:17 But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.

Before the resurrection, the apostles had scattered in every direction rather than to take the chance of being crucified along with the Master. The Sadducees remembered that fact and decided they might well be able to bring about the same type of confusion again. All they needed to do was threaten the two

and tell them never to allow the name of Jesus Christ to pass their lips again.

ACT 4:18 And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

And so that was the course of action taken. It is logical to think that they attempted to persuade Peter and John that they were capable of making life extremely miserable for them if they did not cease their preaching in Jesus' name. There were to be no speeches. There were to be no private instructions of others. The name of Jesus was to fade away into the shadows and remain there.

ACT 4:19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

They completely misjudged the two apostles. They were not about to betray their Teacher. He had told them to begin at Jerusalem and see that the gospel was spread unto all the world. Now these government officials were placing their own authority in opposition to the command of the Lord. Anyone in their right mind would be able to see this decision was what is sometimes today known as a “no brainer”. Christians must obey God rather than men.

ACT 4:20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

These two apostles were not the only ones who found themselves compelled to make such a decision. Balaam had once told Balak he could not speak anything other than that which God bid him to speak. Jeremiah once decided he would cease to preach the Word of God. He found that it was like fire in his bones, and he could not contain it within him.

I was once told by a very fine speech teacher that a preacher should fill himself so full of the Word of God that his sermons were the result of the overflow. Peter and John could no more cease to speak in the name of Jesus Christ than they could cease to breathe.

ACT 4:21 So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done.

The council could not accuse the apostles of healing the man on the Sabbath as they tried to do with Jesus. In fact, they could find nothing at all serious enough that they could make a serious accusation. The only thing left to them was to try to intimidate them further. They should have known better. It should have been clear by this time, intimidation was not going to get the job done.

The thing that made it so difficult was that the general public was delighted with what had happened. Though the Sadducees would not give glory to God, the people were doing so. To have had the apostles beaten at this time would have placed the Sadducees in an extremely dim light

ACT 4:22 For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed.

A man who is forty years of age and has never walked since he was born just does not get up and leap around praising God for his blessings as this man did. God's genuine miracles leave absolutely no room for doubt.

ACT 4:23 And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.

Their own company no doubt consisted of many of the same one hundred twenty who had been gathered in the upper room when the Spirit was poured out upon the apostles. The situation was serious. The Sadducees meant business. They had no intention of allowing the name of Jesus Christ to be preached. They would do anything within their power to halt what they thought to be the foolishness of the resurrection. Peter and John needed the encouragement and advice of their fellow Christians.

ACT 4:24 And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is:

The entire group, including Peter and John reached out for divine help. They lifted up their voices in prayer to Jehovah who created and sustains the

entire universe. Centuries before this, the king of Judah did the same thing. The Assyrians had already marched down through the country north of Jerusalem, taking possession of everything along the way. When the Assyrian army came near to Jerusalem, messengers were sent to tell the citizens of Jerusalem there was no hope for them to escape the power of Assyria. They might as well surrender. The gods of the nations to the north had been unable to resist them. Why did Judah believe Jehovah could do any better?

The king laid out his problem before God. He pointed out how the Assyrians had mocked and made little of the power of the True God. Then he asked for help. God responded by sending an angel who destroyed thousands of the best soldiers of Assyria. The Assyrians went back home and Jerusalem was secure for many years.

ACT 4:25 Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?

The apostles knew the Old Testament prophets. The words of King David came to their minds. David had predicted that the nations would gather around the Messiah when he arrived, and would persecute him with all their might. The quote is from Psalm 2:1-2. However, the entire second Psalm is very pertinent to what was going on. Men may try to dethrone the Son of God. They will not succeed. They will only make him angry and bring the wrath of God down upon themselves. They only imagine they have the power to defy the Lord. In the end, he will break

them like potter's vessels that did not meet the requirements of the potter.

ACT 4:26 The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.

Yes, God knew many long years before it happened, that Christ would be rejected and persecuted. Those who were in power would not willingly accept the authority of the one who was to become King of kings.

ACT 4:27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,

It is not an accident that the two kings who raged out against Christ marked the beginning and the end of his ministry upon the earth. Herod tried to kill him when he was born. Pilate did succeed in pinning him to the cross. Both the Jew and the Gentile were involved in his death. The Jews' rulers took the lead. The Roman soldiers gambled for his clothing at the foot of the cross. The Gentile governors fell in line and passed the sentence of death upon him.

ACT 4:28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

God knew that a complete sacrifice of a perfect man was going to be necessary. He predicted it in

both prophecy and types. Isaiah spoke of it in his fifty-third chapter. Every lamb who died and shed his blood in the evening and the morning demonstrated that God knew what was ahead.

It was not God's pleasure that Christ die. It was, however, his counsel that determined what would be necessary to blot out the sins of the world. Everything which was taking place had been foreknown by God long ahead of time.

ACT 4:29 And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,

The apostles and the band of Christians implored God to take note of how his prophecies were being fulfilled to the letter. The threats of the heathen had to be met. This would not be easy. Each apostle must be granted courage to preach the name of Jesus without any sign of fear or trembling.

ACT 4:30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.

They called upon Jehovah to stretch out his powerful hand to perform further miracles through the power of his Son, Jesus Christ. These signs had begun with the healing of the lame man. They must continue as a means of showing the persecutors that what they were preaching was the Word of God.

ACT 4:31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

God answered immediately, letting them know he had heard their petition. The entire area was shaken, perhaps by an earthquake. This was more than coincidence. God was with them.

We find the same words which were used earlier with respect to the filling with the Holy Ghost. The Holy Spirit had been poured out in the upper room, when the apostles were given power from on high. Then in the eighth verse of this fourth chapter, Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, began to speak.

Does the power of the Holy Ghost run low and have to be renewed repeatedly in order that the Christian may be able to continue serving God? I think not. We are simply being told that those who had prayed still had the assistance of the Holy Spirit. It had not left them powerless. The baptism of the Holy Spirit took place once, and only once. But, as men need the power of God, they will find it available to accomplish whatever task has been assigned to them. These men were expected to preach in the name of Jesus Christ. They received the power required to open their mouths in confidence and boldness.

ACT 4:32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

There were thousands of Christians by this time. Three thousand were added to the church at Pentecost. Five thousand were mentioned later. All of these new converts were bound together in the love of God and of one another. They were willing to share with any man or woman who had genuine need.

Once more, we must draw a contrast between the sharing of these early Christians and the socialistic systems of the present day such as Communism. These Christians were in complete control of their possessions. They had not been forced to give them up. Still, there was not a thing which they possessed that they would cling to, if someone else had a greater need for it. This principle is presented by the apostle Paul in the eighth and ninth chapters of Second Corinthians. He spoke of equality, but it was not a forced equality. It was completely voluntary.

ACT 4:33 And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

Since God had answered their prayer for confidence and boldness in continuing their preaching, they took up the challenge and refused to be intimidated by the Jewish council. They would preach Jesus Christ, even if it meant being faithful unto death.

What is meant by saying great grace was upon them all? Grace is the unmerited favor of God. Every blessing which we receive from the hand of God is a mark of his grace toward us. God's grace protected the apostles as they carried out the commands of the Lord to begin in Jerusalem and spread the gospel unto all the world. Perhaps we should remind ourselves of

what is said in the first chapter of John's account of the gospel.

John 1:14-16 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.

ACT 4:34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

Any man who was in danger of being cold or hungry could rest in confidence that if the other members of his Christian family had enough to help him, he would receive that help. This went so far as to include selling a possession to provide for the needs of the brethren. If you wish to know why the early church grew? This is one of the primary reasons.

ACT 4:35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

I am confident that those who sold possessions and laid down the money received for them at the apostles' feet did not go cold or hungry themselves. God has his ways of caring for those who care for others. The little boy who gave up his lunch of loaves

and fishes in order that the five thousand could be fed by the Lord, had twelve baskets full of food to eat if he desired after everyone was fed.

ACT 4:36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,

One of those who sold a possession was a man named Barnabas. I believe this is the same Barnabas who defended Paul when he returned to Jerusalem after he had been converted and needed someone to help prove that he had changed and was no longer persecuting Christians. If so, it was the same Barnabas who went with Paul on some of his missionary work. A son of consolation would be one who was known to be generous in his aid to others.

ACT 4:37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

As his name indicated, Barnabas felt the need to console those who had need. In order to do so, he was willing to sell some land and offer the proceeds to the apostles that it might be used to aid others.

We need to note that this chapter does not say all of these Christians sold **everything** they possessed. They sold only that part of their possessions which were needed to supply the needs of their brethren. We will see in the next chapter that they had the right to retain their possessions, and they also had the right to keep any money that they received when they sold a possession. Private ownership had not been abolished.

Chapter 5

ACT 5:1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,

Ananias and Sapphira had taken notice of the attention gained by Barnabas as a result of his contribution to the fellowship of the saints. It appears that Barnabas had received his name, meaning “son of consolation”, because of his genuine compassion for those in need.

ACT 5:2 And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.

Ananias and Sapphira conceived of a plan that would allow them to receive the adulation of their brethren, and at the same time maintain control of a portion of their assets. They would sell a possession in order that others might see the action. Then they would pocket a portion. This would make it look like they had made a larger contribution than was actually the case.

They put their plan into action and brought the part of the money to the apostles who were administering the distribution of the donations.

ACT 5:3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?

The couple failed to realize the presence of the Finger of God in these affairs. Peter and the other

apostles had been endowed with special power from on high. It is possible that Peter knew of their deception through other means, but the context points strongly to his having received the information through the Spirit of God.

Peter's response to their offer is clear and to the point. He accused them of acting under the influence of Satan. Their hearts had been defiled to the extent that they thought it possible to lie to the Godhead. Peter knew they had kept part of the proceeds of the sale.

Repeatedly, in the second and third chapters of the book of Revelation, God told the seven churches he knew their works. Yes, he knew their works. He knew the works of Ananias and Sapphira, and he knows the works of every man on earth. It is very unwise to attempt to deceive him. We may deceive men. We may deceive ourselves. But, we will not deceive him. God is not mocked.

ACT 5:4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

Here is the proof that this situation was in sharp contrast to the atheistic communism of the now defunct Soviet Union. The Christians were not required to share their wealth. Their contributions were strictly voluntary. Ananias and Sapphira did not have to sell the possession which they sold. Nor did they have to give any of the money into the common treasury. They were not interested in the welfare of

their fellow Christians. They were greedy for attention. Their deception was far more serious than they realized.

Dear reader, are you robbing God of what lawfully belongs to Him? If you are not giving liberally of that which he has placed in your stewardship, you may well find yourself under the same condemnation as this foolish couple. God told the Israelites of old they had robbed Him by withholding their tithes and offerings. Although Christians are not commanded to tithe, or give a tenth of their income, they are told to give as they have been prospered. Failure to do that is robbing God.

By the way my friend, you cannot steal from God. You must rob him. One steals when he obtains that which belongs to another while the other is unaware of his actions. Since God is aware of all of our actions, we may rob from him, but we cannot steal from him. He will always know the perpetrator of the robbery. Compare Malachi 3:8-10.

ACT 5:5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.

Ananias had come into the presence of the apostles first. He had come without his wife. As soon as the seriousness of his sin was made clear to him, he fell down dead. I have the distinct feeling that others decided immediately against taking the same path of action that he took. The fear that is mentioned is godly fear which activates men to respect the wisdom and power of God. This differs from the fear that paralyzes one in terror.

ACT 5:6 And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.

We can imagine the impression which was made on those young men who carried the body out for burial. I doubt very much if any of them entertained the idea of following in the footsteps of Ananias.

ACT 5:7 And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.

Sapphira did not know what had happened to her husband. She probably wondered why he had not returned from his visit to the apostles. If she had realized the nature of her husband's punishment, she would no doubt have avoided what followed.

ACT 5:8 And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.

Peter told her nothing about the previous events. He simply asked her how much she and her husband had received for the land they had sold. Immediately she entered into the same lie told by her husband. It was clear to Peter that the two had contrived to deceive the apostles, their fellow Christians, and most importantly, God Himself.

ACT 5:9 Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have

buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.

It must have been a terrific shock to Sapphira when she found out what had happened to her husband. She had already placed herself by his side in the lie they had conceived together. It was too late. Peter pronounced the sentence of death upon her. Her husband had hardly been placed in the ground before the same men would carry her out to be buried beside him.

ACT 5:10 Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.

That which is food for the gander is food for the goose. God is not a respecter of persons. We are not told whether Sapphira was a beautiful young woman or not. That might have made a difference with men. It was not even a consideration with God. She was just as dead as her husband.

ACT 5:11 And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

I wonder what would happen today if God administered punishment as promptly as he did in the case of this couple. Because God does not settle all of his accounts in September, there are many today

who decide he never will do so. Isaiah stated it in an interesting way. He said, *With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness (Isaiah 26:9).*

Not only should those who heard of these things in the first century have taken heed. We who have heard of them in these latter days should also be filled with godly fear.

ACT 5:12 And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.

Jesus had said that the apostles would be endued with power from on high. This power would be used to confirm the divine source of the words they preached. They were not presenting the wisdom of men. They were spokesmen for Jehovah. The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira were only a sample of the many miracles done before the people. God had indeed kept the promise given through Joel that the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon all flesh (Joel 2:28-32 and Acts 2:15-18).

The apostles spoke with one mind. They were guided by the Holy Spirit of God, and all preached the same thing. A number of the newly converted Christians had apparently gathered with them at Solomon's porch, and all who were assembled found themselves in spiritual harmony.

ACT 5:13 And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.

I believe this verse is talking about the hesitation of those who might have considered acting in similar manner to that of Ananias and Sapphira. No others among the Christians dared to follow in their footsteps.

There is a problem. Is the second “them” identical with the first “them?” I think not. No Christian was foolish enough to lie to the Holy Spirit as the dead couple had done. The first “them” is Ananias and Sapphira. However, the people magnified the apostles as preachers of the word of God. The apostles are the second “them.”

ACT 5:14 And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)

The church continued to grow. We now have the three thousand converted on the day of Pentecost. We may add to this the five thousand mentioned in chapter four, verse four. Now multitudes of both men and women were added. The power of God was making itself felt.

ACT 5:15 Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.

It is interesting that people are always able to comprehend that which they can see so much more completely than that which is invisible. The forgiveness of sins is a far greater blessing than the healing of a lame leg. Yet, the masses will come flying if one can demonstrate the ability to heal the physical. The miracles performed by the apostles certainly relieved a large amount of suffering. But it was only a prelude to preaching about the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus Christ.

The people were so excited they did everything possible to reap some of the blessings of healing that were being dispensed. They felt that even the passing of Peter's shadow over them would bring healing. Perhaps they were correct in thinking this. Some most amazing things were taking place.

ACT 5:16 There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.

Not only did the citizens of Jerusalem respond to the good news. Many were brought to the apostles from surrounding areas. They suffered from a variety of problems. It did not seem to matter how serious the illness was, the apostles were able to bring them to a state of good health.

Some of these persons were plagued by unclean spirits which had invaded their bodies. Possession of human bodies by more than one spirit is mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments. People today who object to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in

human bodies need to realize that it is possible for more than one spirit to inhabit a single human body. Jesus and the apostles cast out spirits on numerous occasions. If demonic spirits may indwell human bodies, along with the human spirit, there is no reason to deny the possibility of the Holy Spirit doing the same.

ACT 5:17 Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation,

The attention the apostles were drawing was unacceptable to the Sadducees. They had already made objection to the apostles preaching that Jesus Christ had been raised from the grave. They were no doubt concerned over their own decrease in prestige as the people flocked around leaders other than themselves. Men who thrive on power are always dismayed when they see the competition gaining ground.

ACT 5:18 And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.

The Sadducees took the kind of action we might expect from the power hungry. In their way of thinking, placing the apostles in prison would stop their influence cold. Prisons were not very nice places in that time. Prisoners could soon be persuaded to change their course of action. Surely the apostles would cease their preaching if they were forced to endure the hardships of jail for a while.

ACT 5:19 But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said,

Once again, the opponents of God misjudged the picture. Prison bars are but toothpicks in the eyes of God. Locks on doors are of no use whatever. During the night the angel of God paved the way for the escape of the apostles by opening the doors of the prison. This is very real to me. I once worked at the Southern Michigan State Prison. There were a series of steel doors through which any person had to pass to either enter or leave the inside. The first of the doors would be unlocked and one could pass through it. Then it was locked and the next was opened. This continued until some four or five steel doors had been unlocked and then locked again.

ACT 5:20 Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.

As soon as the apostles had been released, the angel commanded them to go straight to the temple where they had been previously arrested and continue preaching the words of life which had been presented by the Lord. Can you think of a better way to irritate power hungry authorities than this? I cannot.

ACT 5:21 And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of

Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

The apostles did as they were commanded. They had been put into the prison in the evening. By early the next morning they were right back where they had been before the imprisonment, preaching the same message.

Meanwhile, the High Priest, who was a Sadducee, gathered the highest court in Jerusalem together to place the apostles on trial. All of the dignitaries of the Jewish senate were ready and waiting for them to be brought in. These leaders were in for a shock!

ACT 5:22 But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned and told,

The officers who were sent to bring them into the courtroom brought a very disturbing report. The prisoners had escaped! The Sadducees should have been learning a major lesson about God. You cannot fight against him and expect to succeed.

ACT 5:23 Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within.

They had securely locked the prison. Under normal circumstances this would have been quite sufficient to insure the presence of the apostles the next morning. But a strange thing had happened. The

officers had found the doors shut, just as they were when the prisoners were locked up. The guards were still stationed at the doors to prevent anyone from leaving. Yet the prisoners were gone. What was to be done?

ACT 5:24 Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow.

When this report came to the High Priest and his associates, they began to realize the matter was much more complex than they had supposed. What would happen if these preachers continued to heal the sick and talk about a resurrection? Things might reach a point where their own authority would completely break down.

ACT 5:25 Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.

This was even more distressing. Not only had the apostles escaped from the prison; they were back in the temple preaching Christ again. In the eyes of the jealous leaders something certainly had to be done. They should have realized, however, there was nothing that could be done to stop Christ's fearless twelve.

ACT 5:26 Then went the captain, with the officers, and brought them without violence: for

they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned.

This is almost ridiculous. The captain went with his officers to arrest them again and bring them to trial. If prison bars would not hold them, how could these soldiers overpower them? The apostles, however, went peaceably. The soldiers were careful not to abuse their prisoners because there was a strong possibility the people would side with the apostles and stone the soldiers. The people had received much benefit from these men of God.

ACT 5:27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them,

This scene would have been enough to strike fear into the hearts of most men. Here was an angry court, ready to dish out whatever punishment was necessary to put a stop to one's activities. These were not ordinary men. They were apostles of the Lord. The Sadducees would soon come to realize they were not easily intimidated.

ACT 5:28 Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

Now the axe was ready to fall. Did these prisoners not respect the authority of the High Priest? They had been clearly told not to teach by the authority of

Jesus Christ. They had ignored that command. They had gone even farther. They had accused the Sadducees of murdering the Son of God. This had better stop immediately.

ACT 5:29 Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

What a different Peter we are seeing now, after the resurrection of his Lord. No longer is he fearful of the opposition. Let them slay him. He will rise again! If it was to be a question of whom he should obey, there was no doubt about his choice. It would be obedience to the commands of God. He would far rather take his chances with the anger of the High Court of the Jews than with the wrath of Jehovah.

ACT 5:30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.

Had Peter and the rest truly accused the Sanhedrin of spilling the blood of Christ? Yes, they had. And now they were prepared to make the same accusation again. These rulers had killed Jesus. God then raised him from the grave and took him into the clouds to reign there as King of kings.

ACT 5:31 Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

Christ had been raised to sit on the very throne of God. He was both a magnificent King and at the same

time a Saviour of mankind from their sins. This man they had crucified was far greater than any they had ever met. He was capable of offering the forgiveness of sins. Israel was very much in need of just such a Redeemer. Their sins were piling up extremely high.

ACT 5:32 And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

Peter was not saying the apostles were witnesses of these things in that they had seen the risen Christ, although they had seen Him. He was saying their preaching was a witness to the fact that Jesus was, and is, the Saviour of the world.

Peter followed this with the statement that the Holy Spirit was also a witness to the fact that the things they had spoken were true. He offered as proof the fact that the Holy Spirit had been given to all that obey God. I have heard some say this promise was only made to the apostles. That is not what the present verse says. It says the Holy Ghost was given to them that obey him. This would certainly include more than the apostles. I believe it refers to the truth stated in chapter two and verse thirty-eight which declares that the gift of the Holy Spirit will be given to those who repent and are baptized.

Note that I did not say everyone who receives the gift of the Holy Spirit will be able to do the miracles the apostles did. The Holy Spirit dispenses his own gifts as he sees fit. He saw fit to empower the apostles to do miracles. The eighth chapter of Romans is the

place to go to find out what the Spirit does for present day Christians.

ACT 5:33 When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.

The listeners on Pentecost day were **pricked** in their hearts. They responded by asking, “What must we do to be saved?” These members of the council were **cut** to the heart. They rose up in fury, determined to kill Peter and the rest of them. How long would it take for them to learn just how futile it is to fight against God?

ACT 5:34 Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space;

There was one man who was wiser than the rest. His name was Gamaliel. This may be the same Gamaliel at whose feet Paul studied. He was a doctor of the law, meaning that he taught the law of Moses. He was a man whom all the people respected highly. At least, they had not gotten so heated that it would be impossible for him to be heard.

The apostles were separated from them by enough space that the council felt they could discuss the matter among themselves without being overheard by the prisoners.

ACT 5:35 And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.

Gamaliel pleaded with the council for caution. Rash action might backfire upon them. Be careful what you decide to do to these apostles.

ACT 5:36 For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.

Gamaliel recalled that a man named Theudas once boasted that he was somebody of great importance. He actually enlisted about four hundred men to follow his leadership. His band of followers was scattered, and he was slain. Everything he had tried to do had dissolved and only a faint memory remained.

ACT 5:37 After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.

Another man named Judas arose and a large number of persons began to follow him. The same thing happened to him. He died, and all of his disciples melted away. Neither of these men had brought about any lasting influence in the land.

ACT 5:38 And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought:

Gamaliel insisted that the best plan of action was to leave the apostles alone. If they were no greater than Theudas or Judas, they would go the same way. Jesus had already been killed. In a short time, his disciples would be scattered and forgotten.

ACT 5:39 But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

But the wise Gamaliel realized there was another possibility. These men might just be servants of Jehovah. If that turned out to be the case, the council would be found in a most embarrassing position. A fight against God would reach an undesirable end.

ACT 5:40 And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

The council decided Gamaliel was right. Things were not going very well at the time. Maybe another course of action would be preferable. Nevertheless, it might be a good idea to give the apostles a beating, just to let them know the council meant business. After beating them, they commanded once more that they no longer speak through the authority of Jesus. Then they let them go.

ACT 5:41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

What was the reaction of the apostles to this

intimidation and beating? Rather than weeping over the beating they had received and the persecution they had endured, they rejoiced in the fact that God considered them worthy of carrying the gospel to a world lost in sin.

ACT 5:42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

They did not even move away from the temple area. They preached both publicly and privately. No doubt large crowds assembled at the porch of the temple. Then those who were interested were taught privately in their own homes.

God had commanded that the gospel be preached in Jerusalem, then to Judea and then to Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world. If Christians would obey his command, he would be with them unto the end of the world. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

One does not stop the true Christian from preaching Jesus Christ. Threats and persecution only increase his or her determination to stand firm for the one who loved them enough to die for them.

Chapter 6

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

The problems which are recorded in this chapter naturally follow the preceding events. The early Christians in Jerusalem had made a serious attempt to care for the needs of every person in the Christian family. This had gone so far as the selling of their possessions in order to fill those needs. That was why Barnabas sold his possessions. It was also behind the lies that Ananias and Sapphira told concerning the price they had gotten for the possessions they sold.

It is not difficult to see why the murmuring mentioned in this verse took place. There was either real or perceived injustice in the distribution process. Either the Grecian widows were being neglected, or else the Grecians believed they were. Racial and national prejudice have been around for a very long time. They have caused untold misery for both those who hold such prejudices and for those who are persecuted as a consequence of such attitudes.

These Grecians were Christian Jews who spoke the Greek language and who had settled in the Jerusalem area. The Hebrews were Christian Jews who still spoke the Hebrew language. The reader will remember that there were Jews from some seventeen different nations who had gathered in Jerusalem for the feast of the Pentecost when three thousand obeyed

the gospel. The apostles did not preach the gospel to the Gentiles until after Peter was commanded to take it to the household of Cornelius (Acts 10).

The phrase “in those days” is indefinite. Some believe there was an extended period of time, perhaps several years, from the day of Pentecost until the events of this present chapter. This would be difficult to prove. All we can say is that it was in the days when the early Christians were sharing their possessions.

ACT 6:2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

The apostles recognized the seriousness of the problem and took action to remedy it. They called many of the Christians together and began to lay out a plan which would allow them to continue their preaching and at the same time see that the needs of all the Christians were attended to.

This verse does not provide an excuse for preachers to envision themselves as an elite class. The clergy problem can be a most ugly one. I have seen altogether too many situations in which members of congregations place the preacher on a pedestal and accept whatever he has to say about Biblical matters as being infallible. This creates two grave dangers. The preacher may become egotistic and feel that no one should question his pronouncements. The members of the congregation may cease to study for themselves and lean on the preacher to do their

studying for them. This is disastrous for both the preacher and the members of the congregation.

It is true that God had given the apostles a very important task. It was not wise that they should spend their time in caring for the physical needs of the members when the apostles had been especially inspired to teach the Word which Jesus Christ had personally entrusted to them.

ACT 6:3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

The apostles commanded that good men be appointed to see that the needs of all persons were met. Those appointed were to meet certain well defined qualifications. First, they were to be full of the Holy Spirit. I understand this to mean they were to be godly men who were willing to be led by the inspired truth which Christ and the apostles had presented. God had given them the Holy Spirit as he promised through Peter as recorded in Acts 2:38, and which he said was to be given to those that obey (Acts 5:32). Thus, these men were to be guided and strengthened by the Spirit of God.

Second, the men were to be wise. They must be capable of making decisions based on the realities of the situation. They could not provide more than enough for some who already had a sufficiency. Nor could they ignore those who truly had needs which were as yet not met. This would require a certain degree of skill in decision making.

Third, the men were to be of honest report. It would be the height of foolishness to put someone in a position where they would be tempted to divert the donations of the Christians to their own pockets.

It is significant that the apostles did not appoint these men themselves. They called for the multitude to seek the men out from among themselves. It is always well to allow input from the members of a congregation when decisions are to be made as to new leadership. A leader who has been installed without such input begins his work with two strikes against him.

It is from this chapter that we take some of our instructions for the appointment of deacons. These men who were appointed to see that the entire congregation was properly cared for with regard to their physical needs do seem to meet the job responsibilities of the deacons as those responsibilities are described in other parts of the New Testament.

ACT 6:4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

The appointment of the men who were searched out from among the people would allow the apostles to tend to the matter of communication with God and with those to whom God had commanded that they preach the gospel.

ACT 6:5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and

**Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and
Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:**

Both the Hebrew and the Grecian Christians were pleased with this new arrangement. Seven men were chosen. Stephen may have been mentioned first because of his importance in the upcoming events. He was full of faith, and of the Holy Spirit. However, all of the seven were to have met these same qualifications.

Stephen and Philip stand out among the seven as a result of being involved in other high profile matters. Stephen was stoned to death by the Jews when he preached Christ to them. Philip preached to the Ethiopian eunuch and also to the Samaritans.

Some have noticed that Greek names are involved here. This could mean a special effort was made to soothe the feelings of the Grecian Christians by appointing men from among them.

**ACT 6:6 Whom they set before the apostles:
and when they had prayed, they laid their
hands on them.**

The seven were brought before the apostles for their approval. A simple ceremony was performed in order that they might be accepted for the work into which they were about to enter.

I do not believe the laying on of the apostles' hands in this case was for the purpose of transmitting the power to perform miracles. I believe it was merely a means of allowing the seven to know they were approved for the work, and also to cause the assembly

to recognize their authority to administer the donations to the proper recipients.

This may be the place to mention that the deacons are not restricted to administration of the physical matters of the church while the elders are to administer the spiritual matters. The fact is that the elders of the church are responsible for the oversight of both the spiritual and the physical matters. When the gifts which Paul received from the Christians in Asia and Greece were taken to Jerusalem, they were given to the elders rather than to the deacons. The deacons are to assist the elders in whatever tasks the elders assign to them. The word **deacon** means “servant.”

ACT 6:7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

At this point all seemed to be going fairly well. The gospel was being heard. Many were obedient. There were even some conversions to Christ from among the Jewish priests.

When you multiply a number, you normally think of multiplying that number by another number greater than one. Recall that there were three thousand baptized on the day of Pentecost. Later we are told there were about five thousand men, plus women and children. This would give us a sum of at least eight thousand. If this number is multiplied by as little as two we have over sixteen thousand Jewish Christians in the area of Jerusalem. The body of

Christ had been established. It had proven to be healthy.

It is sad that the number of true Christians in Jerusalem today is much less than it was in those early days of the Church. One might search unsuccessfully for one hundred Christians in the entire city of Jerusalem today. When a group of members of the church was in that city on the Lord's day, the guides sought out a few who could meet with us for worship. It was clear that those who came were not regular worshippers who were steady in attendance. There will be many who will answer to God in that final day for their refusal to hear the Word. In the very place where Christ was first preached he has been ignored. That is difficult to excuse.

ACT 6:8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

Stephen was one of the seven. If we consider him a deacon, he was a preaching deacon. He had the ability to back up his messages with supernatural demonstrations. These miracles were critical in the first century. The New Testament had not yet been written. Each inspired man had to confirm his preaching with sufficient evidence that his message was from God. The miracles were provided to supply that evidence. We are reminded of the statement Nicodemus made to Christ that *"Thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do the miracles which thou doest except God be with him."*

ACT 6:9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

All was not a bed of roses. The Jewish rulers had opposed Christ. They would also oppose his apostles and his disciples. The men who arose to dispute with Stephen were both prestigious and intelligent. They were not accustomed to being upstaged by such persons as Stephen. They no doubt thought it would be a simple matter to intimidate him with the power of their oratory.

ACT 6:10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

The disputants had a surprise in store for them! Without realizing it, they had placed themselves in opposition to the power of the living God. Stephen was not speaking through his own wisdom and power; he spoke by the power of Almighty Jehovah. There was absolutely no way the disturbed and jealous Jewish leaders could meet his arguments.

ACT 6:11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.

Since his opposers were unable to meet his arguments, they resorted to another plan. They would hire false witnesses to lie about his teaching. Stephen

had not been speaking blasphemous words against either Moses or against God. No doubt Stephen had been preaching Christ from the law and the prophets. The Jews were unwilling to accept Jesus as the Son of God and the promised Messiah. They were ready to brand both Stephen, and the Christ whom he preached, as imposters and blasphemers.

ACT 6:12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council,

Some people require very little stirring to rile them up. They relish the excitement of making accusations against others. Here was a man whom their leaders had labeled as a heretic. The proper thing was to stop him in his tracks. Why worry about whether or not he spoke the truth? Just eliminate him! So Stephen was captured and taken before the Jewish High Court. They thought he would have no chance standing before the Sanhedrin.

ACT 6:13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:

It was not enough that Stephen had to defend himself before such a group of dignitaries. He also had to face a pack of liars. They accused him of trying to destroy both the temple and the law of Moses. What

terrible things had he taught that brought on such serious charges?

ACT 6:14 For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

The charge was that he had said Jesus Christ was going to destroy the temple and make changes in the law of Moses. We will see in the next chapter just how Stephen reacted to each of these two charges. Did Jesus really contradict the law of Moses and threaten to tear down the Jewish temple?

ACT 6:15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

After the charges were placed against Stephen, a very dramatic change took place in his appearance. His face changed and looked like that of an angel. Just what was this change in the appearance of his face?

Angels were often bright and glorious. I do not believe this simply means that a righteous smile came over his face. I believe it was something similar to what happened to Moses when he had been up on Mount Sinai. At the time the Jews were unable to look upon his face because it shone so brightly. The Jews seem to have been able to look at the face of Stephen, but it does seem that it took on a glorious nature.

Chapter 7

ACT 7:1 Then said the high priest, Are these things so?

We would say today, “Do you plead guilty, or not guilty?” Of course this was the proper way to start the trial. A charge had been placed against Stephen by some very influential citizens. If Stephen was guilty of a crime, he needed to be punished. If he was innocent, he should be released.

ACT 7:2 And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran,

Stephen did not go back all the way to Eden, but he did go back a considerable ways in the history of God’s relationship with his people. He took his listeners all the way back to God’s promise to Abraham. These were students of the law to whom Stephen was speaking. Here was common ground. They knew about the promise to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through his seed. The Jews cherished the idea that some day through the descendants of Abraham, a great leader would come to bring a blessing, not only upon the Jews but upon all men through the Jews.

Therefore Stephen knew his listeners would nod their heads in the affirmative when they heard about their honorable ancestor who had received the promise. God had selected Abraham from all the men

on earth way back when he lived in Mesopotamia between the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers.

ACT 7:3 And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee.

God had told Abraham to leave that fertile land, as well as his own kinsfolk. He was to travel to an unknown land which God would point out to him.

Of course, Stephen was constantly moving in his speech toward the very day in which he stood before the court for upholding Jesus Christ. The land was the promised land of Canaan in which they sat at that very time. They were the descendants of whom God had spoken to Abraham when he said he would cause him to have a multitude of seed, even like the stars of heaven or the grains of sand on the seashore.

ACT 7:4 Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell.

Abraham had followed the instructions of Jehovah. He left his land and lived for a time in the area of Haran, until his father Terah died. Then he moved southward and entered into the very land where the council was meeting. Stephen keeps getting closer home all the time.

ACT 7:5 And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.

The only property Abraham ever owned in the land of Canaan was the Cave of Machpelah. Except for the burial of Sarah, he did not make use of that until after he died. He spent his time as a nomad, wandering over the land without claiming possession of it.

God had told Abraham he would give possession of the land to Abraham's seed, even before Abraham had any children. God's knowledge surpasses ours as much as the stars are above the earth. He knew Abraham would have millions of descendants. He also knew those descendants would someday claim possession of the land of Canaan. It was not until the time of Joshua that the Hebrews did take possession of the land.

ACT 7:6 And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years.

Before the Jews would be allowed to take possession of the land, they were to be taught a lesson about idolatry and bondage. This would be learned during a period of four hundred years in the land of Egypt. It would not be an easy time, but it would prepare them for the coming of a Messiah who would release them from the bondage of Sin. Again, Stephen knows exactly where he wants to go. He is getting ready to preach Christ unto the council.

ACT 7:7 And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place.

After God had allowed the Israelites to learn the need for his assistance in directing their steps, he would visit punishment upon the Egyptians who had held them captive. He had told Moses that one of the signs that he was with Moses as he went to Pharaoh to demand the release of his people was that the day would come when they would come forth from Egypt and serve God at the very mountain where Moses was when he received the command to appear before Pharaoh. We have a reference here to Exodus 3:12.

ACT 7:8 And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.

Stephen moved on with his sermon before the council. Those who were persecuting Stephen knew what he was talking about. They took great pride in being descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were well acquainted with the fact that after the Israelites were released from bondage they moved down to Mount Sinai to receive the statutes and ceremonies of the Law of Moses, including the command to circumcize every male on the eighth day of life. Jacob had produced twelve sons who were to become the twelve patriarchs or princes of the twelve tribes of Israel. All was moving forward under the guiding hand of God Almighty.

ACT 7:9 And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him,

God knew, even before it happened, that Joseph's brothers would sell him into Egypt. This would be the trigger that would bring the entire family of Jacob into Egypt where they would learn the lessons God needed to teach them. Joseph was not alone when he arrived in Egypt. God was with him every step of the way. Joseph would tell his brothers later on that they had meant it for evil when they sold him, but God turned it into good.

ACT 7:10 And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

After Joseph had been placed in prison because of the malice of Potiphar's wife, Jehovah saw to it that he was instrumental in interpreting the dreams of the butler and the baker. This led them to call upon him when Pharaoh had a dream which needed interpretation. As a result Joseph was raised to second in command over all the land of Egypt. All was in line with God's providential plans for his people.

ACT 7:11 Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance.

Joseph had predicted through the power of God that there would be a terrible famine in the land which would last for seven years. The famine hit not only Egypt but also the land of Canaan. The situation became so serious that Jacob and his family had to search out food wherever they could find it.

ACT 7:12 But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.

Word had come that there was food in Egypt. Thus, Jacob sent his sons to purchase food from that land. This fell directly into the hand of the Lord. Joseph would be united once more with his brothers who had so cruelly sold him into slavery.

ACT 7:13 And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh.

The first time the brothers met Joseph and asked to buy food, Joseph did not make himself known to them. When they returned later, he revealed that he was their long lost brother whom they thought must be either dead, or else serving as a slave somewhere. Of course they had no idea where he would have been taken by the slave traders.

After Joseph rejoiced to see his brothers once more, he let Pharaoh know who they were, and they were given a place in Goshen in Egypt to pasture their flocks. This would last for a time, but the favors which were shown to the Hebrews in the time of Joseph was to come to an end.

ACT 7:14 Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls.

At the invitation of Pharaoh himself, Jacob had insisted that his father and the entire family move

into the land of Egypt. Counting Jacob and his own personal family there were seventy persons from Jacob's family who went down into the land of Pharaoh. This was a far cry from the more than two million who left the land four hundred years later under the leadership of Moses.

Bible critics have been quick to point out what they assume to be a discrepancy in the records here. In Acts 7:14 the number 75 is mentioned. In Genesis 46:26-27 we find two different numbers. They are 66 and 70. The reader will note each of these numbers in the texts below.

*Genesis 46:26-27 All the souls that came with Jacob into Egypt, which came out of his loins, besides Jacob's sons' wives, all the souls were **threescore and six**; And the sons of Joseph, which were born him in Egypt, were two souls: all the souls of the house of Jacob, which came into Egypt, were **threescore and ten**.*

Acts 7:14 Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls.

The student of the Holy Scriptures need not be distressed in the least. Let us examine the matter.

I would like to first consider the number sixty-six which is mentioned in Genesis 46:26. Who were the persons who made up this number? The following data provides the answer to this question?

Jacob had 11 sons and 1 daughter	total	12
Reuben had 4 sons	total	4
Simeon had 6 sons	total	6
Levi had 3 sons	total	3
Judah had 3 sons, 2 grandsons	total	5
Issachar had 4 sons	total	4
Zebulun had 3 sons	total	3
Gad had 7 sons	total	7
Asher 4 sons, 1 dgtr, 2 gsons	total	7
Dan had 1 son	total	1
Napthali had 4 sons	total	4
Benjamin had 10 sons	total	<u>10</u>
Grand Total		66

Jacob himself, plus Joseph and his two sons add 4 more

Grand Total	total	<u>4</u> 70
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Of the wives of Jacob's sons there were but nine. Simeon's wife and Judah's wife were both dead. Joseph's wife was already in Egypt. Adding the nine wives, who were not from the loins of Jacob, to the previous total of 66 gives us 75 souls, which is the number mentioned in Acts 7:14.

The reader is referred to Volume 1, page 255 of Adam Clarke's commentary on Genesis for additional information on this matter.

ACT 7:15 So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers,

Jacob was an old man when the family moved into Egypt. When Pharaoh asked him his age, he had told

Pharoah he was one hundred thirty years old. He lived seventeen more years in the land of Goshen before he died (Gen. 47:28).

ACT 7:16 And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem.

The New Testament book of Hebrews informs us that these patriarchs all died, not having received the fulfilment of the promise God had made to them. They knew the land of Canaan was the land God had promised, yet they had spent their lives before Joshua led the people in the conquest of that land.

Jacob's remains were taken to Shechem, or Sychem, where he was buried in the cave of Machpelah

ACT 7:17 But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt,

The four hundred years God had said would pass while Israel was in bondage finally passed by. During this time the seventy souls had multiplied many times over. God was in the process of turning a family into a nation. His promise was not forgotten. His people would be released, and Egypt would be punished for mistreating them.

ACT 7:18 Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph.

It was a very long time from the era of Jacob and Joseph to the time of Moses. Jacob and Joseph lived near the beginning of the four hundred years. Moses lived as it closed out. Pharaoh after Pharaoh had come and gone. Joseph's influence had dimmed to the point where a Pharaoh came to power who really did not care how the Hebrews came into the land. He had no respect for them and decided to commit them to slavery.

ACT 7:19 The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live.

Pharaoh had been so concerned over the numerical growth of the Hebrews that he decided to eliminate all of the male babies. He had little idea that he was attempting to get in the way of God. God had a plan for the Hebrews. Pharaoh would not be able to block that plan.

Remember dear friends, Stephen is telling this story in front of the Jewish council that is ready to punish him for preaching in the name of Jesus Christ. Everything he is saying is one continuous story which will leave only one possible conclusion. The man whom Stephen preached was the one for whom God had been planning from the time of the promise to Abraham.

ACT 7:20 In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months:

The plan of Pharaoh was only partially successful. He killed many of the male babies of the Hebrews.

However, he missed one whom God was going to use in the development of his purposes of redemption. That babe was Moses.

Moses was a beautiful child. He lived in his father and mother's house for three months until it became impossible to hide him any longer. Then his mother placed him in the river where Pharaoh's daughter would find him when she came to wash in the river. She was taken by his weeping and decided to rescue him from the reeds in the edge of the river.

ACT 7:21 And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son.

How was Moses cast out? It was through the necessity of leaving his parents home and being hidden in the reeds at the riverside. Matters such as decrees from the kings of powerful nations are but small things in the way of God's purposes. God had plans for Moses. They would not be hindered by an order from Pharaoh. When the child wept, Pharaoh's daughter could not allow him to be destroyed. Even though she knew he was a Hebrew child, she rescued him from the river and took him to her own quarters to be treated as her own son.

How simple it is for God to overcome the commands of the most powerful men on earth. This time he did it with the tears of a babe.

ACT 7:22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.

Egypt was one of the culture centers of the world at that time. Moses received an education second to none. He would have been trained in mathematics, in science, in politics and in the arts.

The lad did not waste his opportunity. He became a powerful and influential young man. All of this knowledge of the Egyptians would be of great advantage to him later as he led the Israelites from the clutches of Pharaoh.

ACT 7:23 And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.

Moses' life was divided into three forty year periods. He spent the first forty years in Egypt, gaining experience for the great adventure of leading God's people from bondage. The second forty years was spent in the wilderness tending the sheep of his father-in-law, Jethro. God has always looked with favor upon shepherds. Moses was a shepherd. David was a shepherd. A mature congregation of God's people is ruled by men sometimes called shepherds. Jesus Christ is called the Great Shepherd. It appears that caring for the animals provides experience in the leading of men. The third forty year period was as the leader of the Israelites as they moved from Egypt toward the promised land.

Moses was aware of his Hebrew ancestry. The time came when he realized he was destined to become their leader. One day he decided to go out and mix with them and see how things were going.

ACT 7:24 And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian:

He saw a sight which disturbed him greatly. One of the Egyptians was abusing a Hebrew slave. This was more than Moses was able to endure. He not only stopped the abuse. He decided to take vengeance upon the Egyptian who was responsible for the cruelty. He killed him.

ACT 7:25 For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not.

Moses made the mistake of thinking his Hebrew brethren would be sympathetic with his actions. This may have been a poor judgment on his part. They had been suffering terrible affliction while he was living in the palace of Pharaoh, enjoying all the luxuries to be found there. It is really not surprising that they failed to understand that he was to be their future leader.

Leadership is not easy. It can become a very lonely task. There are often those among the followers that are envious of the prestige of the one who is leading. This opens the door for easy criticism. More than once Moses was to experience the loneliness of leadership.

ACT 7:26 And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?

The following day Moses returned to the area where he had killed the Egyptian. This time he saw

another unpleasant scene. Two of the Hebrews were fighting with one another. This was more than he could take. How could they add to their misfortune by making life miserable for their own people. He determined to intervene and bring the fighting to an end. He chastened them by asking why brethren would act as they were acting.

Moses was to find out a very important truth in dealing with conflict between persons. All too often both parties will turn upon the one who attempts to bring peace.

ACT 7:27 But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?

The man who was responsible for the quarrel quickly turned against Moses. He asked Moses a very pointed question. What right did Moses have to rule over the Hebrews? Who had given him this authority? He might have come from the palace of Pharaoh, but that did not automatically give him the right to act as their judge.

This seems like a pretty bold speech on the part of the Hebrew. He is but a slave. Moses is the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter. Moses was probably taken by surprise at the boldness of the man. He did not realize the man had a secret weapon at his disposal.

ACT 7:28 Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday?

Now Moses could understand the lack of caution on the part of the complaining Hebrew. The man had seen him kill the Egyptian the day before. This could

have placed Moses in danger of making an enemy of Pharaoh. The situation was critical. If Moses was to lead the Hebrew people, he would have to take quick action.

ACT 7:29 Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons.

I do not believe Moses fully understood how he was to lead the Hebrews. He may have been as much perplexed as he was fearful at this point. His hesitancy later when God commanded him to go to Pharaoh indicates this might have been the case.

At anyrate, he left the land of Egypt and fled into the wilderness of the desert. He produced two sons while living in the wilderness. Through Zipporah, Moses begat Gershom and Eliezer.

ACT 7:30 And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush.

After having concluded the forty years of sheep herding, this eighty year old man was completely astonished to see a bush burning with flames of fire. Within the flames there appeared to him an angel of God. Moses did not contemplate returning to Egypt to withdraw the Hebrew slaves. He was drafted by God! His long years of preparation were completed. There are other places in the Old Testament where angels were seen in flames of fire. We also recall that

the first chapter of Hebrews speaks of angels in connection with flames of fire.

ACT 7:31 When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him,

Any man who ever lived would wonder if he were to see what Moses saw. Rather than being afraid, he came closer to the bush to get a better look at it. Soon he was listening to the voice of God.

ACT 7:32 Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold.

This is just one of the strange appearances of the “angel of the Lord.” This angel seems to be so closely related to God that he is called God. In the case of the appearance to Moses, he said, “I am the God...”

We must ask ourselves why God identified himself with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? There is a clear answer to this question. God had promised to bless the earth through the seed of these three great patriarchs. He had not forgotten his promise. He is about to take one more step in bringing about the fulfilment of that promise. The descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were not to be left in slavery to the Egyptians. They were to be led to Canaan, the land God had promised to their forefathers. Moses was to take a very important part in seeing that accomplished.

ACT 7:33 Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground.

The reason Moses was told to remove his shoes from his feet was that he was in the presence of Jehovah. Removing one's shoes does not leave a person in a very dignified state. The removal of the shoes indicated a voluntary humility before the Creator of all things.

Sometimes we hear people speak of taking a trip to the "Holy land." By this, they normally refer to Palestine or Israel. However, the soil of Palestine is no more holy than any other geographical area. "God's country" today is the Kingdom of God which is found in the hearts of men. If you wish to visit holy ground today, look into the heart of a faithful Christian.

ACT 7:34 I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.

The message to Moses was that God had not overlooked the anguish of his people. He knew of their misery and misfortune. They had suffered enough to realize the horror of bondage. With this lesson in their hands, they would be released to move toward the land which was promised to their fathers. They should be ready to worship the Lord their God; and him only.

ACT 7:35 This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the

same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush.

The very same Moses whom they had accused of appointing himself as ruler and judge was being sent back by the Lord to deliver them to freedom.

Now, we can begin to see the relationship of this angel to God. God had spoken through the angel as if it was God himself speaking. The angel was merely a way in which God could manifest himself in a manner such that Moses could observe the manifestation.

ACT 7:36 He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

We must keep reminding ourselves that this is the account as given by Stephen before his persecutors who had accused him of rebellion against God. He is explaining why his actions were not those of a rebel.

Moses had demonstrated many signs and wonders that established, or confirmed, his divine authority. He brought the ten plagues upon the Egyptians. Later, the Red Sea opened before him to permit the Israelites to move out of Egypt and into the wilderness. This was the Moses who had led the fathers of the Jews through forty years of wandering.

ACT 7:37 This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear.

Stephen was now closing in on his major point. Jesus Christ was the Messiah whom God had sent to take away the sins of the world. Moses had predicted his appearance long before the time of Stephen and his accusers.

Moses had spoken of a prophet who would be like him. Truly Jesus Christ was a prophet like unto Moses. It is true that Moses was but a servant in God's house while Jesus was a son. Nevertheless, both were to lead people from bondage to freedom. Both were to feed the people with God's food and drink. And both were to die before they reached their heavenly resting place, Moses on mount Nebo, Christ on Calvary.

ACT 7:38 This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:

Moses was the one who had been with the “called out” as they endured the afflictions of the wilderness wandering. Moses was the one to whom the angel of God had conveyed the ten commandments and the book of the law on the top of Mount Sinai.

It was Moses who had first received the Word of God on that mountain and had transferred those “Words of life” to Israel.

ACT 7:39 To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt,

The suffering the fathers had brought upon themselves by refusing to obey the commands and

precepts given through the angel on Mount Sinai had been very heavy.

The people had been extremely foolish in their decision to turn from God to their own will worship.

ACT 7:40 Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.

They had cried out to Aaron to manufacture a god for them. Moses had been gone from their view for several days. They had so little confidence in Jehovah that they begged for a replacement. How could they do this such a short time after seeing the wonders of the plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea? The only answer I can give is that men are very forgetful. When things are agonizing, they will cry out for help. When things are going well and they become fat and prosperous, they lean upon their own understanding. It has been this way from of old.

ACT 7:41 And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

Many riches had been brought out of Egypt. The Egyptians had been very eager to give these riches to them to get them to leave the land for good. There was much gold among these treasures. From this gold, they fashioned a calf which they could worship. This was a remnant of their experiences in Egypt. The worship of cows was common there. The people were only doing what they had seen done in years gone by.

ACT 7:42 Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness?

It would have been a little less serious if the golden calf had been the only object of worship other than Jehovah. That was far from the case. They had worshipped the sun, moon and stars. For forty years, they had turned from one god to another.

ACT 7:43 Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.

They had gone so far as to allow their children to pass through the fire to Moloch. This consisted of throwing their tiny infants into a furnace between the arms of a man made god. It was absolute abomination to Jehovah. Even when God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, he halted the action before Isaac was actually killed. God has never approved of sacrificing humans to appease him. Jesus Christ is the only human sacrifice which the Father in heaven has accepted, and that was true only because this was his own Son who could be raised to live again.

ACT 7:44 Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen.

Now Stephan turned to a discussion of the place of worship. Throughout the wilderness wandering they had carried a tabernacle with them. Every detail of that tabernacle had been specified by the Lord. Every detail of that tabernacle and its services was a type of the new era under Jesus Christ.

ACT 7:45 Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David;

If we do not recognize that the Jesus of this verse is Joshua rather than the Saviour of the world, we can become quite confused. Stephen was talking about the entry into the land of Canaan, as the Israelites took the tabernacle of God into the promised land with them.

There were seven nations whom God drove out before the Israelites. He stated that it was not because of the goodness of the Israelites that he had driven out the Gentiles. It was because of the abominable acts the Gentiles performed and because of God's own promise to give a good land to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and to their seed.

It was not until the time of David that the Philistines were conquered and the Jews dominated all of their enemies.

ACT 7:46 Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.

David had not been satisfied to worship Jehovah in the tabernacle. He wanted to build a more glorious

permanent structure which would be recognized as one of the wonders of the world. God denied David the privilege of building the temple because his hands had been so stained by the blood of the enemies.

ACT 7:47 But Solomon built him an house.

God, however, promised that Solomon would build him a house. David gathered the materials. Solomon did use those materials to construct a building which remains a source of wonder to the last part of the twentieth century.

ACT 7:48 Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet,

Although God favored the temple, when it was finished, by filling it with his glory, God cannot really be confined to the four walls of any building constructed by human skills. He is a spiritual being. It is possible for him to inhabit a physical entity such as a building or even a human body. Yet, it is impossible for him to be confined to such structures. The house which Solomon built was only a type of the house the Son of God was to build in the Christian age.

ACT 7:49 Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?

The God who made all things is not about to be limited to living in a temple like the one built in Ephesus for the praise of the false goddess Diana.

Our God is so big he uses the entire heaven as a throne, and he might be thought of as resting his feet upon the earth as men would rest their own feet on a footstool.

ACT 7:50 Hath not my hand made all these things?

Before time began, God was. It was through him that all matter and energy came into being. How silly to bring silver and gold and make elaborate plans with our human minds, and then delude ourselves into thinking we have built our God a house suitable for his majesty.

ACT 7:51 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.

Stephen got a little rough right here. The circumcised were those who were committed to God. An uncircumcised heart is one that refuses to honor and obey him. Uncircumcised ears are those ears that refuse to hear the truth and turn toward the lie. Just as those in days of old had failed to fall in line with God's purposes, those who were making accusations against Stephen and the apostles were doing precisely the same thing.

The boldness of Stephen's language was not inclined to calm the infuriated Jews who were determined to halt the preaching in the name of Jesus Christ which the apostles had been doing.

ACT 7:52 Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain

them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:

The Jews of olden days had murdered the prophets who foretold of the coming of the Messiah. It is claimed that Isaiah was sawn in two with a wooden saw. Jeremiah saw terrible persecution, as he was placed in a cistern with water in it for a lengthy period of time. Jeremiah was called a traitor to Israel because he informed them they would be better off to surrender to the Babylonian king and take their seventy years of punishment.

ACT 7:53 Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

The Jews had received the law on Mount Sinai through angelic assistance of some type. All is not clear as to just what part the angels played. The Bible tells us God wrote the ten commandments with his finger, or with the “Finger of God.” This verse states that angels had some part in delivering the law. Perhaps the reader can dig deeper into the matter.

ACT 7:54 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

There is a tremendous difference between the actions of a people whose heart has been pricked as were those on the day of Pentecost, and the actions of a people whose hearts are cut, like these who faced

Stephen. One whose heart is pricked hears and obeys the words which have penetrated good soil. Those whose heart is cut take vengeance on the preacher for interfering with their guilty consciences.

I hardly think the Jews actually crowded around Stephen and bit him. I think this is a way of saying they gritted their teeth at him.

ACT 7:55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,

Their evil faces did not turn him from his position. His Saviour had once said not to fear them which could kill the body, but to fear him that could cast both soul and body into hell forever more. Thus, inspired by the Holy Spirit of God, Stephen looked upward into heaven. There he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father.

It may be significant that Jesus was **standing** as Stephen saw him. Other passages speak of Jesus being **seated** at God's right hand. It is as if the things which were happening to Stephen were so shocking to the Son of God that he rose from his seated position in astonishment.

ACT 7:56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

Apparently the Jews did not see what Stephen saw. Stephen attempted to tell them of his vision. This should have brought a cessation of their aggressive manners. It did not accomplish that end.

Here is further reinforcement of the fact stated in the second chapter of Acts that Jesus was raised by God to rule from God's right hand. Jesus is king now. We do not have to wait for a millennium to live under his sceptre. He is a spiritual king, not an earthly king. He rejected Satan's bid to make him king of all the earth. He knows of a far higher kingship; that of heaven and earth.

ACT 7:57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,

The Jews refused to hear his words. It would be difficult to hear him when they were yelling so loudly for his murder. What a vast difference in this scene and that where three thousand gladly heard the Word of God and were baptized and added to the church at the preaching of Peter. Nothing would satisfy their anger except the death of this man who called them murderers of the very Son of God.

ACT 7:58 And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

It was not wise to pollute the streets of the city of David with the blood of a prophet of God. The Jews

considered him no more than garbage. Just as they had taken Jesus outside the city to crucify him, they now took Stephen outside where they could take his life. I wonder if Stephen might not have rejoiced that he was allowed to join his Lord in this manner.

Here we meet Saul of Tarsus for the first time. He is the one who held the garments of the ones who did the stoning in order that they might more easily cast their stones. For the rest of his life Saul regretted what he had done in the gruesome murder of this faithful disciple of his Lord. Saul later called himself the chiefest of sinners. No doubt this was one of the memories that led him to make that statement.

ACT 7:59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

How simple a sentence! How terrible the event! I have seen cattle struck in the forehead with a maul before they were butchered. I have seen a sharp knife used to cut the throat of a hog and allow the blood to run out over the snow until the animal grew weak and died. But I have never seen a man stoned to death. May God prevent me from ever witnessing such a sight.

As I write, it occurs to me that God actually called for the stoning of certain persons who disobeyed his laws in the Old Testament. The man who worked on the Sabbath was commanded to be stoned. Achan, who took treasures from the city of Jericho, was sentenced to death by stoning. Sin is awful. I know it must be, because such punishment would be commanded by Jehovah only if the crime was of greater consequence than we can imagine.

ACT 7:60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Stephen then shared another experience with his Lord. Jesus had said, *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”* Stephen said, *“Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”* Mercy is contagious. Jesus inspired mercy in Stephen. Stephen inspires mercy in us. And we must inspire mercy in others. If we forgive others who sin against us, God will forgive us. If we refuse to forgive others, God will also refuse to forgive us.

Yes, Stephen fell asleep. You may remember that Jesus said that Lazarus slept. Lazarus had been dead several days. Stephen sleeps because the last trump has not yet sounded. When that trumpet sounds, Stephen’s body will rise from the grave where he now sleeps. That body will be changed in the twinkling of an eye and will become incorruptible and immortal. Stephen will be raised to live with the Lord whom he adored in the city where there will be no tears, no sorrows, no pain and no murderers.

Chapter 8

ACT 8:1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Saul was acting in all good conscience. He was fully convinced Christ was an imposter and Stephen was promoting evil and interfering with the work of God. Saul felt death was appropriate for those who opposed his Lord. He was a very dedicated man, and tried to do what he thought was right, even if it took murder to get it done.

The persecution was furious. The Jewish rulers were determined to put down this challenge to their power and prestige. It became so difficult for the Christians that they found it necessary to scatter throughout the entire upper portion of Palestine.

Note that this worked directly into the hands of God. He had commanded that the gospel be preached first in Jerusalem, then in Judea, Samaria and the uttermost regions of the earth. As these persecuted Christians moved from Jerusalem to other regions, they took the gospel with them boldly and without reservation.

In spite of the terrible persecution, the apostles remained in Jerusalem. Jesus Christ had promised to be with them unto the end of the world. They took him at his word.

ACT 8:2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

In the meantime, Stephen's brethren gave him a decent burial and grieved over the loss of such a righteous man. They were no doubt placing their own lives in danger by associating themselves with a person who had been stoned to death.

ACT 8:3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

Saul was absolutely convinced that Jesus was an enemy of Jehovah and his people. Saul had been raised by Jewish parents and had been sent to study at the feet of the noted Rabbi, Gamaliel. The prevailing attitude of the Jewish leaders was that when the Messiah arrived, he would relieve the Jews of the burden of servitude to Rome and would establish a throne in Jerusalem from which he would rule the entire world and bless it through the fleshly descendants of Abraham.

Therefore, Saul was bent on destroying everything Jesus Christ stood for. Every disciple of Jesus must be discouraged from preaching his message or living after his example. If that meant breaking into their houses and hauling them off to prison, so be it. The Christians must be stopped regardless of what it took to stop them.

ACT 8:4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

Many of Christ's followers found it necessary to leave Jerusalem and seek more secure areas. But moving from their homes did not quench their fierce enthusiasm for promoting the teaching of the Son of God. Even though it meant the loss of their lives, they continued to preach and teach in the name of their precious Saviour.

ACT 8:5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

The Samaritans were despised by the Jews. They were the descendants of intermarriage between the poorest of the Jews who were left behind when the others were taken into captivity and the Gentiles with whom they came into contact. The reader may recall that Jesus stopped at a well in Samaria to speak with a woman who was drawing water from the well. She was surprised that he would talk with her, since she was a Samaritan.

Now we find Philip going down to the city of Samaria and preaching Christ to these people. The gospel was to be preached first in Jerusalem, then in Judea, then in Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the Gentile world. It is on its way!

There is something else noteworthy here. The question sometimes arises as to whether elders and deacons of the church should be preaching. Philip appears to have been a deacon in the church at Jerusalem. Now we find him preaching some distance from

his home congregation. Was Philip neglecting his responsibilities in Jerusalem while preaching in Samaria? It is not likely. Since the seven were to be filled with the Holy Spirit it is not surprising that Philip had the ability to speak in public. We must remember that his case is different from that of most deacons today. The church had been under such persecution that its members had been scattered abroad. Philip was doing just what we might expect from a man who could no longer perform the duties he had been appointed to do. He was letting others know about the Saviour of the world.

ACT 8:6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

Philip received a hero's welcome. The Samaritans saw the miracles which he did and heard the message he presented. They believed the truth he delivered. I am reminded of the success Jonah had when he was finally persuaded to go to the city of Ninevah. Sometimes our preaching achieves unexpected results. God had said he would be with the apostles, confirming the word with mighty signs and wonders. Philip was not an apostle. However, he had had apostles hands laid upon him, and the miracles he was able to do caused many to believe in Jesus Christ.

ACT 8:7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.

Demons and unclean spirits are mentioned often in the first century church. They are real spiritual beings. It is almost as if God had allowed them to oppose the work of the Holy Spirit in order that men might be enabled to see that greater power rested in the apostles than was possessed by these evil beings.

There seems to have been a connection between being possessed by these evil and unclean spirits, and various physical problems. Sometimes it was palsy. Sometimes it was falling into the fire. Sometimes it was going about naked and acting much like a beast of the field.

ACT 8:8 And there was great joy in that city.

We are not surprised that there was great joy. When men and women are relieved of the kind of problems these people had carried with them tears of joy would certainly flow freely. We are made to wonder if the citizens of Jerusalem, where the gospel had been rejected and the Christians had been forced to flee, were joyous. I am convinced they forfeited the same joy the citizens of the city of Samaria now enjoyed. Rejection of the gospel of Christ does not result in joy.

ACT 8:9 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one:

In this city of Samaria we find a man who had been preying on the people through deception. I do not know whether his sorcery actually allowed him to perform some supernatural feats through the power

of Satan, or not. Certainly he was persuasive enough to cause many to perceive him as having unusual powers. This, no doubt, provided him with a sizable income.

ACT 8:10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.

Simon's claim was that he was doing his wonders through the assistance of God. He was so successful in his deception that he had followers among people of every social level, from the rulers to the beggars. We can only speculate as to how much influence this evil man had accumulated to himself.

ACT 8:11 And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.

Is sorcery the same as magic? Was Simon using the magic arts to deceive men? We cannot be certain from what the Bible says here. The word sorcery in the New Testament is taken from the Greek word **mageivai**" which is also the source of our English word "magic." There are places in the New Testament where the word sorcery seems to have some connection with the use of drugs or potions.

At any rate, God condemns the sorcerers. They are among those who will find their place in the lake of fire and who will be refused entrance into the heavenly city.

ACT 8:12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom

of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

When the people of the city saw the miracles performed by Philip and heard his preaching, they changed their loyalties and dedicated themselves to Jesus Christ. Many were baptized into the church. This seems to have been a mass movement. Large numbers of the people responded to the truth as preached by this loyal and energetic man called Philip.

ACT 8:13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

Among those who saw, who heard and who believed, was Simon the sorcerer. He was baptized and associated himself with Philip. The wonders Philip was producing were far superior to the delusions Simon had been foisting off on the people.

We have absolutely no reason to believe Simon was dishonest in his response to what he had seen and heard. The Bible itself says he **believed**. Those who attempt to say Simon was never converted in the first place, or else he would not have received the condemnation Peter gave him, are doing so in a futile try at salvaging their once saved-always saved doctrine.

ACT 8:14 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received

the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:

Although many of the members of the church had fled from Jerusalem, it seems the apostles stayed and weathered the storm of persecution. They were still there while Philip was doing his preaching to Samaria. Word soon reached the apostles that Philip had converted many of the people of that place.

The apostles decided to send Peter and John to assist Philip. There were things the apostles could do that Philip could not do. There were blessings available that Philip could not bestow.

ACT 8:15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:

When Peter and John arrived, they prayed for the new converts in order that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Clearly, they had not received it until the apostles arrived. We have a problem here. Was it necessary for the apostles to be present in order that a new convert receive the gift of the Holy Spirit? Peter had told the hearers on Pentecost that those who repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ would have their sins remitted and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Later, in 5:32 we were told that God gave the Holy Spirit to those who obey.

Can men not receive the gift of the Holy Spirit without the prayer of the apostles and the laying on of their hands? If so no man can receive the gift of the Holy Spirit today. The apostles are dead. I believe

the answer to this question is in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit itself is given to the new Christian. However, the Holy Spirit dispenses various gifts to men as he wills. In the days of the apostles, there was a need for miraculous demonstrations to confirm the divine source of the message. Every new Christian receives the gift of the Spirit. Then the Spirit guides and enables men to accomplish the tasks God has for them. The tasks in that early day required miraculous demonstrations. Today those demonstrations are not needed. The Word has already received adequate confirmation.

We notice later that Simon had not received any miraculous powers. He attempted to buy such abilities with money. This indicates only certain persons received such power, and Simon was not one of them. It is possible that he was trying to buy the power to pass miraculous powers on to others, rather than to just buy the miraculous powers for himself.

ACT 8:16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

The Bible is clear. These converts had been baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Yet, they had not received the Holy Spirit, at least in the sense they were able to perform signs and wonders.

ACT 8:17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

It was not until the apostles had prayed that the converts might receive the Holy Spirit, and laid their

hands on them, that these new Christians received the Spirit. And then it seems that only selected ones received these special powers.

ACT 8:18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money,

I believe these Christians had received the Holy Spirit in the sense that they were able to cry out “Abba Father” to the God of heaven. I do not believe they had received the Holy Spirit in the sense that they were able to perform miracles, until the apostles laid hands on them.

What Simon saw was the manifestation of the power of the Spirit through miracles. He very naturally wanted these abilities. They fit in perfectly with his former manner of life. Imagine what could be accomplished with the true power of Jehovah behind him. Simon did what so many have done in every age. He desired to have the new life in Christ without completely giving up the old life which was supposedly behind him. He was truly converted. Then he turned back toward the darkness.

ACT 8:19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.

Simon did not just desire the miraculous powers. He wanted the same abilities the apostles had. They were not only able to perform the miracles. They were able to pass that ability on to others upon whom they

laid their hands. That is what Simon wished to do. He envisioned great riches ahead. This was not magic. This was real supernatural power!

ACT 8:20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

One modern translation of the New Testament gives Peter's statement here as, "You and your money both go to hell." That is unjustified. I do not believe Peter was pronouncing eternal damnation upon Simon and his money. He was simply informing him that if he continued in the direction he was headed, he was lost. Simon had made the mistake of thinking everything has a price. We cannot help but remember what Peter and John said to the lame man. "*Silver and gold have we none, but such as we have give we unto thee.*" They then healed his lame legs and gave him far more than silver or gold. There are many things that are worth more than money can buy. The gift of the Holy Spirit is one of those things.

ACT 8:21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

At this point, Simon's heart was not in such a condition as to receive abilities such as the apostles possessed, nor even those possessed by those on whom the apostles had laid hands. He did not desire the power of the Holy Spirit for the advancement of the

Kingdom of God. He saw an opportunity for his own personal advancement. It is just such selfishness that Jesus Christ tried to eradicate from the world. In his present state, Simon could not be entrusted with these powers. He could have no part in what was taking place unless he changed his attitude.

ACT 8:22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.

He had repented before. Now he must repent again. He was full of wickedness and was not ready to either meet his God, or even serve him. There was need for drastic change. Still, there was opportunity for change. Some have tried to say that once a man has become a Christian and had his sins removed, any further sin is deliberate and cannot be remitted. That is not Bible teaching. God is faithful to forgive any sin a man is willing to confess and turn from.

The directions given to Simon are a pattern for men of all time. The alien sinner must first hear, then believe. This is followed by repentance and baptism. Since the wayward Christian already has heard and believed, the plan for him is to repent of his sins and pray that those sins be forgiven.

ACT 8:23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

A life of sin is a bitter life. Truly, Simon had turned from the joy of salvation back to a life of galling bitterness and condemnation. He had returned to the

captivity which Jesus mentioned when he said he came to release the captives (Luke 4). Simon needed to pray that he be released from the miserable condition into which he had entered.

ACT 8:24 Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.

Simon responded correctly. He was not like those who gnashed their teeth upon Stephen and stoned him to death for preaching to them. He requested that the apostles pray for him that he might avoid the destiny which Peter had pictured to him. O that many today who have endangered their souls would see the need to turn back to God!

ACT 8:25 And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

The apostles had accomplished their purposes in the city of Samaria. On the way back to the city of Jerusalem, they preached to many of the Samaritans. Jesus had at one time told them not to go to either the Gentiles or the Samaritans. They were commanded in the limited commission to go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. All of that changed with the coming of the New Covenant. Jesus had commanded that the gospel be preached to every creature under heaven. This began in Jerusalem. Now the gospel had been made available to the Samaritans.

There were three occasions in which the Holy Spirit seems to have been given in a different sense. The first was when it was poured out on the day of Pentecost and the apostles began to preach to the Jews. The second is in the present instance when the Samaritans were invited to share in the good news. The third will occur later when Peter is sent to the household of Cornelius. Each time the good word was extended to a new major group, the Holy Spirit manifested itself in a unique manner.

ACT 8:26 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.

Philip's work seems to have been complete among the Samaritans. The angel of the Lord then sent him southward to the area between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean Sea. This was the territory of the Philistines in days gone by. Gaza was one of five cities controlled by these ancient enemies of Israel in the times of Saul and David. It now marked the road from the African continent up to the land of Palestine and to the city of Jerusalem. It was said to be desert, not because it was so dry, but because it was sparsely populated.

ACT 8:27 And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship,

Philip obeyed the command of the angel of the Lord. We are not told what Philip's means of travel was. Since no beast of burden is mentioned, it is likely that he was on foot. It would have been quite a number of miles from where he was in Samaria down to the road from Jerusalem to Gaza.

As Philip moved along, he observed a man from Ethiopia. Ethiopia may not have been in the same location then as it is today. However, it was probably in the African continent. The man whom Philip saw was one of great dignity. He was the treasurer of the queen of the Ethiopians. He is said to be a eunuch.

This may be deceiving. It is true that men who held offices in the palaces of the nobility in Biblical times were sometimes made eunuchs to protect the harems of the ruler. However, as time passed the word eunuch seems to have been attached to certain officials whether or not they had been emasculated. The important thing is that this man was a high servant to Candace, queen of the Ethiopians.

ACT 8:28 Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.

The man had been to Jerusalem to worship. He was returning to Ethiopia when Philip came upon him. Rather than simply riding along and looking at the scenery, he had decided to use his time to good advantage and was reading from the prophet Isaiah.

It would be a good idea for more of us to use our time in this manner. With the Bible on cassette and read by professional readers, there is no reason why we could not expose ourselves to a great deal of Bible

we are traveling long distances on vacations, etc. This we are traveling long distances on vacations, etc. This treasurer is the kind of man we like to meet when we are telling the story of Jesus Christ.

ACT 8:29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

The Spirit commanded Philip to make contact with the Ethiopian. We do not know what means the Spirit used to communicate with Philip. It is best not to speculate on whether he spoke in an audible voice or directly to his mind. Whatever the manner was, Philip understood the will of God. He was to talk to the Ethiopian.

ACT 8:30 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?

As Philip ran toward the chariot, he could hear the man reading out loud. He used a very effective method of starting the conversation. He asked if the man understood the material he was reading. We often use a similar method when we invite people to study the Bible with us. We offer to help them to understand the truths which are contained in the book of books. Often they will discuss the Scriptures with us and we are able to teach them.

A number of years ago I was in the public library in Nashville, Tennessee. As I was reading, an elderly stranger walked up to me and said, "Understandest thou what thou readest." I replied with the same

words the Ethiopian replied to Philip. We ended up having a very interesting conversation though we were complete strangers.

ACT 8:31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.

The Ethiopian was having a difficult time understanding what he was reading. He had been unable to see through some of the sayings in the book of Isaiah. Those who have struggled with the prophets of the Old Testament will sympathize with him. It is not always easy to dig out the meanings.

ACT 8:32 The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth:

The Ethiopian was reading from the fifty-third chapter of the book of Isaiah. This chapter is a description of Christ being crucified for the sins of others. Christ did not fight back when taken to the cross. Like a sheep being taken to the slaughter house, he went quietly. He had already prayed in the Garden of Gethsemene that this cup might pass if it be the will of the Father. It was not possible to avoid it, and so he offered his life for us. The Ethiopian did not understand that this applied to the Christ.

ACT 8:33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.

As Christ had been condemned without cause, his life was taken away. He did not die because of his own sins. He died because of ours. Other men might have children and grandchildren. He would never have either one. He was humiliated, shamed, mocked and beaten. Finally, they gambled at the foot of the cross for his garments.

ACT 8:34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?

The Ethiopian wondered if Isaiah was talking about his own persecution. Was he predicting that he would be treated in this way, or was he talking about someone other than himself?

Back when I was about twelve years old, I remember reading from this same book of Isaiah and wondering exactly the same thing the Ethiopian did. It is sometimes difficult to tell if a prophet is talking about himself or about another person.

ACT 8:35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

This gave Philip exactly the opportunity he needed to preach the gospel of Christ to the man. What did the Eunuch preach when he preached Christ to the Ethiopian? Let me suggest that he told him of the life, death, burial and resurrection of our Lord. I would also suggest that he told him of the commands such as believing, repenting, confession, baptism and en-

duration unto death. Then I suppose he also told him of the precious promises of a better, richer life here and eternal life in the world to come.

Now all of this preaching began with the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. We would do well to use more prophecy in our preaching today. Only God could have foretold the wondrous things of the Christian age. In order to escape the force of the evidence men must close their eyes and stop their ears. If they are truly honest in facing the facts, they will react in the same way the Ethiopian did. They will submit themselves to the will of God.

ACT 8:36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

I previously mentioned that the word “desert” did not mean dust and sand. Here we have proof of that. As they were moving along, the Ethiopian desired to be baptized. This is sure proof that the preaching of Christ involves baptism. The man did not wait until they arrived at an inn. He did not worry about wearing wet clothing. He understood that God wanted him to be baptized in the name of Christ. He did so as soon as it was possible. Some men have died while waiting for a more convenient time. The Ethiopian understood that *“Today is the day of salvation. Today is the accepted time.”*

ACT 8:37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Only one thing remained before Philip was ready to baptize the man. He wanted a statement from him that he believed with all his heart that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. When the Ethiopian answered that he did believe, Philip was ready to baptize him.

Confession is a very important part of the Christian life. It is to be done at the time of baptism. It is also to be done every day of a man's life until the end of his days. To deny Christ before men is to invite Christ to deny us before the Father in the final day of judgment.

ACT 8:38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

What was the mode of baptism used when the Ethiopian was baptized? Was it some type of immersion of the spirit into the mind of Christ, or was it immersion in water? The verse cannot be misunderstood. Both Philip and the Ethiopian went down into the water. Philip immersed him and then they both came up out of the water. This baptism was a burial, just as it is described by Paul in the sixth chapter of Romans. Dear friend, do not evade the force of the example. Baptism is not pouring. Baptism is not

sprinkling. Baptism is a burial in water. Just as Jesus Christ was buried in the ground, we must be buried in the water.

ACT 8:39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

Again, we have a mysterious statement. What happened when the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip? It appears that he simply disappeared from the sight of the Ethiopian so he could not be seen any longer. Since the Bible does not give further details, we must be satisfied with what we have.

The Ethiopian went on his way rejoicing. I have seen both men and women come up from the waters of baptism with tears in their eyes. They knew they had done what God commanded in order for their sins to be washed away. The feeling of freedom was so joyous they could hardly restrain themselves. The Ethiopian knew that feeling.

ACT 8:40 But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

Here is the other end of the journey for Philip. The Spirit of the Lord had caught him up between Jerusalem and Gaza. We next find him much farther north, preaching in the area of Caesarea. This was a considerable distance. How did he get from one location to the other? All we know is that the Spirit of God was responsible.

Chapter 9

ACT 9:1 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,

Saul had just recently witnessed the murder of Stephen by stoning. He was ready to complete the task of finishing off Christ and his church. Along with others among the influential Jews, he had been responsible for driving many of the Christians out of the city of Jerusalem. These Christians had been scattered in many directions. But they had not been stopped from preaching and teaching in the name of the Lord. Some of them had found their way northward to the city of Damascus and were glorifying God and his Son from that location.

Saul went to the High Priest to see if anything could be done about these persistent pests who were determined to follow Jesus, even if it meant death.

ACT 9:2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

Therefore, Saul asked the High Priest for letters of authority to seek out the disciples who had escaped his heavy hand in Jerusalem and fled to Damascus. It mattered little to Saul whether they were men or women. As Christians, Saul saw them as being

opposed to both Moses and the worship in the Temple. His purpose was to find them in Damascus and bring them back to Jerusalem bound and ready for punishment.

ACT 9:3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

Saul was in for the greatest surprise of his life. He had gone most of the way from Jerusalem to Damascus when a light shone from heaven. It covered the area around which he was traveling. It was obviously sufficient to cause amazement on his part. We are not told all of the details of the light. We do not know whether it was colored. But, Saul knew it was not a natural occurrence. This was something deliberately sent to attract his attention and to humble him.

ACT 9:4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

Many artists have pictured Saul as riding on a horse or a donkey. They see him as falling off his beast of burden to the ground. The text says nothing about his riding. He may have been walking for all we know. He could have fallen to the earth from a standing position, just as well as from a riding position.

He then heard a voice asking him why he was persecuting the owner of the voice. This must have caused much turmoil in Saul's mind. He had no idea

he was in the process of persecuting anyone who had the power to bring about such a display as he was seeing.

ACT 9:5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

Saul asked who the owner of the voice was. Even this quickly, we get the impression he was ready to change his course of action to avoid bringing on the wrath of the one who had caused this strange light to shine upon him. I cannot but feel that he must have connected the strange change in the face of Stephen at the time of his stoning with the light which he was seeing on the road here.

It soon became painfully clear that Jesus Christ was the owner of the voice and the reason for the shining light. The things that were going on were a result of Saul's oppression of the Lord and his followers. He was now having to kick against the pricks which resulted from his actions. When I was a boy, we sometimes had to load cattle on trucks. Some of the cattle did not appreciate being herded into the truck. They would set all four feet as solid as they could and make it nearly impossible to move them. We had an answer. That answer was to jab them lightly with a pitchfork. Usually that worked. But not always. Sometimes a cow would kick back in the direction of the pitchfork. This only brought serious pain to the cow. Saul was kicking against the guiding of God through Jesus Christ. He was now finding that kicking against Christ was most painful.

ACT 9:6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

All of his boldness and arrogance turned to fear and trembling before the Son of God. Saul was absolutely and completely convinced of the foolishness of his previous ways. The only reasonable thing to do was to ask the question he did ask. What did Jesus wish for him to do?

If we could cause men to realize the seriousness of their rejection of the Christ and his offer of redemption, we could get many of them to turn from their evil and wicked ways. The difficulty lies in their belief that they may move onward as enemies of Jesus without suffering any discomfort. This is only a temporary condition. One day all men will bow their knees and confess with their tongues that Jesus is Christ. For many it will be too late.

Saul was told to go into the city of Damascus, and he would be told what it was necessary that he do to be pleasing to God. Why did Jesus not tell Saul personally what he expected him to do to be saved? It is an interesting thing that God normally uses men to preach the gospel to other men. He does not do it through personal appearances.

ACT 9:7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

Saul's companions were also shocked, though perhaps not in the same manner or degree as Paul.

They were dumbfounded and unable to comprehend what was taking place. They were able to hear the voice which spoke to Saul, but were not able to see any person producing the voice. We are reminded of other times in which voices spoke from heaven, as in the case of the baptism of Christ and also the transfiguration. This may help to explain the specifics of other times when God spoke. It was possible to hear the voice without seeing the Speaker

Some have claimed a contradiction exists between this verse and the account which is given in Acts 22:9 where it is said that his companions “heard not the voice of him that spake to me.” It is quite possible to hear a voice in one sense and be unable to hear it in another sense. Both my wife and myself are getting on in years now. If either of us speaks to the other from another room of the house, the one spoken to may hear the sound of the voice without understanding what was said. Our comment will be, “What did you say. I did not hear you.” Only Saul was able to understand what the voice was saying.

ACT 9:8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.

Saul had fallen to the ground when the light appeared. Now he arose from the earth and was ready to continue his way into the city of Damascus as he had been instructed by the voice of Christ. However, when he opened his eyes, he was unable to see. He had to be led by the hand. This may be an indication that he was walking rather than riding when the light

appeared. Otherwise he could have been placed on his beast and ridden it. It seems that he was being led by the hand as he walked onward. The brilliance of the light left him blind.

ACT 9:9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

The blindness was with him for three whole days. During this time he took neither food nor drink. This must have been a period of deep sorrow. Imagine the things that must have been running through his mind. How many had died at his hand? How many children had been made orphans? How many husbands and wives had been left without their mate? How seriously had he injured the cause of the Son of God? Such thoughts were enough to take away the appetite.

There is a place for fasting and prayer in the lives of Christians. It is a means of disciplining the mind. The physical world is far less important than the spiritual world. Sometimes it is good to deprive one's self of food and drink for a limited time and remind ourselves that they are secondary. Any fasting which is done should not be for the sake of demonstrating one's piety. It should be a genuine effort to realize one's dependence upon God.

ACT 9:10 And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.

While Saul was fasting and blind, God spoke to one of the Christians at Damascus named Ananias.

In a vision, Ananias heard his name called. He answered in the same manner that all men should answer when God calls. He said, “*Behold, I am here Lord.*” Remember, this man was among those whom Saul had determined to stamp off the face of the earth, or at least stop their voices from preaching Christ. Ananias will be called upon to do good to one who had been trying to do him evil. This is the true spirit of Christ.

ACT 9:11 And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,

Ananias was told exactly where to go to find this man called Saul of Tarsus. He would be found praying in the house of one named Judas on a street which was called “Straight.” I had the opportunity in 1978 of seeing what the guides said was the street called Straight. It is a very narrow street in the heart of that city. Small houses are built side by side with no space between them. If it was at all like this in the days of Saul he certainly did not find himself in the mansions of the wealthy.

ACT 9:12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

While Ananias had seen a vision of the Lord instructing him to go find Saul, Saul had also had a vision. He had seen a man named Ananias coming to

put his hand upon him that he might see once more. Dear reader, do you find the condition of Saul appropriate to his behavior in fighting against Christ? Christ was the light of the world. Saul had done his best to extinguish the light of Christ. It seems to me that God fit the punishment to the crime. Saul did not wish to see the spiritual light. God took away his ability to see the physical light.

There are other examples of such appropriate actions by God. When the Hebrews were complaining about the manna they had been given for food in the wilderness, God sent quail and told them they would eat it until it came out their nostrils.

ACT 9:13 Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:

Ananias was astounded. Was he really to go personally to Saul of Tarsus and help the man to see? This was the man who had brought unbelievable grief upon so many of the disciples. What would prevent him from taking Ananias life also?

ACT 9:14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

Ananias even knew Saul had received permission from the Jewish High Priest to arrest any Christians he found and take them back to Jerusalem to be punished for their discipleship. I think all of us can sympathize completely with Ananias. Perhaps everyone of us would have trembled in our boots to

think of doing what Ananias had been commanded to do. He had very good reason to be hesitant. Nevertheless, when God gives a command, it is not our privilege to dismiss it on our own grounds. It is our responsibility to obey and watch God work things out for both our own good and that of the Kingdom. *His thoughts are higher than our thoughts.*

ACT 9:15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

One might wonder why God had chosen Saul for this great task of preaching to the Gentile world. God had his reasons. Saul was a man who lived in all good conscience. He threw every ounce of energy he had into what he thought to be the good and right way. He was a busy and conscientious man when he fought against Christ. He would be just as busy and conscientious after he was enlisted in the army of the Lord. God can see ahead to the very end of the road. Men see only a very short way. We must trust the divine mind.

This man, Saul, was to preach to three classes of persons. He would preach the gospel to both the Jew and the Gentile. He would preach to kings as well as paupers. He would become the greatest evangelist for Jesus the world has ever seen.

ACT 9:16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

Yes! Saul would suffer greatly for serving the Saviour. He had been the persecutor up to this point. Now he would be persecuted by others. But Saul would not turn back. He would rejoice that as vile a sinner as he had been was permitted through the grace of God to suffer for God's cause.

ACT 9:17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Ananias did as he was commanded. It would be up to God to protect him from Saul. As he entered the house where Saul was praying, Ananias placed his hands upon Saul and instructed him as to what had happened to him. He had been told by Jesus Christ that he was to come and help Saul. There were two things he was expected to do. He was to help him receive his eyesight, and he was to aid him in being filled with the Holy Spirit. Of course, Ananias was but an instrument in the hand of God. He could neither restore Saul's sight, nor fill him with the Holy Spirit. Still, God used Ananias as a channel of blessing for others. With great courage on our part, we may also be channels of blessing for those who seem to be the fiercest enemies of Jesus. Many surprises have occurred in the past, and many will occur in the days to come. Give God a chance to work through you.

ACT 9:18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

Instantly, Saul received his eyesight. He was now ready to see the spiritual light of Christ. God was ready to give him back the ability to see the physical light of day. What was it that fell from Saul's eyes? Notice that the text does not say it was scales. It says that which was removed was like scales. I can give no further explanation.

Saul had heard of the baptisms of both John the baptist and Jesus Christ. Such successes for Christianity had caused him much concern in days gone by. What a change this was! Now he was ready to be baptized into Christ himself. Peter promised that those who repented and were baptized would see remission of their sins, and would be given the gift of the Holy Spirit. Saul had repented. He had been baptized. His sins were forgiven, and he would be filled with the Spirit of God.

ACT 9:19 And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.

Saul had become a different man. He had been born again. After fasting for three days, he must have had great need of physical food and drink. Having eaten, he turned to the very ones he had previously persecuted. For several days he remained with the

disciples of Christ in the city of Damascus. What excitement this must have caused among those disciples! Saul was now on their side! He had already proven what a powerful foe he could be. This was all to change. He would be as energetic in their support as he had been in their persecution. They had much reason to rejoice.

ACT 9:20 And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

This great man was to be known as the “apostle to the Gentiles.” In spite of that, he never forgot his own roots. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He loved his people. At one time he said that he would be willing to be cut off himself if it would result in the salvation of the Jews. The synagogue was the meeting place of the Jews. Saul went there to preach to the worshippers. They must be caused to realize Jesus was the Messiah he had claimed to be.

The synagogue was not a healthy place for a converted Jew to be found. Saul was placing his own life in some jeopardy by appearing there.

ACT 9:21 But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?

The Jews heard him with amazement. How could this be the same man who had been visiting

destruction on everyone who confessed the name of Jesus of Nazareth? Had Saul not come to Damascus for the very purpose of intimidating the Christians who were found there? Surely he would not have turned so completely that he now was ready to die for the same Christ whom he had so despised.

It has been said that if there were no other evidences for the truth of Christianity, the conversion of Saul would be sufficient to convert an honest seeker for the truth. There is an account of two men who considered themselves atheists. They met and decided that each of them would investigate the two strongest evidences for Christianity. One chose to explore the resurrection of Christ. The other devoted himself to an investigation of the conversion of Saul. When they came back together, one of them sheepishly admitted that he had found the resurrection of Christ to be beyond dispute. The other said he was much relieved. He was ready to admit the conversion of Saul as undeniable proof of the power of Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

ACT 9:22 But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

With God on his side, Saul was even more powerful as a supporter of the Lord than he had been as a foe. The Jews in the synagogue at Damascus could not meet his powerful arguments. The proofs are entirely too strong to be refuted. The types and prophecies found in the Old Testament scriptures are logical and provide a reason for the hope which lies in the hearts of Christians.

Of all the people of the earth, the Jews should have been ready to hear Christ as the Messiah for whom they had waited. The difficulty was not in any weakness of the proofs of his Messiahship. The reason the Jewish rulers did not accept him was that they were wallowing in power. They had no intention of surrendering that power. The people had been persuaded to follow them.

ACT 9:23 And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:

After a time, the Jews realized they would not be able to contend with the powerful arguments put before them. When you cannot prevail through argumentation and proof, there is another way. That is the way of force. Saul was now considered a traitor to the Jewish system. He must either be persuaded, or he must be eliminated. Since he could not be persuaded, it was time to kill him.

ACT 9:24 But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.

The Jews were waiting for the right time and place to get to him. They watched the gates of Damascus continually in order that he not escape their grasp. But, my friends, you cannot overcome the will of Jehovah. Saul found out their sinister plans and avoided them.

ACT 9:25 Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.

The walls of large cities such as Damascus and Jerusalem were several feet in thickness. There were windows at various places along the walls. Saul could have been let down over the top of the wall, or he could have been let down from one of the windows. Either way, he was not noticed by those who lay in wait to murder him. God had much work for him to do. The Word of Christ must be preached to all the world. Thus far, it had spread only to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and a few places where the Christians had been driven by their persecutors.

ACT 9:26 And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.

Saul was a brave man. After escaping from the Jews in Damascus, he came to the very heart of the Jewish nation. In Jerusalem he would be making contact with the very High Priest from whom he had received letters to go abroad in search of fleeing Christians. He would also take the chance of facing the Christians he had tried to destroy.

There are many places in the Bible where one may miss much if other portions of the scriptures are not interwoven. Saul did not go directly from Damascus to Jerusalem. He spent three years in Arabia and Damascus before going to Jerusalem. We know this from what he had to say in the first chapter of Galatians. Here are his words.

GAL 1:16-18 To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I

conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter; and abode with him fifteen days.

If Saul had gone immediately to Jerusalem, he could have conferred with the other apostles and have been taught by them. He did not do that. He spent three years in Arabia and Damascus before even seeing the apostles.

It is not difficult to understand why the disciples might have had difficulty in believing Saul had been converted. When they last saw him, he was an enemy. He had been gone for some time. What was his attitude now? They could only pray that it was in agreement with the rumors they had heard of his conversion. They dared not trust him.

ACT 9:27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

Among the Christians at Jerusalem there was one man who both trusted and defended him. That was Barnabas. This is the first mention of this great assistant to the apostle in his missionary travels. Barnabas confirmed Saul's conversion and willingness to preach the gospel of Christ. He told how Saul had been fearless in presenting the truth of Christ in the very city where he had gone to oppose his saints.

ACT 9:28 And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.

The Jerusalem Christians trusted the word of Barnabas and accepted Saul as a true brother in the Lord. He was able to move among their midst without inspiring fear in their hearts.

ACT 9:29 And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him.

Saul of Tarsus had become Paul the apostle. It would take a bold man to achieve the results God desired in offering the gospel to the world. Paul possessed just such boldness. He declared that he was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It was, and is, the power of God unto salvation. To the Jew first and then to the Greek.

These Grecians were probably Jews who had been born in areas where Greek was spoken and had moved and settled in Jerusalem. You will remember that the Grecian widows had complained that they were being neglected in the early days of the church.

Apparently there were some of those to whom Paul preached here that took the same attitude as did those who stoned Stephen. Except, now Paul was the hunted rather than the hunter.

ACT 9:30 Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.

Paul's fellow Christians were not about to let him be killed. They brought him to the shore of the Mediterranean and sent him back to his boyhood home of Tarsus. I think we may be confident that he did not sit idly by when he arrived there. At that point in time, the region of Tarsus would have been exposed to the preaching of Jesus through the tongue of Paul.

ACT 9:31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

Paul had been the fiercest foe of the church in southern Canaan. Once he departed from the picture, things began to calm down a bit. The Christians were allowed to live dedicated lives with little interference. The three thousand from Pentecost and the five thousand mentioned later were multiplied. Who is able to say just how many Christians were found in Judea and Samaria? The persecution had fired them up in heart. The reduced persecution had allowed them the freedom to grow. A grand explosion of souls in the kingdom was the result.

Jesus had promised just before his death that he would later send the Holy Spirit as a comforter. His promise was being kept. The Spirit had come!

ACT 9:32 And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda.

The book of Acts is a book containing some of the acts of some of the apostles. Paul is the most notable.

Now we are to take notice of some of Peter's experiences. Peter was preaching the same gospel that Paul had defended and promoted.

ACT 9:33 And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy.

Peter came across a man who had been so incapacitated by palsy that he was unable to get out of his bed. This palsy was no mere trembling of the hands or of the head and neck regions. The disease had left the man bed ridden for some eight years. He must have given up hope long before of ever being able to walk again.

ACT 9:34 And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.

The severity of his problem was not sufficient to prevent Peter from bringing about a cure through the power of God. Peter told him to rise and make up his bed. He would not have to use that bed constantly from that point on. The man arose immediately. Has the reader noted the use of the word immediately in several different cases of miraculous healing in the book of Acts? These were true miracles. They were not doubtful changes which could not be distinguished from natural or medical improvements. No man could do these things without the aid of the Spirit of God.

ACT 9:35 And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.

This and other miracles had the effect God intended. They confirmed with great confidence that the message preached by Peter and the others was not of human origin. It came from the mind of God.

ACT 9:36 Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.

Joppa was a seaport city. It was Joppa to which Jonah had fled when he wished to avoid preaching to the citizens of Ninevah. A very fine woman named Dorcas, or Tabitha, lived in Joppa. The woman was known by many as one who had compassion on others. She was constantly doing pleasant things for others. Alms deeds are actions that help others who might have serious trouble in helping themselves.

I thank God that there are a few Dorcases around yet. These women are always willing to do whatever they are able to do in the service of Christ. They do not forget that Jesus said, *“When you do it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you do it unto me.”*

ACT 9:37 And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber.

There must have been many tears when the community at Joppa realized they had lost a woman like Dorcas. They carefully prepared her for burial and laid her in a secluded spot.

ACT 9:38 And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter

was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.

The disciples knew Peter was nearby preaching Christ and doing many signs and wonders. He had healed a man of the palsy. Was there a faint possibility that he might be able to bring this dear friend back to life? They sent men to request that he come quickly.

Jesus once faced a similar circumstance. Lazarus had died. Rather than coming right away, Jesus allowed Lazarus to remain in the grave long enough that his body would have begun to decay. Then he came and called the man from his grave. Death cannot hold his prey when God decides to unlock the gates.

ACT 9:39 Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.

Peter agreed to go with the men to the upper room where the dead woman had been laid out. He was quickly surrounded by many of the poor whom Dorcas had befriended. They loved her dearly. Good women who care about others are very precious in the Kingdom of God. There are things men can do, and there are things women can do. The kind of things Dorcas had been doing while she was alive are typical of the valuable services women can render to Christ.

ACT 9:40 But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to

the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

Peter caused everyone to leave the room. I have no idea why he did this. It may have been because he had seen Jesus do the same when he told a young damsel to arise from the dead. Peter than prayed and called out for Dorcas, or Tabitha, to arise. As if she had been only sleeping, the woman opened her eyes and sat up when she saw Peter.

ACT 9:41 And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive.

As she sat on the side of the bed, Peter reached out and took her by the hand. He called for the others to return to the room and gave their dearly beloved friend back to them.

One day, every grave will be opened, and the dead shall arise. How impossible such things are with men. Yet how simple they are with God. Death will finally lose its stranglehold on men. Some will arise to everlasting life. Others will move from the grave into eternal torment. Which will it be for you and me?

ACT 9:42 And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.

This miracle caused many of the citizens of the city of Joppa to place their confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ. And to this very day, men are still having

their faith made more real by reading of this great wonder as it is recorded in the book of God.

ACT 9:43 And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.

Peter did not leave the area immediately. He stayed in the house of a tanner. It is likely that Peter assisted Simon in the tanning of skins when he was not out preaching the Word of God. Paul was a tentmaker by trade. He did not hesitate to ply his trade when it would relieve others of supporting him. Jesus also had grown up in the house of Joseph, a carpenter. Christians are busy people who help to pay their way.



Chapter 10

ACT 10:1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band,

Caesarea was a very important city in the New Testament record. It was a port city on the Mediterranean rivaled only by Joppa to the south of it. It took its name from having been promoted by the Roman Caesars. The fact that this man Cornelius was a centurion of a band called the Italian band falls in line with the Roman connections of the city.

A centurion was the commander of one hundred soldiers. He had a considerable amount of power in seeing that the territory controlled by Rome was kept orderly and obedient to Roman law.

ACT 10:2 A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.

This man, Cornelius, was a particularly good man. He is the kind of man most of us would like to have as a neighbor. He and his entire household were obedient to Jehovah. He realized the need for prayer and made this a part of each day of his life. This is interesting in that we would not expect a Roman centurion to have committed himself to the True God.

He not only respected Jehovah; he was concerned about the needs of his fellow men. Some centurions would not have felt such compassion on the needy.

Their power would have corrupted them and produced a haughty spirit. It was not so with Cornelius.

ACT 10:3 He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.

Dreams occur while men sleep. Visions normally occur in the daytime. The ninth hour of the day would have been three o'clock in the afternoon, since the day began at six in the morning.

The word “angel” means messenger. Angels perform numerous functions in the Bible. The angel discussed here is doing just what many others did. He is bringing a message from God to man. Cornelius must have been a bit startled to see this angel coming in answer to his prayers and calling out his name.

ACT 10:4 And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.

Note that Cornelius called the angel “Lord.” Abraham did the same with one of the three angels who appeared to him before Sodom was destroyed. Moses did the same at the time of the burning bush. Sometimes the term “Lord” is applied to any personality who is highly respected, such as the men in the English house of Lords in parliament. I do not know whether this angel was the one often called the “angel of the Lord”, or not.

Cornelius was fearful of him. What was it that the angel wanted? Was there something Cornelius needed to do to please God? There must have been a sigh of relief when he was told that his prayers and alms had been noticed by Jehovah and had acted as a memorial. Just what was it that God remembered when he heard the prayers of this Gentile and saw the good deeds which he had done?

May I suggest that the thing God remembered was the promise he had made to bless all nations of the earth through the seed of Abraham, and that he would pour out his Spirit upon all flesh. The gospel had now been preached in Jerusalem, in Judea and in Samaria. Saul had been converted and told that he was a chosen vessel to take the gospel to the Gentiles. It was now time that the door be opened to the isles afar off, as well as to the Jew and his children.

ACT 10:5 And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter:

Cornelius was told to send to Caesarea's sister seaport of Joppa. Simon Peter was living there. He would be needed to move the plans of God forward into the Gentile world.

ACT 10:6 He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.

The house of a tanner was a surprising place for an apostle to be lodging. Tanners were constantly in contact with dead animals. Contact with death was

considered capable of making one unclean in Old Testament days. Some strange things were already beginning to take place.

Simon Peter was to be sent for in order that he might tell Cornelius what he was to do to please God. Again, we find an example of God using a man to deliver the message of salvation to other men. Why did God not instruct the angel to explain his desires to Cornelius? We do not know all the answers to this question. It does seem that God wants men to deliver the gospel rather than doing it directly by visions.

ACT 10:7 And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually;

Cornelius did not hesitate. He went into action immediately. He called for two of the servants who kept his house in order. He also called for one of the most faithful soldiers in the band under his command.

ACT 10:8 And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.

The two servants and the soldier were sent to Joppa to make contact with Simon Peter and request that he come to Caesarea to give Cornelius further instructions. Cornelius explained carefully to the three just what had happened and why he needed Simon Peter.

ACT 10:9 On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter

went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour:

The scene then changes to Joppa. It is the next day after Cornelius sent the men from Caesarea. They were still on the way. As they were traveling toward Joppa, Simon Peter decided about noon to go up to the housetop to pray. The housetops were flat. The people in that day often went up on the housetop in the evening to cool themselves. This time, Peter had chosen it as a place to commune with God.

Here are two men who realized the critical need for prayer in their lives. God worked with both of them to steer them toward one another. It was not mere coincidence that each of them received an answer to his prayer and that the two were brought together. God moves in mysterious ways to implement his plans. These ways are often far beyond our human ability to comprehend.

ACT 10:10 And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance,

While he was on the housetop, he felt a sudden urge to eat. Since it was noon, this was nothing unexpected. He may well have been praying for some time. It appears that he had made plans to eat with other members of his household. While they were getting the food prepared, Peter went into a trance. A trance is a condition in which one may see visions which otherwise might not appear. Again, the reader is reminded of the difference between visions and dreams.

ACT 10:11 And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:

While in the trance Peter saw a vision of a very large sheet. The sheet had the four corners tied together to make a container such as we sometimes see in cartoons where a stork is ready to drop a baby into a home. The sheet was let down to such a position on the ground that Peter could see its contents.

ACT 10:12 Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

Within the sheet, Peter saw a great variety of both tame and wild beasts, as well as birds and creeping things. From what follows, it is clear that among these beasts, birds and creeping things there were many which were among the unclean as listed in the Old Testament law given through Moses. The reader will find an extended list of these clean and unclean things in the eleventh chapter of Leviticus.

ACT 10:13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.

Peter then received an unexpected command. He was to kill and eat from these unclean animals. Peter had tried to be obedient to the law of Moses. Could God really be instructing him to eat that which had been declared unclean? It was hard to believe his ears!

ACT 10:14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.

Peter objected vigorously. He had kept himself away from unclean meats. He used the word common here in the sense of that which is looked down upon. We still use the word in that sense as we talk about a person being common rather than well mannered. Peter did not wish to dirty himself with meat which would leave him stained.

ACT 10:15 And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

The same voice which had told him to kill and eat came to him again. He need not worry about becoming stained by eating of the animals which had formerly been off limits. God was making a change. That which had been unclean in the past had now been made clean. He could now eat what he could not eat before.

God changed his dietary laws on more than one occasion. When man was created, he was told he could eat of the vegetation. He was not told he could eat of animal life. Later, after the flood, he was told he could add animals to his diet. When the law of Moses was given, certain animals were declared unclean. This corresponded with God's command for the Hebrews to keep themselves separate from the Gentiles around them. The Hebrews were God's chosen people. In a sense, they were clean and the Gentiles were unclean.

Now we find God making yet another dietary

change. The animals which had been considered unclean were no longer so. In parallel with this, the Gentiles who had been off limits were now to be invited to obey the gospel and become a part of the family of God.

ACT 10:16 This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.

After he had been told three times that he was to kill and eat animals which had previously been unclean, Peter saw the sheet move upward into the heavens. What was the significance of the message he had received?

ACT 10:17 Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate,

Peter did not have long to wait to find out the meaning of the vision. Almost immediately, while he was still pondering the matter, three Gentiles appeared at the gate of his residence. These were the men whom Cornelius had sent to bring Peter to Caesarea.

ACT 10:18 And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there.

The men had asked directions to the house of Simon the tanner. They now asked if Simon Peter

was staying in that house. Had they found the man for whom they were looking?

ACT 10:19 While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.

We were told before that a voice spoke to Peter. Now we are told the Holy Spirit spoke to him. Perhaps the voice was that of the Holy Spirit. It is no different to say that the Holy Spirit spoke to Peter than to say that God spoke to him.

The message was that there were three men who were looking for him. The truth of the matter was that God had sent the three men. They were Gentiles. Peter would be expected to speak with them.

ACT 10:20 Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them.

Though they were strangers, Peter was expected to go with them without hesitating. God was responsible for their mission. Peter was to leave his housetop, go down and meet them, and accompany them according to their wishes.

ACT 10:21 Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come?

Peter quickly descended from the housetop and met the men who had come to his house. He identified

himself as the one for whom they were looking. All that was needed now was to find out where they wished for him to go. He asked them to explain the purpose of their visit. He already knew he was to go with them. He did not yet know why he was to go, nor where.

ACT 10:22 And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.

At this point Peter would have known the three were talking about a Gentile. A Jew would not have been a centurion over a Roman band. However, as the men pictured Cornelius for Peter, he would have realized this was an unusual Gentile. He feared God, and he had a good report from the Jewish people. Cornelius was a good candidate for citizenship in the Kingdom of God. He was, however, not yet in that kingdom, even though he was a highly moral man.

The three men explained that Cornelius had been told by an angel of God to send for Peter in order that he might hear what Peter had to say to him. Peter must now have realized the meaning of the vision. He was not to consider the Gentiles as unfit for the gospel of Jesus Christ. He must go to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile, and preach Christ to him.

ACT 10:23 Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with

them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

Peter called the men into his house and bedded them down for the night. Then, on the next day, he went with them. Some of the Christians in Joppa went along with the group. This was a new experience. Jewish Christians were making a deliberate trip to the house of a Gentile to use those keys of the Kingdom which Peter had been given to unlock the door to salvation.

ACT 10:24 And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.

Another day passed, and they entered into the city of Caesarea where Cornelius was anxiously waiting for their arrival. He knew something very special was about to take place. Therefore, he had invited the members of his family, as well as a number of his Gentile friends, to come and hear what Simon Peter would have to say.

ACT 10:25 And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.

No sooner had Peter entered the house of Cornelius than the centurion was overcome with gratitude for his presence and prepared to worship him. This was a serious mistake on the part of

Cornelius. Neither men nor angels are to be worshipped. Any such attempts are errors. In the book of Revelation, John was told not to worship the angel who had brought him glorious news. The angel explained that, like John, he was a servant of God. John was to worship God, not him. The apostles on occasion had to restrain men from worshipping them after they had done mighty works.

Normally I find Burton Coffman to be a highly accurate commentator. However, in this particular case I must take issue with him on the nature of worship. Coffman very strongly believes worship is action and not attitude. He points out that the five acts of worship associated with public assemblies, such as singing, giving, etc., all involve bodily actions. My disagreement with him rests on the fact that one may enter into any one of these five acts without worshipping. I believe the Bible teaches that worship is a combination of proper attitude and proper action. If either of these is faulty, the worship is vain and unsatisfactory to God.

ACT 10:26 But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.

Peter did not fit well into the mold of many glory seekers in the religious world. Such persons would like nothing better than to be made the object of worship. The Catholic Pope is a prime example. Kings of great nations have been forced to kneel at the feet of the Pope in days gone by. But he also is a man. He should instruct men to rise up rather than to bow down.

ACT 10:27 And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together.

Peter had come to speak to Cornelius. It may have been a surprise to find an entire housefull of Cornelius friends and kinfolk. However, this is the way truly interested men react when they come across spiritual blessings. They wish to share them with anyone who will hear.

ACT 10:28 And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

For many centuries God had commanded the Jews to avoid making covenants with other ethnic groups. This was not because of a lack of concern for all men. It was direct planning on the part of God in order to prepare a people through whom the Messiah could come. They were not to intermarry with those of the surrounding nations because it would lead to departure from the worship of Jehovah and sharing in the worship of the false gods of those nations.

Thus, God made his point about cleanness and uncleanness by declaring certain meat to be unclean. This helped to clarify the attitude the Jews were to have toward the idolatrous people around them.

Peter was a Jew. He was speaking to a household of Gentiles. Ordinarily he would not have been found in the same house with these people who had been placed off bounds by the command of God himself.

Yet, here he was. And he was here **because** of the command of God. Through the letting down of the sheet and the connected events, Peter had come to realize that God no longer considered the Gentiles unclean. They must hear the gospel along with the Jews.

ACT 10:29 Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?

Peter had been convinced it was the will of Jehovah that he come to the house of Cornelius. He had not debated the issue. He was ready to do whatever he could to please the Lord. Why had they sent for him?

ACT 10:30 And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing,

Cornelius began to explain what had happened to him while God was preparing Peter to come to him. While he was praying, a man in bright clothing had appeared to him. This man was clearly an angel of God. He had a message to deliver.

ACT 10:31 And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.

Cornelius had been informed that God had taken

notice of his prayer and his good deeds. God had been reminded that he had made a promise to bless all nations through the seed of Abraham. He had also promised that the Gentiles would see a great light through the Messiah. God would use this good man, Cornelius, to show that the Gentiles were now to be invited into the Kingdom. Peter had used the keys of the kingdom to swing wide the gate to the house of God for the Jews on the day of Pentecost. Now he was to use those same keys to invite the Gentiles. Jehovah was no longer the God of the Jews. He was the God of all men everywhere who would hear and call upon his name.

ACT 10:32 Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee.

Cornelius had been told to send for Peter. He was told that when Peter came, he would give Cornelius information which would be important to him as a man with a hunger and thirst for spiritual blessings. Many of us are confident that we would have reacted just as Cornelius did. He was the same type of man as Nicodemus. Such men love the truth and reach out for it when they have the opportunity.

ACT 10:33 Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present

before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.

Cornelius is not saying that it was proper that Peter had obeyed his own command to come. Cornelius was not that type of man. What he was saying was that the entire picture had been painted by Jehovah. It was Jehovah who had told him to send for Peter. It was Jehovah who had told Peter to heed the call. All was as God would have it.

Peter had asked what it was that Cornelius desired that he do. Cornelius' reply is that he desired to hear any and all things Peter could tell him about the will of God. This is directly in line with what Jesus told his apostles when the Great Commission was given. They were to go to all nations and teach them all things which he had commanded.

ACT 10:34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

Peter began his sermon. God had respected the Jews above the Gentiles in times past. Now it was to be different. God would no longer respect one man over another because of his race or the country from which he came.

ACT 10:35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

Peter had not found this truth easy to accept. He had preached it at Pentecost when he said the promise

had come to the Jews, to their children, and to as many as were afar off. Those who were afar off had to be the Gentiles. Thus, Peter had preached the truth he was now following. Nevertheless, he had only come to a complete realization of its meaning when the sheet was let down from heaven and God had talked about cleaning that which had been unclean.

Later on we will note that Peter was still having some difficulty with this Jew and Gentile relationship. He ate with the Gentiles until certain Jews arrived from Jerusalem. Then he separated himself from the Gentiles as if they were unclean.

ACT 10:36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)

Jesus Christ, as the Word of God, had been sent first to the Jews of Jerusalem and Judea. His teachings had been those of peace. It was peace with God. It was peace with one's self. It was peace with other men. Jesus had given his life for the sins of men. As a result he had received a name higher than every name under heaven. Before him all men must bow, whether Jew or Gentile.

ACT 10:37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;

As a seeker of truth, and a man of prayer, Cornelius had heard of the preaching of Christ and

of the baptism which John preached as he cried out for men to prepare the way of the Lord. Cornelius would have known that both John and Jesus Christ preached that men should “*Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.*”

ACT 10:38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

Jesus was anointed with the Holy Ghost at the time of his baptism. God announced that he was his Beloved Son and that he was well pleased with him. From that time on, Jesus went about doing miracles, signs and wonders because he had been given the Spirit without measure. Cornelius would have heard of these marvelous deeds.

ACT 10:39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:

Although Cornelius and his friends would have heard of these wonders, Peter had seen them. He was an eyewitness and had walked and talked with the Lord for over three years. He was not just passing on some information he had received second hand.

Peter had not only witnessed the miracles Jesus did while he was alive. Peter had seen the Son of God led to the cross where he was crucified and left for

dead. It was an infamous way to die. Criminals of the worst kind were slain in this manner. Precautions were taken to make certain they were dead before they were taken down.

ACT 10:40 Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly;

As Peter continued his discourse, he related how Jesus had been resurrected. This is the heart of the sermons preached in the early part of the book of Acts. It was the resurrection of Jesus which made the difference in the power of Christianity and that of other religions. If Jesus could be raised from the dead, he must be the Son of God. If he could be raised from the dead, no man need fear what any man could do to him. The same Spirit which raised the Saviour could quicken the bodies of any of the faithful.

The resurrection was not a matter of doubt. Many had seen the Christ after his exit from the grave. Far from being a secret, it was burned into the memories of hundreds who had seen him.

ACT 10:41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.

Jesus did not appear randomly to men after his resurrection. He appeared to those who had been chosen by God. This was done so these persons could be commanded to tell of their experiences to others. The apostles in particular had been allowed to see

him, to eat and drink with him and to touch his risen body as Thomas did.

ACT 10:42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.

Then these apostles were given orders to preach to the people. They were to hold Jesus up as the one who had been chosen by God to do and to teach the Word of God. They were to urge men to obey Christ because the day would come when they would be judged by him. Both those who were alive and also those who were in the graves would ultimately stand before him for his approval or disapproval.

ACT 10:43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

It was Jesus who gave life to the prophecies of the Old Testament. The entire book of God, including the law, the prophets and the writings of David and Solomon, had led men to that point in time when God would send his Son into the world to offer remission of sins.

Those who truly believe in the Lord will obey His commandments.¹ This verse is not a proof text for the faith only doctrine. Faith without works is dead.

ACT 10:44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

During the course of Peter's sermon, the Holy Spirit fell on those who were gladly hearing his words. When the Holy Spirit had fallen upon the apostles at the time of Pentecost, they were enabled to speak with other tongues in which they had not been trained. This had been evidence that the power from on high had been provided for them. There was a special reason why they had been treated in this manner. They were to confirm the Word of God with signs and mighty wonders.

Now, the Holy Spirit fell upon the Gentile household of Cornelius. God had poured out his Spirit upon all flesh. He had offered the gift of his Spirit to the Gentiles as he had offered it to the Jews. The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of life. The abundant life, found only in Christ, could be had by Cornelius and by any other who would call upon the name of the Lord.

ACT 10:45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

They of the circumcision refers to the Jews who had accompanied Peter from Joppa to the home of Cornelius. Gentiles had been allowed to share with God's people in the past, but in order to do so they had to observe the rite of circumcision and obey the laws of Moses. The Jews who were with Peter would not have been as surprised if Cornelius and his Gentile friends had been commanded to first become Jews, and then become Christians.

ACT 10:46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,

These Gentiles were acting much the same as those on Pentecost who had been empowered by the Holy spirit. They were doing things which no man would be able to do without the aid of God's power. God must be with them. It must be true that He approved of them.

ACT 10:47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

Now we come to a hard spot. In the second chapter of Acts, Peter had placed repentance and baptism before the remission of sins and the reception of the Holy Spirit. This time the Holy Spirit was given to the household of Cornelius **before** baptism. Is baptism a prerequisite to the gift of the Spirit, or can a person receive the Holy Spirit separate and apart from baptism?

My reply to this question is that this was a very special case. It marked one of the three occasions in which a group received the Holy Spirit. The first of these occasions was when the apostles received the Holy Spirit and began to preach to the Jews on the day of Pentecost. The second was when Peter and John were sent to confer the Holy Spirit upon the Samaritans to whom Philip had preached. This is the third, as the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit. Each time there was a separation between the Spirit coming upon the people and the baptism which is

normally associated with that gift. It is my conviction that in our day, the gift of the Holy Spirit is offered to men at the time of baptism, when they are born the second time and become alive in Christ.

It pleased God to indicate in very special ways that he was ready to give spiritual life to the Jews, the Samaritans and the Gentiles. It would be wise for the reader to take note again of Acts 5:32. *And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.* Today one must arise and be baptized, calling upon the name of the Lord to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. He must obey that form of doctrine which was delivered to him.

ACT 10:48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

Although these Gentiles received the gift of the Holy Spirit before they were baptized, it is abundantly clear that baptism was to be connected with it. Peter did not say they were quite alright without baptism. He commanded that they undergo that process.

The new converts then requested that Peter not abandon them immediately, but that he remain with them for a few days. What a joy it must have been for them to be able to talk with an apostle who had been with the Lord himself while he healed the blind, the deaf and the lame, and while he went about the business of his Father in heaven. I think if you and I had been there, we also would have begged Peter to stay and talk with us for a time.

Chapter 11

ACT 11:1 And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.

Peter had remained at Caesarea for a period of time after the conversion of the household of Cornelius. The word that he had been preaching to Gentiles apparently traveled rapidly. It reached Judea before he returned to Jerusalem.

Peter was not the only Jewish Christian who had difficulty accepting the fact that the Gentiles were now eligible to be received into the family of God. His brethren in the city of David were shocked that he had invited uncircumcised persons into the Kingdom.

ACT 11:2 And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him,

These Jewish Christians were waiting for him when he returned. Contrary to what the Roman Catholic church claims today, they did not see Peter as a Pope, whose actions were to be accepted without dispute.

It had been permissible to receive non-Jews into Jewish fellowship under the law of Moses. However, the person had to be circumcised and honor the law of Moses before he or she could be accepted. That was apparently what these Jewish Christians had in mind. It was not that Peter had preached to the Gentiles. It was that he had not demanded they first undergo circumcision. See Exodus 12:43-49.

EXO 12:43-49 And the LORD said unto Moses

*and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof: But every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof. A foreigner and an hired servant shall not eat thereof. In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth ought of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof. All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. **One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you.***

ACT 11:3 **Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.**

They expected an explanation from Peter. He knew the law of Moses as well as they. How could he have ignored it and failed to demand the circumcision of the Gentiles before accepting them? We are going to see Paul facing the same opposition from the Judaizing teachers many times during his ministry in Gentile territory.

ACT 11:4 **But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying,**

Peter did not present a logical analysis of Biblical doctrine. He decided the best way to answer his

questioners was to go over the events which had led him to preach to Cornelius and his friends. He could only hope they would believe he was telling the truth.

ACT 11:5 I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me:

There are some very minor differences in Peter's account here when it is compared with the words of chapter ten. These differences are of no serious consequence.

ACT 11:6-10 Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven.

Any comment on verses six through ten would be duplication of that found in chapter ten. We are simply following Peter's description of what happened as he told it to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.

ACT 11:11 And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me.

ACT 11:12 And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house:

Peter wanted to make it perfectly clear that he had not decided to go to the house of Cornelius upon his own. He had been instructed to go by the Holy Spirit. He had not doubted for a moment that God was giving him directions. He was not about to argue the matter.

We were not told in chapter ten just how many there were in the party accompanying Peter from Joppa to Cornelius' house in Caesarea. We learn the number here. There were six of his brethren.

ACT 11:13 And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter;

ACT 11:14 Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.

Peter's questioners needed to know God had been working in two places simultaneously to bring the Gentiles into contact with the gospel of Christ. At the same time that he had been told to go to the Gentiles, God had instructed the Gentiles to call for him to come. This should have been convincing to the Jewish brethren in Jerusalem. I hardly think they would have been bold enough to accuse Peter of lying to them.

ACT 11:15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.

Even while Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit had manifested God's approval of Cornelius and his household by causing them to speak with tongues. This was what caused the apostles to know the Spirit had been given to them. Now it caused those who were present to know God had made his Spirit available to the Gentiles. He was ready to receive them as his children.

ACT 11:16 Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.

It seems that both John the baptist and Jesus made similar statements about the coming baptism with the Holy Spirit (Compare Mark 1:8 and Acts 1:5).

The reader is encouraged to consider whether there were two baptisms with the Holy Spirit, or just one outpouring. Was the Holy Spirit made available to all men on the day of Pentecost, and only manifested itself by enabling the apostles to speak in tongues on Pentecost and the Gentiles to do the same here? Or, were there two separate baptisms; one for the Jews and one for the Gentiles?

It is to be noted that some claim the baptism of the Holy Spirit was promised only to the apostles. They restrict the promise of the Father, as mentioned in Acts 1:5 to the apostles themselves. Obviously, this verse proves the promise of the baptism of the Holy

Spirit was not restricted to the apostles. Perhaps there was but one baptism with the Holy Spirit, which occurred on Pentecost. Thus the Holy Spirit would have been made available to all men at that time. It would have demonstrated its presence on the apostles as representatives of the Jews at Jerusalem and on the household of Cornelius as representatives of the Gentiles. This falling upon the household of Cornelius would then have been an extension of the outpouring which took place in Jerusalem.

ACT 11:17 Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?

It was clear to Peter that both the Jews and the Gentiles had been offered the same gift. What was that gift? It was the same gift which Peter had said men would receive when they repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins. It was the Holy Spirit himself. It was the gift which Peter told the Jews in Acts 5:32 had been given to those who obey God. The ability to speak in tongues was only a manifestation of the Spirit. It was not the gift Peter spoke of in Acts 5 or here in Acts 11:17.

It is not necessary that men speak in tongues in these later centuries to prove they have the Holy Spirit. A special demonstration was needed then. It is not needed now.

Peter insisted it would have been foolish on his part to argue with God about whether or not he should

use the keys of the Kingdom to open the door to the Gentile world. He was obligated to keep the commandment of the Lord.

ACT 11:18 When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

The Jewish brethren who had been so vocal in accusing Peter now realized they had been wrong. They believed Peter. God had made a momentous change in the way he dealt with the nations. When Christ had said to go and preach the gospel to all nations, he did not mean just to preach to the Jews who were in all those nations. He meant to preach to every man, without regard to his ancestry.

ACT 11:19 Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

The scene changed here. Luke, the author of Acts, went back to pick up the story after the stoning of Stephen. Nevertheless, he still has in mind the movement of the gospel from Jewish to Gentile territory. Peter has been in the forefront for much of these first eleven chapters of Acts. Now we will see Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, replacing Peter as a lead character.

ACT 11:20 And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were

come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.

Now that the ice had been broken by Peter, others began to preach to the Gentiles. These were not Grecian Jews such as those who had complained about their widows being neglected in the daily ministrations at the time the seven were appointed to care for this matter. These were Grecians in the sense of Jews versus Greeks.

Antioch was a large and influential city at this time. It has decreased in size and importance over the years until today it is only a shadow of its former self. It has been suggested that it may have had a population of over one hundred thousand in the first century. It was to serve as a springboard to the rest of the Gentile world. Paul would make this his point of return after each of his missionary journeys.

ACT 11:21 And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

Those who preached in Antioch reaped a major harvest of souls for the Lord. When the gospel is preached, the hand of the Lord will be with the preacher. In this case, a strong church was established in the city of Antioch of Syria.

We should differentiate between the Antioch of Syria discussed here, and the Antioch of Pisidia which was north of the Mediterranean Sea. This one encouraged the apostle Paul in his preaching efforts. The other tried to murder him.

ACT 11:22 Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

The wonderful results being seen at Antioch soon traveled back to the elders of the church in Jerusalem. They wished to give whatever support they could to the work which was being done to the north.

They had a man named Barnabas who was a tower of strength . This was the same man who had sold a piece of property and given the proceeds to the church when Ananias and Sapphira made their fatal mistake and lied to the Holy Spirit. This was also the same man who had defended Paul when he came back to Jerusalem after his conversion. The church had been fearful of Paul because of his past record. Barnabas stood up for the apostle and told of his tremendous change from being an enemy of the Lord to being a faithful and powerful preacher of His Word.

ACT 11:23 Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

Barnabas continued in his good work. He was delighted at the magnificent growth of the church in Antioch. He used his powers of persuasion to spur on the energy and dedication which he saw demonstrated. The Christians must work together with one heart and one soul, serving the Lord with all of their heart, soul, mind and strength.

ACT 11:24 For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.

If you were to have an epithet written on your tombstone, what would you like for it to say? I can think of no better one than what was said about Barnabas. *He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.* How often we see just what happened here. When a good man who is full of the Spirit of God comes into contact with a group of people who are ready to hear the truth, wonderful things happen. Congregations are established. Sometimes those that are established double and triple in size. God is glorified and his church stands tall. May God bless us with many men and women like Barnabas.

ACT 11:25 Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul:

Barnabas had a head full of vision. He knew it would be good for a man like Saul, or Paul to come into contact with a congregation like the one which was eager to serve God. He loved Paul. He wished to work with him in the building up of the Kingdom of God. Paul had gone to his boyhood city of Tarsus. Barnabas was not willing to see him inactive.

Perhaps I am assuming Paul was inactive. It is difficult to imagine anyone with the zeal of the apostle sitting idle after receiving the charge he had received from the Lord. It may be that many in the vicinity of Tarsus heard the gospel without our having received any report of such activity.

ACT 11:26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

Barnabas found Paul and persuaded him to go with him to work in Antioch. For an entire year the two of them labored together with the church there. What a tremendous privilege those Christians enjoyed. Imagine being led by two men of the calibre of Paul and Barnabas. It would have been an eye opener to see what happened to that congregation during one twelve month period.

ACT 11:27 And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.

There were persons during the first century who had the gift of prophecy. Joel had said this would be the case (Joel 2). These prophets were enabled to use such powers as a result of having the hands of apostles laid upon them. When the apostles were no longer alive to lay hands upon others and confer spiritual gifts, the gift of prophecy ceased (See I Cor. 13). Some of these prophets favored the church at Antioch with a visit.

ACT 11:28 And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.

Agabus was the prophet who, later on, told Paul that if he went to Jerusalem he would be bound and persecuted. This time he predicted very difficult times ahead. A scarcity of food would be felt throughout a vast area. This would make it necessary for Christians to have special concern for their brethren who would suffer if they did not receive assistance.

It was Claudius Caesar who decreed that all the Jews should be driven out of Rome in the time of Aquila and Priscilla. You will recall that Paul abode with this couple during his missionary efforts.

ACT 11:29 Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea:

The suffering must have been particularly severe in the province of Judea and the city of Jerusalem. In addition, the Jews who rejected Christ made it difficult for the Christians in that area to find friends or work. The Christians in Jerusalem and Judea needed outside help. The church in Antioch was ready and willing to do what they could to provide that help.

ACT 11:30 Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

This is not the last we will read of Paul collecting aid for the relief of the poor saints in Jerusalem. He kept this problem in mind for much of the time he was preaching. I believe Paul saw this as a very effective way of bringing Jew and Gentile together as one man in Christ.

There is another lesson in this verse. There are some today who believe the elders should tend to the spiritual matters of the church and leave the physical matters to be handled by the deacons. The fact is that the elders are to supervise all of the activities of the church, whether spiritual or physical. The money here was not sent to the deacons. It was sent to the elders. We may feel confident that the elders enlisted the aid of the deacons in seeing that the funds were properly dispensed.

Chapter 12

ACT 12:1 Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.

The “about this time” mentioned here is the time that Paul and Barnabas traveled from Caesarea to Jerusalem to deliver the supplies for the saints in Jerusalem who were suffering need because of the famine.

Herod was a king who served under the authority of Claudius, the emperor of Rome. Herod tried in many ways to make friends with the Jews in Jerusalem. He was responsible for doing much building which pleased them, including Herod’s temple. His reason for vexing the church was that the Christians were hated by the unbelieving Jews. This would be just one more way to gain the support of those over whom he ruled.

ACT 12:2 And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

This action appears to have been taken very abruptly. Later, when he took Peter, we find the Christians gathering to pray for Peter. It seems that in the case of James, there was little time to do that.

Herod was placing himself in serious danger by murdering an apostle. It is extremely unwise to fight against God. The sword Herod employed to kill James was but a toothpick in comparison with the mighty outstretched arm of God.

ACT 12:3 And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)

The murder of James simply whetted Herod's appetite for blood. He realized he had gained support from the non-Christian Jews. They were in the majority and in power. Why not take the apostles one by one and extinguish the entire Christian movement?

The days of unleavened bread were the days of the Passover week. Passover was not a single day. It was an entire week climaxed in the great Passover feast. This was a very visible moment to kill the second of the apostles. He would take Peter and murder him before the eyes of everyone.

ACT 12:4 And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.

Herod had no trouble arresting Peter, nor did he have any trouble casting him into the prison. His difficulty lay in keeping Peter there. To ensure that Peter would be present when Herod was ready, he placed sixteen soldiers in charge of him.

The word "Easter" is used here. This is an improper translation of the Greek. It should have been translated as "Passover."

ACT 12:5 Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

The church was grief stricken. Would Peter be murdered in the same manner as James was? The Christians began to pray constantly that God would intervene. We do not know the exact nature of their prayer. They could have been praying for his release. In that case we are made to wonder why they seemed surprised later when he was released. But, they could also have been praying that his faith would stand solid in the midst of his tribulation. His faith had failed him at the time of his denial just before the crucifixion. He would need the help of God to withstand the pressure.

ACT 12:6 And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison.

The night before Herod planned to execute Peter, the apostle was chained to two soldiers. In addition, there were guards watching the door of the prison. Reports are that the gate of this prison was large enough that it took several men to swing it open. We are reminded of the security which was placed on the tomb of Jesus, and the manner in which the Lord escaped from his tomb while the guard stood by.

ACT 12:7 And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.

Here is another mention of **the angel of the Lord**. It is not **an** angel of the Lord, but **the** angel of the Lord. We are not given the identity of this angel. Many wonder if this very special angel stands enough higher than the others that it might be divine.

Bright light often accompanies the appearances of angels in the scriptures. When the angel struck Peter on the side, the apostle was told to get up quickly. In order that he be able to obey that command, the chains fell from his hands. Did the guards awake when this took place? We do not know. If they did awake, they were unable to prevent Peter's release.

ACT 12:8 And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.

The prison may have been very hot, causing Peter to have shed part of his clothing. He was told to dress himself, tie up his sandals and follow the angel. When God sends his messengers to give men directions, it is wise to follow those directions. We do not see angels with personal messages for us today. We do, however, have the truth of God, as given by his inspired prophets and apostles. They have been provided for

us in the pages of the Holy Bible. Let us gird ourselves and follow the instructions of the Lord.

ACT 12:9 And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.

Peter did as he was told. He was not at all sure he was not dreaming, or seeing a vision. Was it really true that his chains had fallen off and he was about to depart from the inner depths of such a secure prison?

ACT 12:10 When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.

Prisons often have more than one gate. This seems to have been the case with the one where Peter had been confined. I worked in the Southern Michigan State Prison for a short time. It was my task to carry messages from the record office to the ones in charge of the prisoners, telling them that certain prisoners had served their time and were to be released. In order to go from the record office to the inner part of the prison, it was necessary to pass through four large iron gates. The first was unlocked and then locked behind you before the second was unlocked. This procedure went on until all four gates had been first unlocked and then locked.

Peter followed the angel until they had come to the large gate which opened out into the streets of Jerusalem. The gate opened by itself, without human assistance. As soon as they had left the prison and found themselves on the street outside the prison, the angel left Peter by himself.

ACT 12:11 And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

Peter had wondered if he was having a vision. Now he knew everything which was happening was very real. He had been in prison. He had been liberated by an angel. He was now free to walk the streets of Jerusalem. What should be his next step?

ACT 12:12 And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.

After a bit of thought, he decided to go to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. A number of the Christians had gathered there and were even then praying for Peter. It was quite natural for Peter to go there. Perhaps he had reason to know this would be one of the places his brethren would gather.

ACT 12:13 And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda.

There is some reason to believe Mary was well off. Her house was large enough for many Christians to gather and pray. There was a gate leading into the home. A maid named Rhoda came to the door of the gate when Peter knocked. Reading between the lines, it seems this home may have been a nice one. We do not know this. A number of Christians could gather in many homes today. Some humble homes have gates. Rhoda may have just been a young girl rather than a maid servant.

I think, however, the evidence does point toward a home above the average class.

ACT 12:14 And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate.

Rhoda recognized Peter's voice as soon as she answered the door. She became so excited she forgot to open the gate. Peter was left waiting while Rhoda ran into the house to tell those who had been praying that Peter was outside waiting to be let in.

ACT 12:15 And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel.

The Christians were shocked beyond measure when they heard the words of Rhoda. As far as they knew Peter was still in the depths of the prison, bound with chains between two guards, with guards at the doors of the prison, and with a strong gate which required several men to open it.

It is true that they had been praying for something to happen. But this was hardly what they had expected. We all too often want God to answer our prayers according to our own pattern rather than his. When that is the case, we may be disappointed, or we may be surprised when he answers.

What did the occupants of the house mean when they said, “It is his angel?” Did they think Peter had a personal guardian angel who had protected him and allowed him to escape from the prison? Did they think Peter had died and his spirit had appeared in the form of an angel? I do not know, but I tend to think they believed Peter had been killed and they were seeing his spirit.

ACT 12:16 But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished.

Their wonder did not stop Peter from seeking entrance into the house. He persisted in his knocking until they opened the door. Their prayers had been heard and answered. It was Peter. He stood before them unharmed. It was incredible!

ACT 12:17 But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.

Peter then proceeded to relate the amazing things which had happened to him. The Lord was responsible

for his release. The Lord is capable of doing amazing things in our day. Millions of persons are bound in Satan's prison house today. If they will heed the call of the gospel, they may also be released from their captivity to walk the streets in the kingdom of God.

Peter asked that the news be given to James. This was not James the brother of John. He had already been beheaded by Herod. This was James the brother of the Lord. He was one of the pillars of the church in Jerusalem. He was also the author of the book of James in the New Testament.

ACT 12:18 Now as soon as it was day there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter.

All this had taken place during the night before Herod planned to execute Peter. As the dawn came, Peter's disappearance from the prison caused serious concern among the guards who had been responsible for securing him. There was good reason for their concern. An officer who allowed his prisoner to escape sometimes had to bear the sentence of the escaped prisoner himself.

ACT 12:19 And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and there abode.

Herod was incensed. He questioned the guards, and when their answers were not satisfactory, he put

them to death. This was an embarrassment and an insult to his pride.

Herod then went from Jerusalem to Caesarea where his headquarters were located. For the moment it seemed wise to back off his persecution of the Christians.

ACT 12:20 And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country.

Herod had some other troubles that needed attention. There were problems with the citizens of Tyre and Sidon. They were dependent upon the territory over which Herod ruled to remain economically strong. They attempted to patch things up with Herod by going through one of his officers. They may have bribed Blastus to speak to Herod in their behalf.

Herod saw this as an opportunity to step up his glory and his power. Here was a group of people who were dependent on him. He devised a method of self grandeur.

ACT 12:21 And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them.

Herod appointed a day upon which he would present an oration to the people. He knew he had a crowd of “yes men.” They would do everything they

could to gain his favor and nourish their own territory of Phoenicia. Herod put on his finest. Josephus tells us he dressed himself in clothing which shone brilliantly in the rays of the sun.

Then the ruler put on his greatest show. We can only imagine his gestures and the rise and fall of his voice as he spoke of his own accomplishments and of what he could do for those who praised him.

ACT 12:22 And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.

The Phoenicians fell in with the plan. They proclaimed him to be more than a mere man. He must be a god to be capable of making such a speech! I do not think for a moment they believed he was divine. What they did believe was that if they praised him to the heavens, he might grant them the favors they desired.

People are often fickle. They are also sometimes very gullible. Some persons will lower themselves to the mud in order to please someone in power who can give them something they want. Every worker in a large organization knows of fellow workers who use this method of getting ahead. It is wrong, but it is a reality.

ACT 12:23 And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.

Herod was not about to deny the praises of the audience. The apostles told men to rise up when they bowed before them. Even the angels told men who sought to worship them to stand up. They quickly informed them that they were only fellow-servants. It was not so with Herod. He soaked up the glory like a sponge. If they wished to call him a god, he was willing.

Moses made a similar mistake in the wilderness when he asked the Israelites if he must get them water. It was not Moses who provided the water. It was Jehovah. Moses lost the opportunity to lead the Israelites into the promised land because he took glory which belonged to God (See Psa. 106:33).

The reader is urged to spend his or her life in the glorification of God. The entire duty of man is to glorify God and keep his commandments. To steal his glory is deadly. Herod found this out quickly and unquestionably. He died and was eaten by worms. One even wonders if his body was left to rot without burial.

ACT 12:24 But the word of God grew and multiplied.

We have adversaries here. Herod was on one side with the unbelieving Jews. God was on the other side with his faithful children. Herod died. The Christians grew stronger and the Word of God flowed over the land like a river.

When the Jews lost Herod, they began to move toward the end of their national power. Within about twenty-five years Jerusalem was overrun by the

Roman army and the Jews lost their status as a nation.

ACT 12:25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.

Barnabas and Saul then left Jerusalem to return to Antioch of Syria. They had completed their mission in delivering the supplies which had been sent from Antioch. They would return and would soon be off on Paul's first missionary journey. The rest of the book of Acts will show how the preaching of the gospel spread through Asia Minor and finally to the great capitol city of the Roman empire, the city of Rome.

Chapter 13

ACT 13:1 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

Under the leadership of Paul and Barnabas, the church in Antioch of Syria was thriving. We have here a list of prominent men who were serving God with great energy. At this time certain persons in the church had spiritual gifts, which had been provided to them by the Holy Spirit, such as the gift of prophecy. It is likely that the teachers mentioned here had also been given special abilities in the field of teaching the Word of God.

An interesting point in this verse is the name of the man Simeon, who was called Niger. The word “niger” means black. At the time I write these words, there are many persons of the negroid group who would be insulted if you called them a “nigger.” Yet they are not offended when they are referred to as blacks. Of course, the word “nigger” has come to be associated with slavery. We can understand why they see it is a hateful term. Men ought to treat others with honor and pride, not with slurs and derision.

ACT 13:2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

Fasting was more common in the first century church than it is today. It appears here that the dedication which these men had to the work of the Lord, and the fasting which they did had something to do with the message which was received from the Holy Spirit. We do not know in what form this message came. Did they hear an audible voice? Did the Holy Spirit plant the message in their mind? This is not revealed.

What we do know is that it was the will of God that Paul and Barnabas be selected out of the congregation for special work which the Lord was about to explain.

ACT 13:3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

The fasting and prayer continued. Hands were laid on Paul and Barnabas to indicate they had been officially appointed to the coming assignment.

I do not believe the laying on of hands here was for the purpose of imparting spiritual gifts. This was done only through the apostles. I do not know that there were no apostles, other than Paul, present. However, I believe what was done here was a simple acknowledgment that these two men had been selected and were approved by God for the task ahead.

ACT 13:4 So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

The challenge facing Paul and Barnabas was to take a missionary journey into Gentile territory. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles. He was ready to begin serious work with them in obedience to the command of Christ. Seleucia was a port city not far from Antioch. Cyprus was a large island in the eastern end of Mediterranean Sea.

ACT 13:5 And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.

The Jews had been scattered in various nations as a result of their breaking of the covenant of God and having been driven from the land of Canaan. There were a number of them living on the island of Cyprus. When Paul and Barnabas reached the island and went to the city of Salamis, they went first to the Jewish synagogues to preach Christ to the Jews in that place. It was required that ten Jewish families be found in an area before a synagogue could be established. Since there were a plurality of synagogues at Salamis, we can assume a sizable number of Jews were there.

It was always Paul's policy to preach to the Jews first when he went to a new area. We will see this again and again from here to the end of the book of Acts. The Jews should have been the ones to receive the Messiah with open arms. Although most did not, some did so. This provided a core of Christians who had a knowledge of God's long time preparation for offering the gospel to all nations.

John Mark is now mentioned. He is said to have been their minister. When we use the word minister, we often associate it with pulpit preaching. It may be that John Mark was their minister only in the sense that he tended to the needs of Paul and Barnabas as they preached the Word of God at Salamis.

ACT 13:6 And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus:

Paul and Barnabas did not remain long in Salamis. They passed through much of the island of Cyprus. On the way, they came into contact with a man who is described by three characteristics. He was a Jew. He was a sorcerer. He was a false prophet. This man's name was Barjesus, which means son of Jesus. This does not identify him as a fleshly son of Jesus Christ. Jesus was a common name among the Jews, as it is among Spanish speaking people at present.

A sorcerer often attempted to use chemical potions to accomplish his ends. We are all aware today of the effects of chemicals upon the brain of humans. These sorcerers had no hesitation in using chemicals in this manner. Barjesus was not a true prophet of God. He was a pretender and an imposter.

ACT 13:7 Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.

This man, Barjesus, had associated himself with Sergius Paulus, a civil officer at Paphos. Sergius Paulus heard about the preaching of Paul and Barnabas and sent for them so he could hear what they had to say about the will of God.

ACT 13:8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.

This did not set well at all with Barjesus who was also called Elymas. He seems to have been profiting by his connection with Sergius Paulus. Barjesus began debating with them and doing his best to prevent Sergius Paulus from hearing and believing the gospel message.

I would advise any reader not to follow the example of Barjesus. When a person is interested in hearing what God has to say concerning the salvation of that man's soul, God takes it very personally when there is interference. On many occasions parents have done their very best to prevent their children from being baptized into Christ. This has gone so far as to disown them and refuse to allow them entrance back into the house after their baptism. I would not wish to be in their shoes in the judgment.

ACT 13:9 Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him.

Saul of Tarsus will be called Paul from this time on. Saul was the name applied by the Jews. Paul was

the form of the name used by the Gentiles. Paul was now working in Gentile land. He will be called Saul by the Jews and Paul by the Gentiles.

Paul did not take Barjesus' interference lightly. With the power of the Spirit of God backing him, he turned and gazed directly at Barjesus. Action was about to be taken.

ACT 13:10 And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?

Is it wrong to call evil workers by evil names? Paul apparently did not think so. He called Barjesus a subtle mischief maker, an enemy of truth and righteousness and a child of the Devil. That reminds us of the attitude of Jesus toward the Scribes and Pharisees who had rejected the truth, when he said to them, "Woe be unto you, Scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites." Solomon said there is a time to everything under the sun. This was no doubt a time to be angry.

Nevertheless, we need to be cautious about our attitude toward others who disagree with us. Sometimes there is a need for bold, sharp criticism. Other times, when men are sincerely mistaken, gentle correction serves much better. The Holy Spirit was working through Paul as he turned in fury upon Barjesus. Paul used the right method. The perversion of God's plan is the quickest way I know of coming face to face with disaster.

ACT 13:11 And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not

seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.

God is very adept at making the punishment fit the crime. Here was a man who hated spiritual light as preached by Paul and Barnabas. If Barjesus did not wish to welcome the light, he would be allowed to grope in the darkness. True, there is a great difference between spiritual light and physical light, but Jehovah often uses physical means to teach spiritual lessons. The book of John is loaded with such lessons.

ACT 13:12 Then the deputy when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

Jesus had said the word would be confirmed by mighty signs and wonders. When Sergius Paulus saw what had happened to Barjesus, he realized the seriousness of ignoring the preaching of God's word. He decided not to take the route Barjesus had taken. Remember the case of Ananias and Sapphira. There were many who believed after the two of them died for lying to the Holy Spirit.

I wonder what the reaction would be today if God were to strike a few men blind who mock at his Son, who is the Light of the world.

ACT 13:13 Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.

The events on the island of Cyprus were complete. Paul and Barnabas were ready to move on to the mainland north of the Mediterranean in Asia Minor. Perga was a port city at which they landed.

John Mark decided to return to Jerusalem rather than to continue with them. We are not told about it here. However, Paul was not at all happy with the departure of John Mark. Later, he would remind Barnabas of the fact that John Mark turned back. Paul did not want John Mark to go with them because of his previous actions.

Some try to read between the lines and conclude John Mark was a “momma’s boy”, and that he did not care for the rough going he realized was ahead in Asia Minor. Whatever the reason, Paul did not believe it was justified.

ACT 13:14 But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down.

Do not confuse Antioch of Syria with Antioch of Pisidia. Paul and Barnabas had begun this journey from Antioch of Syria. They were now many miles away and had come to Antioch of Pisidia.

Where did they immediately go? They went to the synagogue of the Jews on the Sabbath day. There they sat down and observed the activities in progress. Were they observing the Sabbath day as the prescribed day of worship? Not at all. They went to the synagogue because it was the best place to start preaching. The Jews must always be the first to hear the gospel, then the Gentiles.

ACT 13:15 And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.

It was the custom for a portion of the scriptures to be read and then commented upon by various men in the audience. This time, the portion of scripture which was read had come from the law of Moses and from the Old Testament prophets. The floor was opened to anyone who wished to make comments on that which had been read.

That was precisely why Paul was present. This gave him the opportunity to preach Christ to them. The reader will perhaps remember that Philip did the same thing when he preached to the Ethiopian eunuch. The eunuch had been reading aloud from the prophet Isaiah. Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading. When the eunuch said he needed guidance, Philip preached Jesus to him.

ACT 13:16 Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.

The standing and beckoning with the hand was more attention getting than to remain sitting. Jesus often sat when he taught the people. Jewish Rabbis commonly did sit. But Paul chose to command attention by standing and gesturing.

These were Jews. He began by appealing to their long history as the chosen people of God. The fact

they were gathered at the synagogue told him they were God fearing individuals. As Israelites and God fearing persons, they should be ready and willing to hear what the apostle had to say to them.

ACT 13:17 The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it.

Paul reminded them that out of all the people of the world, God had chosen the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to prepare the way for the coming of his Son into the world. After choosing these descendants of Abraham, God had been with them during the bondage in Egypt. He had released them from Pharoah through the use of his supernatural power.

ACT 13:18 And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness.

After having been released from Egypt, they had lacked sufficient faith to move directly into the land of Canaan. Recognizing this, God caused them to remain in the wilderness for forty years until they were properly prepared to enter in. They had not been model subjects during those forty years. They complained about the food, the water and the leadership. They begged to go back into Egypt where they had leeks and cucumbers to eat. They became so insufferable that Moses lost patience with them and forfeited his right to lead them into the land because of his failure to give God the proper glory.

ACT 13:19 And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, he divided their land to them by lot.

The seven nations are listed in Deuteronomy 7:1. They were: the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites. There are other passages in which five or six nations are listed. In those cases the seven above are all included, even though combined with others under one name.

After Israel had been favored by the Lord in conquering the entire land, the land was divided among them according to the number of people in each of the tribes. God was behind the process from beginning to end.

ACT 13:20 And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet.

For four hundred and fifty years Israel was governed through the judges. It was not a pretty time. The period of the Judges ended with God telling us every man did that which was right in his own eyes, for there was no king in Israel. The latter part of the book of Judges records some gruesome events that took place just before the period of the kings began.

The coming of Samuel marked the end of the Judges, and the beginning of the kings and the prophets. All this time God was providing types of Jesus Christ who was to combine the roles of Prophet, Priest and King.

ACT 13:21 And afterward they desired a king; and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years.

The people had realized Samuel was getting old and his children were not of the proper character to serve as leaders. In addition, they noted that the nations around them, such as Edom had kings who led them into battle. They pleaded with Samuel that they be allowed to have a king also.

God gave in to their desires and instructed Samuel to appoint Saul to be their first king. He also commanded Samuel to tell them just what they could expect from their kings in time to come. Not everything would be as rosy as they thought.

Saul was allowed to reign for forty years, during which time he took upon himself to offer the sacrifices which were only supposed to be offered by Samuel. God is able to raise up or to depose kings at any time. He had appointed Saul. Now he took his crown away.

ACT 13:22 And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.

Even while Saul was still alive, God was in the process of preparing David to take the throne. Saul seemed to sense what was coming and became insanely jealous of David. He spent an extended period of time pursuing David and seeking to kill him.

Finally, it was Saul who died in battle. David took the throne. God testified that David was a man after his own heart, and that David would follow his Divine instructions.

David was not perfect. He committed two terrible sins. He committed adultery with Bathsheba and then sent Bathsheba's husband into the thick of battle where he died. David suffered much as a result of this. Throughout his life, his children caused him all kinds of grief. The child to which Bathsheba gave birth died.

Still, God found David to be a good man in many ways. He promised David that there would never come a time when one of his descendants did not sit upon the throne of Israel. That promise was made sure by the coming of Jesus who sits today on David's throne as King over spiritual Israel. He will continue to be enthroned until the end of time.

ACT 13:23 Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus:

It was common knowledge among the Jews that God had made a promise to David that through his descendants a Messiah would come who would become a great king over Israel, and would bring a day of great glory to the people of God. When Jesus was escorted into Jerusalem in a triumphal march, shortly before he died, he was hailed as the "son of David."

In his preaching, Paul was carefully following the trail of God's working amidst the Jews from the

promise to Abraham until the very day of his present preaching.

ACT 13:24 When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.

Jesus had not come without the proper introduction. John the baptist had cried out to the Jews that they were to repent for the kingdom of heaven was at hand. He had warned them not to come without making the proper preparation of mind and heart before asking to be baptized.

ACT 13:25 And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not he. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose.

John had made it abundantly clear that he was not the Messiah. He made it just as clear that Jesus *was* the one for whom the Jews longed. He had said he waited for one upon whom the Holy Spirit would descend and remain. At the baptism of Christ this took place, and John insisted this was the Messiah.

ACT 13:26 Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.

Now the Jews must understand that this Christ whom Paul preached was the one through whom those

who feared God would receive the promise presented first to Abraham, then to Isaac and Jacob, and later to David.

ACT 13:27 For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him.

It was incredible to Paul that the Jews in Jerusalem, along with their rulers, had ignored the messages of the prophets who predicted the coming of the Christ. They had read such promises every Sabbath day, and yet they failed to receive the Redeemer when he appeared. They had condemned the promised Messiah, just as the prophets had predicted.

ACT 13:28 And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain.

Christ had done nothing that would be sufficient to condemn him to death. It was quite the reverse. He had done everything possible to aid the Jews in finding eternal life through his name. When Pilate gave them the choice between releasing a murderer and releasing Christ, they cried out for the release of Barabbus and for the crucifixion of Jesus.

ACT 13:29 And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre.

The events surrounding Jesus' birth, life and death were all predicted ahead of time and the predictions were fulfilled to the letter. Jesus died for you. Never forget it! This was no ordinary man. This was the Only Begotten Son of God. Only the love of the Godhead could have made it possible for him to be treated as he was. He could have called legions of angels to defend him. Instead, he died for you and me.

ACT 13:30 But God raised him from the dead:

If that had been the end of the story, it would have been the saddest, and most tragic event in all the history of humanity. But it was not the end. God raised him from the dead. As a result of Christ's body being raised, every man has been given hope that death will not be the final victor. Obedience to the gospel opens the way to a similar journey for each of us from the grave to the eternal heavenly city and the land of endless day.

ACT 13:31 And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people.

How do we know he was raised from the dead? The number of credible witnesses who observed him under a variety of conditions leaves no possibility of fraud. These were men who died for their convictions later on. They would never have endured the agonies they suffered if they had not seen him, eaten with

him, spoken with him and been taught to go and tell others of his resurrection.

ACT 13:32 And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers,

Paul was one of those who had seen Christ. In view of all this series of fulfilled prophecies and amazing events, the apostle knew he was obligated to preach the Word of salvation to both the Jews and the Gentiles. The promises had been made to the ancestors of the Jews. The people must be told the time had come for the fulfilling of the promise.

ACT 13:33 God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

Those now living were the descendants of those to whom the promise was made. They must not ignore the tremendous blessings God was ready to pour out upon them in the latter days. Through the mouth of David, God had predicted the birth of his own Son into the world.

ACT 13:34 And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.

From the time of the entrance of sin in the Garden of Eden, the curse of death and corruption lay heavy on mankind. God had warned that in the day they ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would die. When they ate of that fruit, they were driven from the Garden and lost access to the tree of life. Through Jesus, that access to the tree of life may be regained. But it must wait for the entrance of the faithful into the joys of the Lord in the time of judgment.

Every person over the age of thirty is aware that the body reaches its prime and then begins to fade. It continues to erode until finally Satan's wages of death are paid. Corruption appears to have won the war.

ACT 13:35 Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

This reference comes from Psalm 16:10. The statement, "For dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return (Gen. 3:19)." did not apply to Jesus Christ. Before his body had time to decay, he escaped from the grave and began the return to the glory of heaven from which he had come to this lowly world of sin, of sorrow and of tribulation.

ACT 13:36 For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption:

The prophecy did not refer to David. He lived his life unto the end. Then he was buried, and his body

remained in the grave until corruption did turn it back to dust. The prophecy had to apply to a descendant of David.

ACT 13:37 But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.

The only possible explanation of this lies in the resurrection of the Son of God. He was to say in the book of Revelation that he possesses the keys to death, hell and the grave. With those keys, he can open the graves, and no man has the power to shut them back again.

ACT 13:38 Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins:

It is through Jesus Christ, who defeated Satan and conquered corruption, that Paul preached the escape from the slavery of sin. In him lies the possibility of a cleansed soul and approval in the sight of the Father in heaven.

ACT 13:39 And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

These Jews to whom Paul was preaching laid heavy emphasis on keeping the law of Moses. That law served its purpose well in acting as a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ for an introduction to the joy of remission of sin and escape from the clutches of

the Devil. However, the blood of bulls and goats could never bring ultimate forgiveness of sins. All it did was point to the saving power of the Son of God. They must leave the schoolmaster now and sit at the feet of the Master of heaven and earth.

ACT 13:40 Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets;

If, after having been favored with the oracles of God which had declared these wonders which had now come upon them, the Jews ignored or rejected these offered blessings, they would face the wrath of the Creator. *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God.*

ACT 13:41 Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.

In his infinite wisdom, God was able to foresee the attitude the Jews would take toward the gift of his Son. He knew they would not believe in him when he came to them. Even if men like Paul and Barnabas preached the wonderful gospel of forgiveness of sin and eternal life, they would stop their ears, close their eyes and harden their hearts. The consequences of turning their backs on the Christ could only be death and corruption. The only escape from these horrors is through God's Son.

ACT 13:42 And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that

these words might be preached to them the next sabbath.

Apparently there were both Jews and Gentiles in the assembly. These Gentiles may have been proselytes to the Jewish religion. The Jews left the synagogue, leaving the Gentiles behind. The Gentiles were ready to hear more of this wonderful Saviour who had given his life that they might live. It was natural that they call for this preaching to be done at the next Sabbath. They had been meeting with the Jews on that day.

There is a possible objection to the position I have taken above. If the Gentiles were present, why did they wish to hear “these words” preached on the next Sabbath day? It may be that the Gentiles who were present, and heard Paul’s preaching,, wished for him to present those same truths to their fellow Gentiles who were not present.

ACT 13:43 Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

There were many who believed Paul and Barnabas. Some of them were Gentile proselytes who had been converted to Judaism. Some of them were Jews who recognized the truth of what the two men had preached. All were admonished to put on Christ and live for him.

ACT 13:44 And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God.

The excitement spread throughout the entire city of Antioch. Very few people were not caught up in the anticipation of hearing more about the Christ.

If you have never experienced anything like this, you have missed a thrilling experience. I went to Evarts, Kentucky to teach there. Shortly after we arrived, a powerful preacher of the gospel came to town. I have never heard a more persuasive preacher. The town was not a large town; perhaps two thousand persons. After the first two nights of the meeting, the entire town was buzzing. Converts were being made right and left. The superintendent of a sectarian Sunday School was baptized. Other religious groups quickly organized their own meetings to prevent their members from attending the services of the church. I think I can understand something of what was happening in Antioch of Pisidia.

ACT 13:45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

It is difficult to deal with prejudice and invested interests. The leaders among the Jews became extremely jealous and envious of the popularity and influence of Paul and Barnabas. They began to oppose them by contradicting their preaching and desecrating the name of the Son of God.

ACT 13:46 Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

What a terrible thing that Paul had to speak these words to those who should have been the quickest to hear the good news of Christ! Rather than being intimidated by the resistance of the unbelieving Jewish leaders, the two men stood boldly and pointed out to them the dangerous path they had chosen.

God had commanded that the Jews hear the gospel first. He had set the pattern by having the first gospel sermon preached by Peter to the Jews who had gathered at the feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem. Paul continued to follow that procedure throughout his lifetime. It was the Jew first, then the Gentile.

What a calamity it was that the Jews, who had been God's chosen people for some two thousand years, had proven themselves disinterested in the very thing God had been bringing to the world through them, the promise of eternal life.

ACT 13:47 For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

Peter had said the promise was to the Jews, to their children, and those afar off. Peter had preached the gospel to Gentiles at the house of Cornelius. But,

it was Paul who had been given the distinct challenge of introducing the plan of salvation to the isles of the sea. It was he who was to hold up that light God had prophesied would be seen in the latter days by the Gentiles.

ACT 13:48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

The Gentiles in Antioch rejoiced and gladly received the Word which was preached to them.

But what does this verse mean when it says as many as were “ordained to eternal life?” Is this an indication that God predestined certain men to eternal life and consigned others to the torments of hell, without this having anything to do with their freedom of choice? Definitely not! The ones who are ordained to eternal life are those who receive the Word of God and lovingly serve him unto the end. God has not ordained individuals regardless of the type of life they live. He has ordained the entire body of the faithful to eternal life in heaven with Him.

ACT 13:49 And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.

There were enough of the believing Jews and Gentiles to spread the tidings throughout the entire area. Do we have the same dedication today that those believers had in Antioch? They faced formidable opposition from both the Pagan and the Jewish

communities. Yet they did not flinch. They marched forward rejoicing in their newfound life in Christ. They were valiant soldiers of the cross.

ACT 13:50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts.

It was not the same with the unbelieving Jews. They proceeded to seek out the high officials of the city. These were men of power. They raised such a furor Paul and Barnabas found it advisable to leave the city. These men and women were said to be devout. This would normally mean devout Christians. It does not mean that here. These persons were devoted to their previous ways of life and did not intend to bow their will to that of God or his apostles and preachers.

ACT 13:51 But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium.

Jesus once told his disciples they were to do just what Paul and Barnabas did. They were to go to various cities, preach to them, and watch to see what reception the gospel was given. If the people heard and obeyed, they were to pronounce God's blessing upon them. If they persecuted the messengers of God, those messengers were to shake the dust off their feet and move on to other places where they would be heard.

ACT 13:52 And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.

In spite of the opposition which had risen up in their faces, the new converts went on their way rejoicing. This was the common reaction then, and it is still common today. I have seen eighty year old persons with tears of joy running down their cheeks, realizing just what had taken place in their lives when they decided to follow Jesus.

Chapter 14

ACT 14:1 And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.

There had been mixed results in Antioch. Some, both among the Jews and the Gentiles, had believed on Christ. At the same time, the unbelieving Jews had stirred up the people to the extent that Paul and Barnabas had been cast out of the city.

Now the two of them moved on to Iconium. It was almost one hundred miles from Antioch to Iconium. The country was mountainous and very difficult to cover. We do not know whether the men had beasts of burden. It is very likely that they traveled on foot.

As soon as it was possible they went to the synagogue together. This is in agreement with their plans throughout the missionary journeys. The Jews knew the Old Testament scriptures. They had been entrusted with the oracles of God from centuries past. If anyone had the background to believe in Christ as the promised Messiah, the Jew had it.

In short order, many of the citizens of Iconium heard the Word of God gladly and became Christians. These two men were powerful evangelists. The same energy with which Paul had persecuted the Christians was now turned toward converting his Jewish brethren to Christ.

ACT 14:2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.

This part of the pattern persisted also. Part of the Jews accepted Christ as the Son of God. Others were just as bent on destroying any influence the Lord might have in their part of the country. God had predicted they would cast aside the chief cornerstone of the church. They were fulfilling the predictions exactly as given.

ACT 14:3 Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

We do not know just how long the two men remained in Iconium. We do know they were not intimidated by the commotion brought on by the opposing Jews. Just as Christ had promised, they were given the power to perform miracles before the people. This was not simply a means of healing the infirm. Although that was a secondary benefit, it was a confirmation of the preaching as having come from the mind of God.

ACT 14:4 But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.

It seems there are always some who will listen to the preaching of the gospel. It seems just as certain that there will be many who will consider it foolishness, or even a threat to their power and influence. And so it was in Iconium. Some sided with

Paul and Barnabas. Others took the side of the obstinate Jews.

Barnabas is called an apostle in a different sense than the original twelve. Even Paul stated that he was an apostle out of due season. The word “apostle” means “one who is sent.” Both of these men had been sent with the message of Christ.

ACT 14:5 And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them,

In our day, nearly two thousand years later, and in lands where the gospel has been preached and the church established, we think we face difficult obstacles in spreading the good news. It would be well for us to occasionally look back to the time of Paul and Barnabas and thank God that we do not face the violence they encountered. Stoning was a common method of punishing criminals in the Old Testament. The Jews continued to fall back on stoning whenever they wished to punish quickly and forcefully.

We are made to wonder just how the unbelieving Jews managed to persuade the Gentiles and their rulers to make life so difficult for Paul and Barnabas. Were they able to convince the Gentiles Paul and Barnabas were troublemakers? Whatever the method, it was successful. The two men were placed in grave danger of losing their lives in a hail of stones.

ACT 14:6 They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about:

I imagine they *were aware* of it. I would be very much aware of it if someone had attacked me with the intent of stoning me to death. Iconium was located in Phrygia. Lystra and Derbe were both in Lycaonia. All three of these cities were in the Roman province of Galatia. When Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians, he was writing to people in this area.

ACT 14:7 And there they preached the gospel.

If people in one location will not receive the Word of God, there are others in other locations who will receive it. At the time I write these words, England and Germany have become difficult places to preach. India is just the opposite. Hundreds of Churches of Christ have been established in the land of India in recent years. Russia was, for a long time, completely off limits to the message of Christ. This has changed and thousands of persons in Russia have reached out to embrace the truth.

ACT 14:8 And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked:

As the men passed through the city of Lystra, they came upon a man, crippled from birth. He had never walked a step in his life. These were the types of persons the apostles healed. There could be no mistaking the miracles they did. They were not fakes. Everyone could see them. Everyone knew they could not be accomplished through human skill separate from divine assistance.

ACT 14:9 The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed,

This unfortunate lame man heard the preaching of Paul. We are not told that he made any special request. However; it seems reasonable to believe he conveyed to Paul in some manner that he wished to be made whole. In addition, Paul recognized him as the kind of person upon whom the blessings of God would not be wasted.

ACT 14:10 Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.

The apostle called out loudly for the man to stand up. As in numerous other cases, the results were immediate and unmistakable. He not only stood upon his feet. He began to walk and leap about. There was no sign whatsoever of the malady he had lived with from the time he was born.

ACT 14:11 And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.

The people of Lystra were amazed at the healing of the lame man. Rather than seeing the miracle as the dispensing of divine power to Paul and Barnabas from God, they decided the two men must be gods themselves. They had only appeared in the form of men, but in fact they were truly gods.

ACT 14:12 And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.

They thought Barnabas was Jupiter and Paul was Mercury. This is interesting because Jupiter was the more important of the two false gods. But, because Paul took the lead in speaking, they viewed him as Mercury, who was thought to be the messenger among the gods.

ACT 14:13 Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.

The man in Lystra, who claimed to be a priest for the god Jupiter, saw this as a possible opening for further prestige. If he could take advantage of the miracle which had been done, he stood to gain power and wealth among the people. Therefore, he was ready to offer a sacrifice to the two.

ACT 14:14 Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out,

Paul and Barnabas were shocked that sacrifices might be offered to them. We can imagine they might have also been somewhat fearful of the possible consequences if they took glory to themselves which only belonged to Jehovah. The tearing of their clothing

demonstrated their horror at the thought of being considered gods.

ACT 14:15 And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein:

The reason Paul and Barnabas were on this missionary trip was to glorify God and to bring men into a proper relationship with him. It was shocking to them to have these persons bow down before them. The entire creation, including the non-living, the non-human life and human life was the product of Jehovah. It was a deadly mistake to worship any of these limited aspects of the creation. Only Jehovah deserves the worship of men. It is no wonder the two men rent their clothes and rebuked those who sought to worship them.

ACT 14:16 Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.

God had operated through the Jewish people for a long, long time. During that time he had allowed the Gentiles to direct their own steps. There were good reasons why this was done. God intended to show the Jews they could not be saved through the keeping of the law. He intended to show the Gentiles they could not be saved through their own wisdom and power. Jesus Christ is the answer. Neither paganism nor

Judaism will bring redemption. That comes about through the life and death of the Saviour.

ACT 14:17 Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

Even though God had allowed the Gentiles to seek out the way of truth for themselves, he had not left them without clues which would lead them toward it. He had sent his general blessings upon both the just and the unjust. The rain and the resulting harvest had demonstrated to all men everywhere that God is both loving and good.

This verse should be set beside Romans 1:20 and Psalm 19:1-2. There is a God. God is wise. God is powerful, and God is good. These things can be seen by any man anywhere.

ACT 14:18 And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.

Even after speaking so bluntly and chastising those who would have worshipped them, it was almost impossible to prevent them from continuing their misguided efforts to worship men rather than God.

ACT 14:19 And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.

The furious Jews who had caused the two men to leave Antioch and Iconium had followed them for dozens of miles to Lystra. Now they provoked a furor among the people of Lystra and caused the people to stone Paul to the point of death. He was dragged out of the city and left for dead. Some students of the Bible contend that Paul was dead. I do not believe the word “supposed” would have been used if he had actually been killed.

Were the ones who stoned Paul the same ones who earlier had to be restrained from worshipping the men? It is not impossible. Men are very fickle. The hero of today may easily become the villain of tomorrow.

ACT 14:20 Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

The reason some think Paul was actually dead is that he rose up while the disciples were gathered around him. The logic is weak. He could have been unconscious and have regained consciousness. It appears that those who dragged him outside the city were convinced he was dead. They left him and went their way. Paul was able to go back into the city of Lystra overnight. Then he and Barnabas left the city and moved on to the village of Derbe.

ACT 14:21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch,

We are not informed of any serious violence against them while they preached in Derbe. Nor do we know how long they remained in Derbe. After a time, they made up their minds to retrace their steps through each of the cities in which they had previously preached.

Do not overlook the courage this required. Ask yourself if you would have been willing to return to Iconium and Antioch where there were men who had decided to kill you for preaching Christ. I think most of us would have said this is probably the time Jesus was talking about when he said shake the dust off your feet. Paul and Barnabas did not bow to that temptation.

ACT 14:22 Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

The Roman Catholic church today has a sacrament called confirmation. This verse is not a back up for that procedure. The confirming of the souls of the disciples in this verse was merely a matter of going back and adding strength to the dedication of those who had committed themselves to Christ before this.

There are two senses in which men enter into the Kingdom of God. One enters the Kingdom of God when he becomes a Christian. Christ is King. Every child of God is a part of the church, or Kingdom of God. There is, however, a fuller sense in which men will enter the Kingdom of God. That is when the graves are opened, the books are opened and the

faithful will be told to enter into the joys of the Lord. This life is full of tribulation. Only those who overcome such tribulation will hear those joyous words of welcome.

ACT 14:23 And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

How could elders have been ordained in every church? It had not been more than three or four years at the most since those congregations had been established. There are congregations today that have been in existence for twenty years or more and still claim there are not men qualified to be elders. There is probably one of two problems present when this is true. First, the church may be so corrupt there have been no spiritual leaders developed. Second, there may be so much jealousy no man can be ordained as an elder without bringing on complaints from those who are left out. Both of these conditions are inexcusable. Elders can be developed in a period of just a few years from the time of their conversion.

The ordination of the elders was accompanied by fasting and prayer. The two of these in combination can cause men to think on spiritual things. Perhaps we should deny ourselves the delights of this world occasionally just to show ourselves that the material world comes second to the Kingdom of God.

ACT 14:24 And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia.

Back they came through the same route they had followed in passing through the cities previously.

ACT 14:25 And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia:

Perga was the seaport at which they had landed when they came from Cyprus on the way to Asia Minor.

ACT 14:26 And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.

After passing through each of the cities where they had preached on the way northward, they now returned to Antioch of Syria, the city from which the journey had begun. This must have been a time of rejoicing for both the church at Antioch, and for the missionaries. The church had shown great confidence in them as they were sent out. They had proven worthy of that confidence. The Father in heaven and the Son of God must also have been pleased at the success of their efforts.

ACT 14:27 And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.

Notice the humble attitude shown by the two. They did not take the glory for themselves. It was not what

they had done. It was what *God* had done, using them as instruments of righteousness. It was God who had opened the door of the Kingdom to the Gentiles through them. They were delighted to have been used in this manner. Remember, Paul had actually been left for dead, yet he did not brag about his contribution.

Jesus Christ had appointed Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles. Paul was happy to comply with that appointment.

ACT 14:28 And there they abode long time with the disciples.

We are not told how long the two men enjoyed working together with those in the church at Antioch before they once again decided to move further out into the Gentile lands. The first missionary journey was completed.

Chapter 15

ACT 15:1 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

The certain men mentioned here were no doubt Pharisees who had been converted to Christianity and wished to maintain some of the rituals and ceremonies of the law of Moses. Circumcision was a rite bound upon the fleshly descendants of Abraham. No such action was laid upon the Gentiles who became Christians.

Jerusalem had been the point of origin for the first influx of persons into the Christian faith. Those who had become prominent among the brethren there had a tendency to see themselves as privileged to legislate to others distant from that city. Their point was that no person could become an acceptable citizen of the kingdom of God without first becoming a part of the covenant delivered to Abraham and perpetuated under the law of Moses.

ACT 15:2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

These Jews from Jerusalem had been able to dominate the thinking of the Jewish Christians there.

But now they had a more difficult task. They were moving out into Gentile territory. It would be far more difficult to persuade these Gentiles to keep a commandment given specifically to Jews.

Paul and Barnabas stood up to them boldly. The confrontation became so heated, it seemed wise to all concerned for some of the Gentile Christians to go to Jerusalem with Paul, Barnabas and the Judaizing teachers to discuss just what the Gentiles should be expected to do to become acceptable members of the Christian church.

As an inspired apostle who had no need that others teach him on these matters, Paul did not go to Jerusalem to hear and heed the decision of a church council. He went to discuss the matter so that all could come to consensus on what the Holy Spirit had revealed.

ACT 15:3 And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

The church at Antioch apparently made provision for the group to travel together to Jerusalem. Phenice and Samaria were places through which it would be natural to pass on the way from Antioch of Syria to the city of Jerusalem. As they moved along they told of the results which had been achieved through the preaching of the gospel to the non-Jewish world. This resulted in great rejoicing. We must remember that Samaria was inhabited by people with a mixture of

Jewish and Gentile ancestry. It would be a source of joy to them to know Christianity was making inroads into Gentile minds.

ACT 15:4 And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.

When the group first arrived in Jerusalem, they received a hearty welcome from the Jewish Christians in the church there. Some of the apostles had remained there when the church was scattered abroad due to persecution. Do not forget that there were many thousands of Jews who became Christians on the day of Pentecost and the months following. These people were filled with joy when they heard the church was spreading rapidly.

Paul and Barnabas spelled out the wondrous things which had been taking place. They had preached. God had supported their preaching with confirming miracles. Many persons had received the word gladly and were eager to be baptized.

ACT 15:5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

These who rose up were Christians who had been a part of the sect of the Pharisees. They had believed Christ was the Son of God. They had believed in his

resurrection. They were in accord with the morality taught by Jesus. The only problem was that they were convinced no man could become one of God's chosen people without obeying the rite of circumcision. He must first become a Jew. Then he could become a Christian. The law of Moses must be continued.

ACT 15:6 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

The apostles were inspired men. The elders were respected for their maturity of character. With God having revealed the truth through inspiration and with men of mature wisdom, the meeting should have gone on harmoniously.

ACT 15:7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

What should have happened did not happen. Soon there was much disagreement among them. We must conclude that revealed truth was ignored and that pride and prejudice reared up its ugly head to create this scene.

Here again Peter took the lead in speaking. Sometimes this was advantageous, as in the case of the great sermon on Pentecost. Other times, Peter spoke before carefully considering his words, as when he claimed he would never deny the Lord. This time

he had words of wisdom to present to the gathering.

Peter felt that he had a responsibility to speak up. God had chosen him to first open the door to the Gentiles. He had been told to go to the house of Cornelius. When he hesitated, God made it clear through the letting down of the sheet with clean and unclean animals in it that there was no longer to be a difference between the Jew and the Gentile. God had granted light and salvation to the Gentiles just as he had to the Jews.

ACT 15:8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;

As Peter had preached to the household of Cornelius, they had believed from the heart. God had read their hearts and had given them the gift of the Holy Spirit. This was a witness to them, as well as to Peter, that as Gentiles, they had been accepted as part of the Christian family.

ACT 15:9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

Although God had worked strictly through the Jews for many long centuries, under Christ he had broken down the barriers which once had been so rigid. Through the blood of Christ the sins of the Gentiles could be washed away just as surely as those of the Jews. Certainly there were differences in their physical characteristics. There were differences in their ancestry and their experiences. That did not

matter. They were to be invited into the body of Christ and allowed to join in the business of the Lord.

ACT 15:10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

The attempt to force the Gentiles to keep the law of Moses was an affront to the will of Jehovah. No Jew had been able to keep the law of Moses perfectly. The law defined sin. It told of the consequences of committing sin, but it did not provide a way of permanent cleansing of the soul. A better way had arrived. It was not necessary for the Gentile to place himself under the heavy burden of the law. He could come directly to the Son of God for salvation.

ACT 15:11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

This is a sort of exclamation point on Peter's remarks. He was one of them. He "belonged" in Jerusalem. There could be no doubt that the Holy Spirit had given ample proof that the Gentiles were to be accepted. Any further discussion had to be directed toward the conditions under which the Gentiles were to be admitted.

ACT 15:12 Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.

It was time to hear Paul and Barnabas present their experiences among the Gentiles. It became increasingly clear that God had guided them and supported them in the preaching which they had done. They were not working under their own power and through their own wisdom. They had divine help.

ACT 15:13 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me:

When Paul and Barnabas had concluded their remarks, James began to speak. James, along with Peter, commanded great respect among the Jerusalem Christians. Peter, James and John had been very close to the Christ while he was still in the flesh. What would James add to the conversation?

ACT 15:14 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

James referred back to Peter's contact with the household of Cornelius, recorded in the tenth chapter of this same book. Simeon is only another name for Simon Peter. God had long considered the Jews a people for his name. Now, he had undoubtedly decided to choose disciples from among the Gentiles. They would also be privileged to cherish the promise that "I will be their God and they shall be my people."

ACT 15:15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written,

James called the attention of the group to a number of prophecies found in the Old Testament. All that was happening was completely in harmony with those prophecies. It was time to fall in line with the will of God.

ACT 15:16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up:

The first of these prophecies came from Amos 9:11-12. The tabernacle of David is identical with the house of David. David was a great king over the people of God. His glory dimmed sharply as the years passed. However, God had promised that there would be a king available to sit on the throne of David forever. Jesus Christ was in the process of rebuilding the glory of David's house. From the ruins of the former glory there would be an even greater and more glorious house raised the temple, or Church of Christ.

ACT 15:17 That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.

The prophecy had specified that all men would be permitted to seek after God. This was in harmony with the promise given to Abraham. All nations would be blessed through his Seed. Both Jew and Gentile would carry the name of Jehovah.

ACT 15:18 Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

Long before the group in Jerusalem had even entered into this world, God had planned to bring men from every land and every race together in service to him. These plans had been laid from the very beginning of time. The things that were happening were not new to the mind of God.

ACT 15:19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

A great deal of difficulty had been placed in the way of the Gentile believers. They had been put under pressure to adopt the ceremonies of the Law of Moses before they could come into full fellowship with Jewish Christians. James contended that this was not by command of the Holy Spirit.

ACT 15:20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.

James spoke confidently and firmly. There were only four ceremonies which the Gentiles should be instructed to observe. They were first instructed to avoid the worship of idols. This command was certainly taught by Jesus himself. He had insisted that the first and greatest commandment was to “Love the Lord with all the heart, soul, mind and strength.”

Idols were a pollution because they detracted from the complete love which God demanded for himself. The second of the four instructions was to abstain from fornication. There was a strong connection between idol worship and fornication. Most of the worship services of the idols included sexual excesses and distortions. Thirdly, God had always abhorred the eating of blood. The life is in the blood. Last, strangled animals had the blood trapped inside. They were not to be eaten. There is no reason to think the four principles mentioned in this verse are less binding today than they were in the time of this discussion. Food that contains blood should not be eaten.

The listing of these four prohibitions did not mean the Gentiles could live morally depraved lives. They were not to murder, to lie, to covet or to steal. But they did not have to keep the Holy days, the Sabbath or the rite of circumcision. Their circumcision was to be that of the heart rather than of the flesh.

ACT 15:21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

There were still a large number of Jews who observed that law and studied it when they came together on the Sabbath. Eating meat which had not been drained of the blood would offend these Jews and would make it very difficult to bring Jew and Gentile into one fold.

ACT 15:22 Then pleased it the apostles and elders with the whole church, to send chosen

men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas and Silas, chief men among the brethren:

At this point, the decision was made to send a delegation to the Antioch church to inform them as to the outcome of the discussion in Jerusalem. This does not mean the gathering in Jerusalem was similar to the general councils of various religious sects today. This was not dependent upon the wisdom of men. It was strictly a matter of coming together to determine what the Holy Spirit had revealed to be the will of God and Christ.

They selected certain men out of the members of the church in Jerusalem to go back and report to the brethren in Syria. These natives of Jerusalem traveled along with Paul and Barnabas to verify that what the two men had to tell them was true. The two men from Jerusalem were Judas Barsabas and Silas. Silas must have become very close to Paul during this period of time. Later he became a companion of Paul during much of his missionary work.

ACT 15:23 And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia.

They did not depend strictly on word of mouth. Letters were prepared from the apostles, the elders and the church in Jerusalem. These letters would

make it even more certain that the Gentiles were not bound to be circumcized before they could become members of the church. Notice that these letters were addressed to Gentiles over a wide geographical area. It was not just the Gentiles in the church at Antioch who needed to be instructed. All Gentiles, everywhere, were involved.

ACT 15:24 Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment:

There is nothing new in this verse. The Gentiles had been troubled. There was some danger they might lose their souls as a result of the unnecessary demands the Jews had tried to force upon them. No commandment had come from Jerusalem to that effect. The Gentiles could disregard any teaching demanding they be circumcized.

ACT 15:25 It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

There were two of these men, Judas Barsabas and Silas.

ACT 15:26 Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

These were not simply run of the mill individuals. They were faithful enough to risk their lives to uphold the name of Christ.

ACT 15:27 We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth.

Judas and Silas would confirm that which was written in the letters which had been sent. This way, there was no possibility that Barnabas and Saul would come back and falsify the conclusions of the gathering in Jerusalem.

ACT 15:28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;

How did they know what seemed good to the Holy Ghost? I think the answer lies in the fact that there were inspired prophets in the group. These men were capable of receiving information directly from the mind of God. These abilities disappeared with the death of the last person upon whom apostles had laid their hands and with the completion of the scriptures.

The Holy Spirit indicated they needed only to command a few necessary things. Much of the ceremonies of the Jewish law could be passed over by the Gentiles. This was particularly true of circumcision.

ACT 15:29 That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

We have a repetition of the four prohibitions mentioned earlier. Abstaining from these actions would cause them to be pleasing to God.

ACT 15:30 So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle:

Paul and Barnabas had finished the business for which they had traveled to Jerusalem. They now headed back, along with the two men who had been appointed to accompany them and confirm the letters they carried. There they delivered the letter.

ACT 15:31 Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.

The Gentiles in the Antioch church were relieved that they did not have to keep the mass of regulations found in the law of Moses. They would not have to be circumcized in order to become members of the body of Jesus Christ.

ACT 15:32 And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.

The two men from Jerusalem confirmed that which was found in the letters. Since they were prophets, this confirmation was binding. In addition, these two men preached to the members of the church at Antioch.

ACT 15:33 And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.

We are not told how long they remained in Antioch before they were encouraged to return to Jerusalem where the apostles were located. The relationships between all were cordial as the differences over circumcision had been resolved.

ACT 15:34 Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still.

It appears that a strong bond had formed between Silas and Paul while they were traveling together and meeting with the members at Antioch. Silas did not wish to go back to Jerusalem. He could, no doubt, have seen the enormous opportunities that existed in the Gentile lands.

ACT 15:35 Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

These must have been enjoyable days for these powerful men of God. It is usually pleasant to be with others who are full of the knowledge of Jehovah. The brethren at Antioch were privileged to associate with some of the greatest men the church has ever known.

ACT 15:36 And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our

brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.

Paul could hardly remain in Antioch for an extended period of time. He felt a compulsion to preach the gospel where it had not previously been taught. It seems that he did not like to travel alone. Therefore, he invited Barnabas to go along with him into new territory.

At the same time, he desired to go back to the places where they had previously established congregations. This is a wise procedure. It is not good to convert a number of persons in a new field and then leave these immature Christians to fend for themselves.

ACT 15:37 And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.

John Mark was the son of Barnabas' sister. He was, therefore, Barnabas' nephew. This is the same Mark who wrote one of the four accounts of the gospel.

ACT 15:38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.

Paul did not like the idea. John Mark had returned to Jerusalem when Paul moved into difficult territory in Pamphylia. Paul remembered it well and did not want a spineless man in the group. Later on in his life, Paul forgave John Mark and commended him for his work.

ACT 15:39 And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other; and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus;

Nevertheless, at this time Paul and Barnabas could not come to an agreement on whether or not to take John Mark with them. Barnabas took Mark with him, and the two of them went to Cyprus to preach there.

ACT 15:40 And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.

This left Paul and Silas as fellow travelers. The brethren had confidence in Paul and Silas and were willing to commend them as servants of God and missionaries of the precious treasure of the gospel.

ACT 15:41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

The two men moved northward around the Mediterranean Sea, strengthening the churches which had already been established. Antioch was in the province of Syria. Cilicia was farther north and was the province in which Paul's boyhood home of Tarsus was located.

And so, we find that the second missionary journey had begun .

Chapter 16

ACT 16:1 Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek:

The strengthening of young churches is a very important part of missionary work. It is altogether too easy to move into an area, make a number of converts, and then leave for other parts without further thought concerning the spiritual welfare of those babes in Christ. Paul knew this truth very well. He was, at this time, retracing his footsteps over territory he had previously evangelized. Present day missionaries would do well to learn from his pattern of action.

When Paul arrived at Lystra, he found a young man he would later refer to as his son in the faith. Timothy was as beloved to the apostle as he would have been had he been his son in the flesh. Timothy would travel with Paul on many of his travels from this time forward. At other times Timothy would be left in an area to strengthen it while Paul moved on to another field of work.

Timothy had a mixed ancestry. He was part Jew and part Greek, or Gentile. This had its advantages. It also had some disadvantages. Sometimes Timothy was expected to act like a Jew. At other times he was also expected to act like a Gentile.

ACT 16:2 Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.

Timothy had earned a large degree of respect from his fellow Christians at Lystra and Iconium. This probably had a great deal to do with Paul's eagerness to take Timothy along as a traveling companion. Would it not be a wonderful thing if every Christian could be spoken of by his brothers and sisters in Christ as Timothy was spoken of?

ACT 16:3 Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek.

Although Paul was delighted to have Timothy travel with him, he had some concern over whether the Jews would accept Timothy without objection. We learned in the fifteenth chapter that there were numerous Jews in the entire area who had become Christians. They were so persuaded that circumcision was necessary to be approved of God that they even insisted Gentiles must be circumcised before becoming Christians. The meeting at Jerusalem had established the fact that Gentiles did not *have* to be circumcised. However, Timothy's mother was a Jew. This meant Paul and Timothy were going to run into sharp opposition from the Jews who assumed Timothy would not have been circumcised because his father was a Gentile.

Thus, Paul caused Timothy to be circumcised. We must now ask the question as to whether this was completely honest on the part of Paul, or whether he may have bent his principles before the pressure of

the Jews. The apostle had refused to have Titus circumcised (Gal. 2:3). He had made some very strong statements about circumcision and the law of Moses. For example Galatians 5:2-4 states:

Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

In a related incident, Paul was asked to go to the temple and purify himself along with four men who had taken a vow. He was to do this to show that he walked orderly in the keeping of the law of Moses and that he had not taught Jews to abstain from circumcising their children. Paul did go to the temple. He did purify himself. An offering was made for him according to the law (Acts 21:18-26). It seems from this text that the Jewish Christians felt they must keep the law, even though the Gentile Christians were not expected to do so. (See particularly verses 24 and 25.)

The attitude of Paul toward the keeping of the law of Moses by Jewish Christians is a very complicated topic. I frankly admit that I do not believe Paul was completely consistent in his actions and his teaching. I refer the reader to the comments of two very mature students of the Bible for further examination of the issue. Brother J.W. McGarvey had some in depth thoughts in his *New Commentary on Acts of Apostles*. Brother Burton Coffman also presents material well worth considering in his commentary volume on Acts. A thorough study of

Paul's attitude toward the law would require a small book. Perhaps Coffman's suggestion that Paul's reason for circumcizing Timothy was not to place Timothy under the law of Moses, but was to honor the fact that Timothy was a descendant of Abraham and was proud to be so. However, I do not think that is why the Jews would have insisted on his circumcision. I believe they would have seen it as bringing him under the Mosaic covenant.

ACT 16:4 And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.

As Paul and Timothy moved through the various cities where they had made converts to Christ in the past, they took with them the decrees which had been made at the conference in Jerusalem regarding the required behavior of the Gentiles. These decrees were supported not only by Paul and Timothy. They had the authority of other apostles as well. This certified that Paul and Timothy were not acting on their own.

ACT 16:5 And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.

The disciples must have rejoiced to have the company of Paul once more. He would not remain with them long. Nevertheless, his short stay gave them spiritual strength which would have taken much longer to have attained without his visit. Notice

that the churches increased in number *daily*. This reminds us of the manner in which the church increased after the sermon on the day of Pentecost. At that time the disciples met from house to house daily. This may have also been the case this time.

ACT 16:6 Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia,

Then an interesting thing happened. Having preached in much of the territory east of the Aegean Sea, the two men had thoughts of moving into the area of the seven churches of Asia. The reader will certainly remember that the book of Revelation was addressed to this very territory. However, God's schedule did not call for a stop in Ephesus right then. The Holy Spirit forbid them to go there. These churches of Asia were south of the line they were taking as they moved toward the Aegean Sea.

ACT 16:7 After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.

Their next thought was to move northward into Bithynia. Again the Holy Spirit did not permit them to go there. We do not know just how the Spirit informed them of his desires. Shortly afterward, we find Paul having a vision of a man calling for him to come over into Macedonia. Is it possible that similar visions instructed them to avoid Asia and Bithynia? We do not know. We can only wonder.

ACT 16:8 And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas.

What we can know is that they were moving directly toward the seaport of Troas. This was at the western extreme of the Asian continent. To move farther westward would require that they cross the Aegean Sea and move into Europe.

ACT 16:9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

Is there a difference between visions and dreams? I have heard it said that visions normally occurred in the daytime and dreams took place at night. This was a vision that was seen in the night.

A man from Macedonia would have been a Greek. The man pleaded with Paul to cross the sea and preach to the people there. This would have plucked at Paul's heartstrings. He prided himself in going to places where Christ had not been preached. He had by this time revisited the congregations which had been established on the first missionary journey. God was now ready to send him to another major part of the world. He would move from what we now call the Asian continent to the European scene.

ACT 16:10 And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.

They did not pause once they knew the will of the Lord. Without hesitating, they made preparation to go to Greece. If that was where God wanted them to go, that is where they would go. Paul was not the apostle to Asia. He was the apostle to the Gentiles, and also to all men. Jesus had commanded that the gospel be preached to men of every nation on earth.

ACT 16:11 Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis;

Can anyone reasonably doubt the reality of the scriptural records? Time after time details are given which would be a burden for one who was writing fiction to make up. It is possible to pick up anywhere in the New Testament and see that there was a Paul. There was a Jesus Christ. There is a God in heaven, and the Bible is a reliable set of documents. Troas, Samothracia and Neapolis were real places, visited by the real missionaries, Paul, Timothy, Luke and perhaps others.

ACT 16:12 And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.

Some think the language here simply indicates Philippi was the first city to which they came, rather than being the first city in importance. The city was in Macedonia, in the northern part of Greece. It was named after Philip of Macedon and was a Roman colony.

ACT 16:13 And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.

Why did the group gather with those who were meeting on the Sabbath for worship? This was after the law of Moses had been nailed to the cross. The answer is that these were not Christians. These were Jews who did not yet know of Jesus Christ. It was the practice of Paul to go first to the synagogue, or to the place where the Jews worshipped. Later he would turn to the Gentiles, but it was always the Jew first, then the Gentile.

ACT 16:14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

Lydia was a business woman. She had come from Thyatira which was on the opposite side of the Aegean Sea. It is interesting that the Holy Spirit forbade Paul to go to that area and commanded that he cross the Aegean. Then the first converts made were from the same area he been commanded to bypass.

Lydia's heart was not opened separate and apart from the preaching of the gospel. It was because Paul preached to her that her heart was opened. Those who see some miraculous touch upon this woman's heart are incorrect. She was an honest woman. When she heard the good news of the gospel she was eager to obey it.

ACT 16:15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

It is clear that attending to the truth of the Word of God resulted in her immediate baptism into Christ. Her entire household was baptized. We do not read of children. The household was probably those who accompanied her in the marketing of the purple dye. We would use the term “royal blue” today to describe this dye. It was expensive and was used to dye the clothing worn by royalty. Lydia was a person of considerable means.

In gratitude, Lydia invited the missionary group to come to her home. Either she had a home away from home in Thyatira, or else she had left Thyatira and was then living in Philippi. In spite of their busy schedule the group spent a short time at her home.

ACT 16:16 And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying:

We do not know who the “we” includes here. It may mean that Paul and his group joined Lydia and her household in a session of Christian prayer now that they had become Christians.

Possession of demons is difficult for those of us living in these latter days to comprehend. It seems that demon possession disappeared by the end of the

first century. It may be that this was allowed as a means of demonstrating the power of Jesus Christ over the demonic world. When the written word was completed and confirmed, the demon possession evaporated.

The girl who was possessed by the demon was owned by a master who in some way took advantage of her plight. Demons were real and they seem to have had powers imparted through Satan himself. It is not clear just what this damsel was doing when she “divined.” God said that a true prophet was marked by the fact that his prophecies came to pass. In that case a false prophet could not have made accurate predictions without using guesswork.

ACT 16:17 The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.

In this case, the message of the maiden was true. These men were servants of the Most High God. Yet it was not a desirable thing for them to be commended by one who had been used for greedy profit taking. The men did show the way of salvation. But her masters were hardly interested in walking the way of righteousness.

ACT 16:18 And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.

We have no idea how loud she was shouting, or how often she interrupted the speaking of the apostle. Finally, it became necessary to bring a stop to the interference. Paul commanded the demon to leave her. As was usual with the apostles, the demon obeyed when he was commanded to depart in the name of Jesus Christ. She was free from the evil spirit.

Here is proof that more than one spirit can dwell in one human body. There are those who hotly deny the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit in men. I see no difficulty whatsoever in my spirit and the Holy Spirit both dwelling in my body. It is not a scriptural objection that two spirits cannot dwell in the same body.

ACT 16:19 And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers,

The masters of the maiden were furious. They had lost their source of wicked gain. In order to get even, they dragged Paul and Silas into the center of the city of Philippi and set them before the chief men of the city for judgment.

ACT 16:20 And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city,

God allows some things to happen. Others he does not allow. At this point, God could have defeated the actions of the masters quickly and completely. He

struck one man blind when he interfered with the preaching of the Word of God. This time he did not prevent the arrest of the missionaries.

The accusation was that they were troublemakers. They were disturbing the normal activities of the city. The reverse was really the truth of the matter. They were correcting disturbances that these greedy men were causing. God's people have long been considered as flies in the ointment of those who seek first the dollar sign.

ACT 16:21 And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.

What were these customs which the accusers felt Romans could not observe? They are not specified in the text. The main difference between Jews and Gentiles was the practice of circumcision. Romans saw this custom as being distasteful. Racial prejudice seems to have been a big part of the problem. Of course it all began with the loss of income by the maiden's masters. Nevertheless, it became a convenient tool in their enemies hands to accuse Paul and Silas of being Jews. Since a hatred of the Jews already existed, this could be fanned into flame by the slavemasters.

ACT 16:22 And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them.

The missionaries were completely outnumbered. The magistrates, encouraged by the masses, stripped

their back bare so the lashes would be more punishing. These were not the only Christians to be treated in this way. Many have lost their lives at the hands of those who saw fidelity to Jesus Christ as a criminal offense. Jesus said that many who are first shall be last and many that are last shall be first. The Lord Himself suffered from similar punishment. He is now both the first and the last.

ACT 16:23 And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely:

It was not a matter of giving them a whack or two and charging them to change their ways. They set out to beat them without mercy. Nothing is said about treating the wounds. They were thrown into prison and left bleeding and aching. The jailor was to take special pains not to let them escape and resume their preaching.

ACT 16:24 Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.

They were treated as the most vile of criminals. The part of the prison where they were taken was reserved for those who had committed the worst of crimes. Then their hands and feet were thrust through holes in boards and they were confined in a position which would cause every part of their body to be racked with pain.

ACT 16:25 And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.

Christians have a Comforter which unbelievers ignore. We do not know how long it was from the time they were bound in the stocks until the midnight hour. However, when that midnight hour arrived, the prisoners in that jail must have been very much surprised to hear men praying and actually singing.

You cannot defeat the spirit of a true Christian. Christians will continue to praise God and ask Him for help when others would grit their teeth and curse their captors. Does such prayer and singing make any difference? Indeed it does. Just read on.

ACT 16:26 And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.

God heard them! *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.* An earthquake shook the very foundations of the prison house. The prison did not collapse upon the prisoners. What did happen was that all of the doors flew open allowing the prisoners to leave if they chose to do so. I assume this speaks particularly of Paul and Silas, but since it says “everyone” there must have been others who were also freed.

ACT 16:27 And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison

doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.

It was a common rule in Roman justice that if a guard allowed his prisoners to escape, he could be punished with the same punishment pronounced upon the prisoners. The keeper of the prison would rather be dead than to face the punishment which would have faced Paul and his companions.

ACT 16:28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.

This was strange behavior. Most of us would have taken off through the open doors and fled for dear life. Fleeing was not Paul's way of meeting danger. He stood tall and courageous to meet it head on. The keeper of the prison was not to commit suicide. His prisoners were all present and accounted for. What a relief this must have been for a man in his position!

ACT 16:29 Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,

The jailor could not see the prisoners in the dark of the midnight. He could hardly believe the things Paul had said. When he saw that Paul had told the truth, he fell down before the apostle, in fear and trembling.

ACT 16:30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

I have the feeling that the jailor did not realize just how meaningful his question really was. He was most interested in being saved from the possible beatings he might have received for not being able to properly guard the prison. Paul knew there was a far more important issue. That issue had to do with being saved from eternal torment in the lake of fire reserved for the punishment of the Devil and his angels.

ACT 16:31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

The belief Paul called for from the jailor was far more than the kind held by the Devil. The Devil believes and trembles, knowing that God is far more powerful than he. At the same time he rejects the will of God with a fierce passion. It is not enough to give mental assent to the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Living God. The kind of belief Paul encouraged on the part of the jailor is the belief that springs into action and seeks harmony with the desires of Jehovah. That belief is not complete until one has obeyed the form of doctrine delivered by the apostles and has been baptized for the remission of sins. Only then can one be saved. And even then the initial obedience must be followed by continuous submission. The crown of life will then be awarded to the one who is faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10).

ACT 16:32 And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.

The jailor was in much the same position as those listeners who had heard Peter on the day of Pentecost. Some of them had been present when Jesus Christ hung on the cross. Their sins had found them out. Therefore they cried out, “*Sirs, What must we do to be saved?*” They were told to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins.

ACT 16:33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.

It must be that the jailor and his house heard the same words of wisdom. In response, he took the prisoners to his own house, washed their wounds and was baptized. This is repentance in action. One does not repent simply from Godly sorrow. Godly sorrow worketh repentance, but it is not identical with repentance. Repentance demands that the penitent person do all within his or her power to rectify the damage which has been done. The jailor did that.

Some have taught that the jailor’s children were baptized and therefore claim scriptural authority for the baptism of infants. The text does not mention infants. Only those who were old enough to **believe** on Jesus Christ as the Son of God were baptized. That is not true of infants.

ACT 16:34 And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

What a vast difference we see in the behavior of the jailor before and after his conversion. Beforehand, he did not hesitate to place the missionaries in stocks in the deepest part of the prison. Afterward, he took them to his own house and fed them. The sixth chapter of Romans speaks of rising to walk in newness of life after baptism. Dear reader, if you have not done that, it is high time.

ACT 16:35 And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go.

We do not know why the magistrates reversed their attitude of the day before. Had word of the events of the night reached their ears? Did they have second thoughts about the legality of what they had done? Whatever the reason, they sent a command early the next day to let Paul and Silas go free.

ACT 16:36 And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace.

The jailor may have had something to do with this new attitude. I can imagine that he was delighted when he heard the instructions to release them. He must have felt they would hasten to leave the hated dungeon and move out into the city. If that is what he thought, he was in for a sharp surprise.

ACT 16:37 But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being

Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out.

This verse causes me to be a bit suspicious that the magistrates knew they had ignored Roman law. The law demanded that accused persons have an honest trial. They were not to be punished until their guilt was established. Paul and Silas had been beaten without such a trial. Now the magistrates were ready to evade the consequences of their actions by very quietly sending the prisoners on their way.

Paul would have none of that. If he was beaten without reason and imprisoned without guilt before a great multitude, he did not expect to close the case without letting the world know about it. And so, to this very day men read of the injustice of those magistrates in Philippi. That which was whispered in the ear was to be shouted from the housetop.

ACT 16:38 And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans.

There was nothing more important to the magistrates at this moment than to get rid of those they had mistreated. They were afraid their superiors might bring misfortune upon them because of their irresponsibility. Roman citizens were not to be mistreated.

ACT 16:39 And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city.

Centuries before this the Egyptians had entreated the Hebrews to depart out of Egypt. They had suffered through ten plagues because of their inhuman treatment of the Israelite slaves. The situation is the same here. The magistrates looked forward to the departure of these Jews who preached the gospel of Christ in their city.

ACT 16:40 And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.

Paul and Silas did not go immediately. Before their departure, they went to the house of Lydia and comforted the new Christians who had been converted in Philippi. Only after strengthening their new brethren did they leave the city.

Chapter 17

ACT 17:1 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews:

Thessalonica was a major city in Macedonia which is the northern portion of Greece. Achaia is the southern part of Greece. Thessalonica is still an active and thriving city today.

As was his usual custom, Paul approached the Jews of the city first. This time there were enough Jews in the city to have a synagogue. In Philippi this had not been the case.

ACT 17:2 And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,

The scriptures Paul used to persuade the Jews concerning Christ were from the Old Testament. The New Testament was not compiled at that time. Certain parchments may have been in existence, but certainly not the twenty-seven books we know today. Remember, Paul was the writer of thirteen or fourteen of those twenty-seven.

The law and the prophets are an excellent place to begin reasoning with persons about the Christian way. The law is said to be a schoolmaster to bring men unto Christ. The prophets are said to testify of Christ. Strong faith rests upon strong evidence. I have always felt a bit sorry for those whose faith depends

strictly upon what parents, friends and preachers have believed. The scriptures tell us faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen. Solid faith is undergirded by overwhelming evidence for the existence of God, for the Sonship of Jesus Christ and for the divine authenticity of the Holy Bible.

In addition, we have the words of Isaiah who called for men to, *“Come let us reason together.”* The Christian faith is intended to be rational!

ACT 17:3 Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.

Paul used those Old Testament scriptures to prove that God foretold the death, burial and resurrection of his Son. His approach was one of logical development. It resembled that of Philip when he began at the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah and taught the Ethiopian eunuch about Christ and his church.

ACT 17:4 And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.

It was the case, almost without exception, that some of the Jews received the evidence gladly and became Christians. In addition to these Jews, Paul succeeded in converting a host of the Gentiles of Thessalonica.

Women have always been a powerful force in Christianity. I have no doubt that these chief women exerted tremendous influence. Men are expected to take the leadership in the congregations of the church and within their own families. Yet, there is a different kind of strength in the submissive role of the Christian woman. God apparently appreciates this, as shown by the mention of such women in this verse.

ACT 17:5 But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

Just as there are normally those who become believers when the gospel is preached, there are also usually those who ridicule and attack the gospel, the church and the Son of God. It appears that there were some very crude men among the unbelieving Jews. They were ready to resort to violence against Paul and his companions. The group had been dwelling in a house owned by one named Jason. They surrounded the house in an attempt to bring a halt to the preaching of the missionaries.

ACT 17:6 And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;

The mob was unsuccessful in locating the preachers. The next best thing was to drag Jason and some of the new converts before the city authorities. The crime of which they were accused was creating chaos wherever they traveled.

Yes, it is true that those who teach and preach the gospel of Christ can turn the pagan world upside down. The power of truth is awesome. Error destroys its own self. Truth ultimately wins every battle. Sometimes the victory is immediate. Other times the Christian must be patient. However, the victory will come. In the case of the city of Thessalonika, the results were most shocking to the opposers of the Lord.

ACT 17:7 Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.

Because Jason had harbored the missionaries in his home, he felt the wrath of the enemy. They brought the most serious charge they could devise against Jason, against Paul and against all who believed. The charge was that of treason against Caesar. Because Jesus went about saying, "*Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand,*" his opponents seized this as a weapon against him. They accused him of plotting the downfall of the Roman Empire. How interesting this is! Rome did fall, but not at the hands of soldiers armed with military weapons. It fell because error and sin corrupted it from the inside, leaving it crumbling and helpless against its foes.

ACT 17:8 And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.

Who was it that troubled the people and rulers of the city? It was the unbelieving Jews. They were determined to stop the preaching of the gospel. When the truth gets in the way of people with established influence, those people will very often take whatever action is thought necessary to protect their position. The Jews were convinced the best way to prevent further spread of the preaching of Paul was to create such a disturbance in the city that the company of evangelists would leave.

ACT 17:9 And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.

The security they took was probably a fine paid by Jason. This would insure that he would not invite Paul and Silas back again.

ACT 17:10 And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.

In order to avoid further clashes which would in no way promote the conversion of the citizens of Thessalonica, Paul and his friends were quietly sent away under the cover of darkness. Since Paul did not hesitate to be beaten or to risk his very life to teach the Word of God, I do not consider it a mark of

cowardice on his part that he left the area. Jesus said not to cast one's pearls before swine, but to shake off the dust from the feet and move on to preach another place. There is no point in wasting precious time on those who have tasted of the good Word of God and found it to be not of their liking.

And so the group moved on to Berea. Just as they did so many times, they went first to the synagogue to allow the Jews to hear first. These were the ones who should have been primed for hearing and believing in the Messiah. They should have recognized him when he arrived. But much of the time they did not!!

ACT 17:11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

It was different in Berea. These were hungry for the bread and the water of life. They eagerly heard the truth and examined it to see if it agreed with the law, the prophets and the Psalms in their declaration of coming events in the latter days.

If only men of today would be more like the Bereans! Very few are ready to face the logical force of the scriptures. They will hear when one speaks of scientific truth. They will hear when secular history is taught. But when one goes to the Old Testament scriptures to show how Christ was foretold in the law and the prophets, these same persons consider the effort to be wasted energy.

There are some, however, like the Bereans who

are honest enough to sift the evidence and come to logical conclusions. These will be rewarded greatly for their effort. God has not left himself without witness. The faith of Jesus Christ is rationally based on solid evidence.

ACT 17:12 Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.

When men give an honest hearing to the testimony presented in the Bible, they will believe. I do not find it surprising that honorable women are mentioned first among those who believed. It has been my observation that women are a bit more teachable than men. Many congregations of the Church of Christ have more women than men attending. What does surprise me is that these are said to be honorable women, indicating that they were highly respected among their fellow citizens.

Note that these women were Greeks and not Jews. The text seems to indicate that first there was a positive reaction among the Jews. Then this was followed by commitment from both men and women among the Greeks. How very satisfying this must have been to those who had just found it necessary to leave Thessalonika to avoid mob chaos there.

ACT 17:13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.

The Jews in Thessalonica had reached white heat and were not even satisfied to run the apostle and his companions out of Thessalonika. They decided to move on down to Berea and cause them trouble in that city. Although there were many positive responses in Berea, the hostile Jews were able to stir up others who would side with them and oppose the gospel of God.

ACT 17:14 And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.

It seems to have quieted things down when Paul left the city of Berea. He set out for Athens and left Silas and Timothy behind him. It was clear to the opposition that Paul was the one to be rid of.

The pattern which developed here was the same as that occurring several other times. Paul would introduce the gospel with the help of his friends. Then he would move on and let them solidify the gains.

ACT 17:15 And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.

It seems the Bereans who accompanied Paul out of Berea and on to the city of Athens had done so to assure his protection. After they arrived in Athens, Paul sent back for Silas and Timothy to come as quickly as they could. It is possible that the Christians felt it would be safer for them to get Paul out first,

and then send Silas and Timothy separately. We are not told precisely what the reasons were for Paul leaving prior to the other two.

ACT 17:16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

It was not possible for Paul to waste time waiting for the arrival of Silas and Timothy. He felt a constant obligation to teach and preach that which the Saviour had revealed to him. Jeremiah spoke of “*fire in his bones.*” There have been many through the centuries who understand this phrase. The strong Christian cannot remain silent. He recognizes how desperately men need to hear the way of salvation. He cannot be quiet.

Thus, when Paul moved out into the city of Athens, he found himself compelled to combat the idolatry which he witnessed in the city. When the text tells us the city was wholly given to idolatry, we can verify the matter by comparing secular history. Some have said that there were more idols in Athens than there were people. How could Paul’s spirit fail to be stirred up within him when he passed by hundreds of altars to the various gods lining the streets. These false gods could not hear, see nor speak. They had to be carried around from place to place by men. Paul had to speak out.

ACT 17:17 Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.

Again he went first to the synagogue to teach the Jews. Those who were both informed and honest would have hearts prepared to hear the message the apostle carried with him. The devout persons mentioned here were very likely non-Jews who had become interested in building a proper relationship with the only true and living God. They may or may not have been proselytes to the Jewish religion. But they were ready to discuss the matter with Paul.

The market place in Athens would have been a gathering place for many who enjoyed comparing their views with others. I can recall the discussions which went on in the older barber shops when I was a young man. Politics, religion, gossip, etc. were all hashed and rehashed. Sometimes the conversations reached fairly high levels of analysis. Most of the time they were not very well thought out.

Paul did not limit his number of visits to the market place. He went daily. No doubt he sometimes came into contact with the same persons from day to day. Other times he would have met new individuals. It would not take long for this intense apostle to find himself surrounded by listeners and debaters.

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

The power of the wisdom of God, as preached by Paul, will now be contrasted with the weakness of

men's wisdom. Athens was the cultural capitol of the world. As Jesus had met the Pharisees and the Scribes, Paul was to meet the Epicureans and the Stoics. The wisdom of men will come out second.

When Greece was crumbling before the rising power of Rome, the citizens quickly lost confidence in their list of gods. They began to search for a way to preserve the present rather than to continue their efforts to rule the world. The stoics and the epicureans were philosophers who were trying to find a way to live with the discouragements which came about when their gods were found to be insufficient.

Epicurus thought life should center around the greatest possible pleasure. Some have accused him of teaching men to "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you may die." That is a little unfair to Epicurus. He would not have advised men to live a gluttonous and unrestrained life. If gorging one's self today brought pleasure, but that pleasure was followed by indigestion that gave greater discomfort than the feasting gave pleasure, Epicurus would have said to follow the path which led to the greatest pleasure over the longest period of time for the greatest number of people.

I believe the proper approach to debate with Epicurus and his disciples would be for the Christian to deny himself, take up his cross and follow the Lord, for the eternal pleasures of heaven would far outweigh the sacrifices of this life.

The stoics believed there was a total life force. It burned like a giant fire. Each man was a spark in that great fire. As a fire produces sparks that separate themselves from the main blaze, the stoics saw each

man rising independently from the central conflagration. The man would exist separately for a short lifetime and then death would cause him to fall back and be replaced by other sparks.

The two groups of philosophers teamed up for the moment to call Paul a “babbling.” The word makes fun of Paul as if he was a nit picker who hardly deserved recognition. Nevertheless, their curiosity demanded that they hear what he had to say. They were certain that he was attempting to introduce strange gods to the Greeks. This was a serious crime. If convicted, Paul could have been killed. Their main concern was that Paul preached the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and the future resurrection of all men to face the judgment. The Christian position involved the continuous existence of the individual rather than a disappearance into the oneness of humanity.

ACT 17:19 And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?

The Areopagus was an elevated area where men could be tried before the prestigious rulers of the day. Paul's speech in his own defense before these men is said to be his “Sermon on Mars Hill.”

I do not know whether the philosophers were simply curious, or whether they looked for a way to intimidate the apostle and bring an end to his preaching of Jesus Christ. I tend to think it was the latter. If that is true, it was unsuccessful. Paul knew very well that the wisdom he preached was as much higher than that of the Epicureans and Stoics as the stars are higher than the earth.

ACT 17:20 For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.

The Greeks had not been introduced to the gospel before this time. The truths Paul was preaching were indeed strange to them. If they would carefully hear this great man, their lives would be lifted to spiritual levels much higher than they had reached in the past. Christians are told to always be ready to give a reason for the hope that lies within them with meekness and humility. Oh how wonderful it would have been if they had heard Paul with an open and honest heart. Oh how wonderful it would be if men today would do the same! The world might be a different place today.

ACT 17:21 (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)

Can the reader visualize the attention which was to be turned toward Paul. Here was something truly new. Both the citizens of Athens, as well as the visitors to their city, had their ears wide open. Those of you readers who are truly students will understand this search for knowledge. It is a thrill to learn something to which one has not yet been exposed. It is not wrong to seek out truth. It is very wrong to mistreat truth and reject it after having received it.

ACT 17:22 Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.

In some versions Paul is said to have used the word “religious.” In others, as in the King James, the word “superstitious” is used. Some foolish men are quick to equate religion with superstition. True religion, revealed by Jehovah, is not superstition. Superstition is not supported by evidence. True religion is based upon overwhelming evidence. Paul was ready to present logic which would demand the acceptance of the gospel of Christ. The Athenians were too superstitious, and Paul knew it!

ACT 17:23 For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

What was it that caused Paul to believe the Athenians were too superstitious? As he had moved through the city of Athens, his spirit had been stirred within him as he took note of all the idols lining the streets. There was one altar that he found most interesting. It was one dedicated to the UNKNOWN GOD. The Athenians were so concerned about worshipping every god, they had erected this altar to make certain they had not missed one.

Paul told them they had definitely missed one. And that one was He whom Paul was about to describe to them. This God was the real God. All their multitude of altars were worse than nothing. They would lead them to spiritual destruction.

ACT 17:24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven

and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

Solomon once expressed a powerful truth concerning the temple which he had constructed for the worship of God. He declared that Jehovah could not be contained in any temple regardless of either its beauty or its size. It is unwise to think of God as dwelling in the finest temples men have ever built. God's temple is the church. It is not made of wood, stone, or metal. God dwells in the hearts of men.

ACT 17:25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

What a difference there is in the gods the Athenians were worshipping as though they were hungry or thirsty, and the God who made man. Are we to worship that which men make, or are we to worship that which made man? There is not a man alive who could make himself. The pumping of man's lungs, the beating of his heart and the workings of his intellect are all dependent upon Jehovah. There are things Jehovah asks men to offer to him, but this is not because God cannot get along without them.

ACT 17:26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

We are all descendants of Adam and Eve. We are also all descendants of Noah and his wife. The Greeks

had no right to see themselves as superior to other men. They could be nothing at all unless God saw fit to allow it. The number of our years and the location of our homes are both in God's hands. He is in complete control. The only freedom we have is that which God has granted to us.

ACT 17:27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:

According to the wise man, Solomon, the whole duty of man is to fear God and keep his commandments. It is not necessary to look for him in the starry sky, nor in the ocean depths. He is near us twenty-four hours a day. He knows our downsitting and our uprising. From before our birth until our passage through the gates of death, God searches our hearts and is there to hear the pleas of the righteous.

ACT 17:28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

Genesis informs us that we were made in the image of God. As a son or daughter is the offspring of his earthly parents, God is the Father of every man. That means God has a very special interest in every human. He desires that they become more and more like him as the years of their lives are unrolled.

ACT 17:29 Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the

Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

It was utterly ridiculous for the Athenians to be worshiping material gods that they had made themselves. Reality is distorted when men worship gods they have brought into being. All should recognize that the true God is a spirit, as man is. Dead metal, wood and stone could not produce men.

ACT 17:30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

There was a time in which the Athenians did not know better. They had sought for God in the only way they knew. Paul explained that those days of ignorance were past and gone. He had now revealed the true God to them. They must be honest and change their worship to fit the new found knowledge.

ACT 17:31 Because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

There is a day of judgment coming. At that time God will raise every man who ever lived from the graves. Their lives will be compared with that of Jesus Christ who was the firstborn from the dead. The people of Athens, as well as those of every time and

place, must realize the importance of getting ready to meet the Father and the Son. We will then give account of every thought and deed done while in the flesh.

ACT 17:32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.

As is always the case, there were at least two classes of men who heard the preaching of Paul and opposed it. First, there were those who mocked the precious gospel. Their future is not bright. Unless they repented, the lake of fire would receive them.

The second class is that group who procrastinated. Why do today what you can put off until tomorrow!! There is no record of any further response from this group. Be careful dear reader. You may not have a tomorrow!

ACT 17:33 So Paul departed from among them.

The Athenians had heard the preaching of the greatest preacher who ever lived unless it was the Christ himself. He then moved on to other regions with his companions to offer the bread of life to those who would hear.

ACT 17:34 Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was

Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

This chapter closes on a brighter note. There were some who heard gladly and believed in the Saviour and Redeemer of their souls. If they remained true, heaven is prepared for them. The resurrection and the judgment will be a time of joy and glory for the faithful.

Chapter 18

ACT 18:1 After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth;

Paul was not hesitant about taking the gospel to the major cities of his world. He had been called to cross the Aegean Sea and go over into Macedonia. After preaching his great sermon at the Mars Hill, he was now ready to move south to Corinth, another of the prominent cultural centers of what we now call Greece. He had met the philosophers of Athens. Now he was to face the sexual promiscuity of Corinth.

If Paul was able to meet such opposition, we should take heart in the face of the intellectual fakery and sexual perversity existing in the United States and other areas today.

ACT 18:2 And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them.

Claudius Caesar was not sympathetic to Jews. Rome had found them to be considerably more difficult to dominate than many of the other people they had subjected to their control. Claudius had decreed that all Jews depart from the capitol city.

Although Paul was a Christian, he was also a Jew by birth. When he found Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth it was quite natural for him to team up with them. No doubt there was a feeling of unity due to their ancestry.

ACT 18:3 And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.

The apostle was not afraid to do manual labor. It was a disgrace for a Jew not to be able to support himself through some skill or craft. Paul had been trained as a maker of tents. This also made it natural for the three of them to combine their efforts while Paul was in Corinth.

ACT 18:4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.

The Christian is admonished to be ready to give a reason for the hope which lies within him. Christianity is a reasonable religion. It is based upon evidence of the highest order. Stand tall, you Christians. The shield of your faith is stronger than the arrows of atheism and materialism.

ACT 18:5 And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.

Silas and Timothy had been left behind in Thessalonika. Now they joined Paul in the city of Corinth. What is meant by saying Paul was pressed in the spirit? It simply means that he could not contain himself. He was constrained by the command of the Lord Jesus Christ to preach the gospel to every

creature in every nation. He could do no less. The purity of the Christian way must be pitted against the filth of the one thousand prostitutes who thought they were serving their gods by offering themselves to the men of the city.

These people were Jews. They should have been versed in the Old Testament prophecies. There was no excuse for failing to receive the word of God gladly. The rock of ages had come. The foundation for the new spiritual Israel had been laid. These Jews could have become living stones in the eternal temple of God if they had heeded the truth which Paul preached to them.

ACT 18:6 And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean; from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.

When men such as those of Corinth are faced with indisputable evidence they often resort to ridicule and mockery. It is one thing to ridicule men. It is quite another to ridicule the word of God. When men oppose the truth of God and thus blaspheme his gospel and his evangelists, the proper plan of action is to shake the dust off one's feet and point out that their destiny is the second death.

As usual, Paul made it a practice to always go first to the Jews in any city or town he entered. He did his best to convert the Jews. Then after he had exerted every effort to turn them to Christ, he would offer the gospel to the Gentiles. That is what happened at

this time. How sad it is that those who had been called the “people of God” through hundreds of years would refuse to hear and understand the Christ to whom all those centuries pointed!

ACT 18:7 And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.

It appears that Justus was a Jew who had responded positively to Paul's preaching. He would then have been sympathetic to the future efforts of the apostle. The fact that he is mentioned as living close by the synagogue lends force to thinking of him as a converted Jew.

ACT 18:8 And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.

The conversion of Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue was a major triumph for Paul and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Not only did Crispus become a Christian, his entire household followed his example.

In addition, large numbers of the citizens of Corinth heard the gospel, believed it and obeyed it.

ACT 18:9 Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace:

God had spoken to Paul before in visions. It was a vision of a man calling for him to come over into Macedonia and help that caused him to move from Asia across the Aegean Sea to Greece.

Bold confidence should be the mark of all Christians. I am not talking about arrogance. I have seen preachers who thought they were serving the Lord by belittling those who did not believe as they did. One can be confident without being rude.

Christ often used the words, "*Fear not.*" The fearful and the unbelievers will have no place in the New Jerusalem in heaven. It is necessary to speak up and let others know the importance of serving God.

ACT 18:10 For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.

When God is with us, no man can defeat us. They may deprive us of our dignity. They may beat us and starve us. They may take our life. But they cannot claim the final victory. God was prepared to defend Paul in Corinth. He need not tremble before the enemy.

Who were the "much people" God had in Corinth? Paul would already have been aware of those whom he had converted. It does not seem that he would need to be reminded of them. Some think God was just telling Paul there were many people in the city, and they must hear the Word. Others think the "much people" were those whom God knew would hear and obey after they were preached to. This is highly probable.

ACT 18:11 And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

There were two cities in which Paul spent considerable time. One of these cities was Ephesus. The other was Corinth. We are told he spent a year and a half in this wicked city. God must have felt there was a reason for leaving him there for such an extended period of time. We should remember that the apostle wrote two letters back to the members of the church in Corinth. Both of these letters have been read by millions and millions of persons. That alone would justify remaining among them for long enough to get to know them well.

ACT 18:12 And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat,

Gallio was an official appointed by Rome to assist in governing the area of Achaia. It looks as though the Jews who refused to believe felt this was a good time to destroy the work of Paul in their community. A host of them rose up against him and dragged him before Gallio who was serving as judge.

ACT 18:13 Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law.

The accusation of the Jews was that Paul was persuading the Corinthians to worship in a manner

that was opposed to the law of Moses. It was not an accusation that he had defied Roman law. They should have known the charge would not be taken as a serious complaint by the Roman judge. However; it was true that Judaism had been accepted as an approved religion by the state. Christianity would have been considered a new religion, and it was illegal to introduce a new religion when compared with Judaism.

ACT 18:14 And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you:

Gallio did not even wait for Paul to defend himself. Before Paul could answer his critics, Gallio rebuked the Jews who had brought Paul before him. He considered their accusations to be outside of his jurisdiction. If Paul had broken the Roman law Gallio would have been ready to hear. Paul had not done that, and Gallio disdained the case.

ACT 18:15 But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters.

Gallio saw no need to get involved over the preaching of the name of Jesus Christ. The Jews were not asking for a judgment of Roman law. They were concerned with Jewish law, and he dismissed the case.

ACT 18:16 And he drave them from the judgment seat.

God's encouragement to Paul to have no fear because he would not be harmed had proven accurate. Paul's enemies had found themselves to be the ones in difficulty, not Paul. They were abolished from the area of the court.

ACT 18:17 Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things.

Earlier we found that Crispus, who was the chief ruler of the synagogue, had believed with all of his house. This is much later. A different chief ruler has been appointed. The Greeks did not like the Jews. Since Gallio had turned down their request to have Paul chastised, and the Jews had been rebuked, this was the chance to make life miserable for them. Therefore they took Sosthenes before the judgment seat and proceeded to beat him. Gallio should have interfered. The Greeks were producing chaos and violence. Still, Gallio let them do as they wished.

Later, when Paul wrote his two letters to Corinth, Sosthenes was mentioned as a brother. We do not know whether this was the same man. If so, we have two chief rulers of the synagogue who became Christians.

ACT 18:18 And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the

brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.

We are not told how much longer the apostle remained in Corinth, just that it was a good while. After that, he decided to move toward Antioch in Syria which was the church from which he had been sent out on his missionary journeys. The persecution of the Christians in Jerusalem had scattered them abroad. Many had settled in Antioch of Syria where a strong congregation of the Lord's people had arisen. Priscilla and Aquila left Corinth and accompanied Paul as he departed.

We have here a very interesting matter. Paul had shaved his head after having taken a vow. Such vows were taken by Jews under the law of Moses. This passage along with several others indicate that Jewish Christians sometimes observed certain ceremonies of the law. The matter of the circumcision of Timothy and Titus is related to this. Paul had Timothy, who was part Jew, circumcised. He did not require Titus, who was a Greek, to do so.

The conference in Jerusalem had concluded that the only part of the law of Moses Gentiles were expected to observe was to avoid fornication, idolatry, eating of blood and eating of things strangled. This period of time from the establishment of the church to the destruction of Jerusalem seems to have been unique in this regard?

ACT 18:19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.

Paul, Aquila and Priscilla crossed the sea and came to Ephesus. Aquila and Priscilla remained in Ephesus. Paul stayed just long enough to go to the Jewish synagogue and speak with his blood kin once more. He was not willing to completely give up on them.

ACT 18:20 When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not;

It is not evident whether it was Aquila and Priscilla who desired that he stay longer or whether it was the Christians present in the city. Whoever it was, he had decided he must move on.

ACT 18:21 But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus.

Again we find Paul concerned about the law of Moses. One of the three feasts at which all male Jews were expected to be present was coming up in Jerusalem. Paul felt that he needed to be there. Was this because he felt he must keep that part of the law of Moses, or was it because this would be a special opportunity to make contact with Jews who might hear the preaching of Christ? I am asking the question. I do not know the answer.

ACT 18:22 And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch.

It is a bit strange that Paul went all the way down to Caesarea before going to Antioch. Caesarea was only a short distance from Jerusalem. Paul landed at Caesarea and then went to Jerusalem. Antioch was a great distance to the north. We would say he went “up” to Antioch since he moved northward. Luke speaks in terms of elevation. Antioch was at a lower elevation than Jerusalem. Paul was ready to report to the church at Antioch on the results of his labors since he had left them.

This marks the end of the second missionary journey.

ACT 18:23 And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.

Paul realized the importance of solidifying the gains which had been made earlier. Some present day missionaries have missed this point. They travel around the United States collecting contributions which allow them to preach in a foreign land. After converting a number of the people of that land, they return to the states and start out for another location. The new Christians in the previous land are left to fend for themselves. Paul recognized that such a plan will not work efficiently. He went back again and again to strengthen and encourage the immature Christians.

ACT 18:24 And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.

We have a slight change of scenery at this point. We are allowed to return to Ephesus where Paul had left Aquila and Priscilla when he went to Jerusalem. A powerful Jew named Apollos had arrived in Ephesus and was preaching Christ. He knew the Old Testament scriptures thoroughly and was very persuasive, having much influence. Without doubt Aquila and Priscilla were delighted to have such a man serving the Lord.

ACT 18:25 This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.

Apollos was the kind of man all dedicated Christians would be delighted to have arrive in their midst. He had a fine background in the Old Testament writings. He was eager to serve, and he was a fine teacher. There are too few persons of this calibre available today.

Apollos had one clear deficiency. He knew of the baptism of John which called out for men to repent for the kingdom is at hand; but he did not know of the baptism into Christ for the remission of sins. Until a correction was made he would be leaving those who heard him at the door of the kingdom rather than inside it.

ACT 18:26 And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

Just as Paul did, Apollos was determined to teach his Jewish kinsmen. He went to the synagogue where the Jews assembled and began to teach them as best he knew. Aquila and Priscilla soon realized they must provide further instruction to the man. They took him aside privately and made the necessary corrections in order that he might preach the baptism of Christ.

We find here the proper role of women in instructing men with regard to the worship service. God does not approve of women taking a leading role in the worship services of the church. They are expected to be followers rather than leaders. In private study the matter is different. It is apparent that Priscilla worked with her husband Aquila in providing the information Apollos needed to preach the entire truth.

ACT 18:27 And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace:

After being taught by Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos moved from Ephesus across the Aegean Sea into lower Greece. In order to help his work there the brethren in Ephesus sent a letter encouraging the Christians in Achaia to hear and trust him. The result was that his great talent and energy helped the believers to become stronger.

ACT 18:28 For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.

Not only did Apollos aid those who were already Christians in the area. He was so persuasive he was able to convince some of the Jews to accept Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Saviour of all who will follow him. We must note that Apollos did not rely upon pure human logic. He based his arguments upon the revealed will of God and the events which substantiated that will. He had the prophecies as well as the types and examples of the Old Testament to bolster his position. May the reader not fail to realize the power of the scriptures. They must be the foundation of any presentation of God's plan for man. Human wisdom can only go so far. God's revelation can take us the rest of the way.

Chapter 19

ACT 19:1 And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,

Apollos had been at Ephesus where he had been given instruction by Aquila and Priscilla but had now left to spend some time in Corinth. He had been preaching the baptism of John and not the baptism into the name of Christ.

ACT 19:2 He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.

Paul soon came across some of those whom Apollos had taught and baptized. Paul asked if they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed. Remember that in Acts 2:38 the promise was made by Peter that if his listeners repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul wished to know if these individuals had received that gift.

Here is indication that receiving the promise of the Holy Spirit is not simply the opportunity of studying the Holy Scriptures. These persons were not asked if they had received a Bible. They were asked if they had received the Holy Spirit.

The answer was no! They not only had not received

the Holy Spirit; they had not even heard that a Holy Spirit existed. We would say we had heard nothing about the matter.

ACT 19:3 And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism.

They had been baptized, but since they had not heard of the existence of the Holy Spirit, they had certainly not received it as a gift. Paul knew there was a need to tell them the baptism of John was insufficient. There was more available to them.

ACT 19:4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.

John had only prepared the way for the Saviour. He had cried out for men to repent for the kingdom of heaven was at hand. There was one who would come after him who could provide blessings John could not offer.

ACT 19:5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

As soon as these people heard the good news they were baptized again into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what should happen today when persons have been baptized into anything other than

Christ. Those who baptized people into sectarian religious groups rather than baptizing them into Christ have done a terrible disservice to them. If the present reader has been baptized with any other purpose than to enter into the body of Christ, he or she needs to be rebaptized just as these did.

ACT 19:6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.

The laying on of the hands of an apostle could allow one to work miracles or apply spiritual gifts during the apostolic age. Not only did these men receive remission of sins and obtain the gift of the Holy Spirit. They also were given the power to exercise the gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy.

ACT 19:7 And all the men were about twelve.

Here were twelve new workers in the kingdom of Jesus Christ. They were ready to bear witness to the divinity of the Christ and to see that others had the opportunity to share in the blessings they had received.

ACT 19:8 And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.

We must note that Paul's primary purpose in entering the synagogue was not to participate in the

worship. It was to teach and preach concerning the kingdom of God. Imagine the impact of one like Paul the apostle over a period of three months. Large numbers of people would have heard and believed the good news of the Son of God. By the way, the kingdom was already in existence. Thus Paul discussed it.

ACT 19:9 But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.

Paul did as Jesus often did. When the resistance in a particular location became an interference with the preaching of the Word both Jesus and Paul would move a short distance away and begin anew. Paul did not even leave the city of Ephesus. He called for the disciples to separate themselves and assemble at the school of Tyrannus. We can suppose that Tyrannus was one who had built up a reputation for fine teaching. It seems only logical that he had become a Christian and was quite willing for Paul to take advantage of the school he had operated.

ACT 19:10 And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

Given three months Paul had made considerable headway in his preaching. Now after two years the entire province of Asia was privileged to hear of the

church of Jesus Christ. I find this interesting in that today one can travel over the territory being discussed here and find it overwhelmed by those of the Muslim faith. How sad it is that after having the chance to hear the good word of the Lord, entire countries will turn their back on him and walk back into the darkness.

ACT 19:11 And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul:

Paul was not one whit behind the chiefest of the apostles. The twelve had been able to perform miracles. Paul was also able. They were apparently called special miracles because of their unique nature, as is discussed in the next verse.

ACT 19:12 So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.

God must have had a special reason for allowing Paul to do special miracles. If God desired to do so he could endow all Christians with miracle working power. He obviously knows some things that we do not know about the effects that miracles have. It was through the laying on of the hands of the apostles that miracle working power was delivered. When the apostles died, the power to work miracles seems to have ceased.

ACT 19:13 Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over

them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.

That which is genuine often draws imitations. The Jews mentioned in this verse were charlatans who preyed on the naive. It was no different then than it is now. We have fortune tellers and con artists of all sorts who rake in sizable gain from duping the unsuspecting. These Jews were claiming to be capable of casting out evil spirits. They decided it would be very profitable to cast them out by calling on the name of Jesus Christ. They knew very well they needed more power than they had. Therefore, they called upon the name of Jesus to help cast the evil spirits out.

ACT 19:14 And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so.

One Jewish father had seven sons who were in the habit of deceiving the people. They were among those described in the previous verse.

ACT 19:15 And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?

They were in for a shock of the highest order. The evil spirits had no respect whatsoever for them. It was clear that they had no authority to call upon the name of the Christ. They were only trying to add a

new trick to the bag they were already carrying.

The evil spirits would have come out through the power of Paul. They would have come out under the power of Jesus. But they knew full well that these sons of Sceva were fakes.

ACT 19:16 And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

Spirit has the power to move matter. The spirit of man allows him to act according to the decision making power of his mind. The body without the spirit is dead. In the case of the man in whom this evil spirit was, the evil spirit was able to take control of the body of the man and cause him to act according to the will of the evil spirit. He caused the man to attack the fake healers and drive them from the house bruised and embarrassed.

ACT 19:17 And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.

Surely it was not this one case that produced the awe the citizens of Ephesus were exhibiting. It would have been a major factor. Still, these people had been hearing of the teaching of Paul for a good while.

ACT 19:18 And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds.

The result of all this testimony in favor of Christ caused many of the hearers to believe in him as the Christ and to confess that their previous actions were only fakery. There are two kinds of confession. When one becomes a Christian he or she confesses that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. When one sins, it is important that the person confesses that they have sinned. When one sincerely repents and confesses sin, God is faithful to forgive the sin.

ACT 19:19 Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.

These evil men had invested a great deal of money to learn just how they should deceive the public. Now, after having such an exasperating experience, they were ready to get rid of every magic book. Fifty thousand pieces of silver would be a very large sum of money. We do not know what kind of coins were involved in this fifty thousand. We do know that fifty thousand of any type of silver coins of that day would amount to thousands and thousands of dollars.

Peter and John once told a lame man they had no silver and gold to give him, but they would give him such as they had. They caused him to rise and walk. There are some things worth far more than silver and gold. These magic workers had begun to realize that the healing power of Jesus is one of those invaluable things.

ACT 19:20 So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

I have witnessed similar demonstrations of the power of Christ though on a different scale. I have attended gospel meeting services in which dozens of persons would come forward to repent of their sins and to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. There would be freely flowing tears in the eyes of both grown men and grown women. Such experiences are mostly memories now. The citizenry of the United States has become too busy and too materialistic to listen to the gospel. Unless there is a sharp turnaround, there are very, very rough times ahead.

ACT 19:21 After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.

Paul had a slightly different relationship with the Spirit of God than preachers today. He was guided by visions at times. Although the word “spirit” is not capitalized in the King James Version it is likely that the reference is to the Holy Spirit rather than his own spirit. A phase of his work had been completed. He desired to go to Jerusalem and communicate with the saints in that great city where the gospel had first been preached.

Rome was the most important city of Paul’s day. It was natural that the apostle desired to establish a

foothold for Christ in that metropolis. He did go to Rome later but it was under far different conditions than he would have envisioned at this time.

ACT 19:22 So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season.

Rather than leave the saints in Macedonia without strong leadership Paul dispatched two of his beloved assistants to that area to insure steady progress of the Word there. This was a common practice with Paul as far as Timothy was concerned. Paul had great confidence in the younger man and felt he could fully depend upon him.

ACT 19:23 And the same time there arose no small stir about that way.

The stir that arose over the Way was a commotion over the conversion of citizens of Ephesus from the worship of Diana to discipleship in Jesus Christ. As the next few verses show, it was properly described as *no small stir*. You will recall that Jesus at one time said, “*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.*” Many, both within the brotherhood and outside it used the term “Way” to discuss the Christian movement.

ACT 19:24 For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen;

Diana and Artemis are two names for the same goddess. The temple which was built to honor her was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Many idols had been crafted by the silversmiths and were worshipped by her followers. We can only attempt to imagine the profits realized by these craftsmen. It is a wondrous thing when men sacrifice to advance the cause of Jehovah the True and Living God. It is a horrifying thing when they make such sacrifices to imaginary gods who neither hear, see or understand their needs. Just as there were unscrupulous men in Ephesus, there have been similar vandals from that time until the present.

ACT 19:25 Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth.

Demetrius was not ready to take the loss of personal gain lying down. He went into action by calling a meeting of other profiteers. He reminded them that they had become wealthy through the manufacture of the silver shrines.

ACT 19:26 Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands:

Paul's successes were well known. His converts to Christianity were scattered over the entire Roman province of Asia. He had caused many to see the folly

of worshiping sticks, stones and metal figures. Those who heard him had been persuaded they were wasting their time and their money.

ACT 19:27 So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.

Citizens of large cities are proud of the most elaborate buildings in those cities. I live near Nashville, Tennessee. One of the sights visitors wish to see when they arrive in Nashville is the Parthenon. Although almost no person in Nashville would fall down to worship the pantheon of Greek gods and goddesses who were associated with the Parthenon, the building is still a source of pride to them. Demetrius had a real weapon to aim at the apostle and his preaching.

Tourists still visit the ruins of the ancient temple of Diana. Demetrius' fears came true. The former grandeur has turned into a few pillars jutting up out of a swampy area where the foundation of the temple stood. When I saw it, a stork had built its nest upon the top of one of these pillars.

Of course the world Demetrius knew was limited to the territory surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. Not all of that area was committed to the worship of Diana. However, his point was made. Something had to be done or else Diana was doomed along with those who produced her silver idols.

ACT 19:28 And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

The craftsmen had a great deal of power over the citizenry. As they began to cry out praises of Diana many in the city joined their cry. Soon there was an uproar that would last for hours before being quelled.

ACT 19:29 And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre.

Some in the city would have supported Paul and the Way of Jesus Christ. Others would have backed Diana and her temple. Some would no doubt have been confused over just what had started the furor. Some people just love to be in the middle of excitement, even if much danger is involved.

The mob captured two of Paul's finest helpers. Without doubt they would have killed them if nothing had intervened. They took them into the theatre where they could be made a spectacle before all.

ACT 19:30 And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not.

Many believe Paul was a frail man. Some of the early descriptions of him say he was very short. That did not seem to prevent him from trying to go into

the theatre to do what he could to protect his companions.

We do not know what the outcome would have been if Paul had been allowed to enter the theatre. God might have moved into the picture and protected him. But we will never know. Some of those who believed in Christ persuaded him not to go. Ultimately, this proved to be the best path of action. We read of no serious injury to Gaius and Aristarchus.

ACT 19:31 And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre.

It was not just the poor and unimportant that had heard and responded to the Word of God. Among Paul's friends were those of high rank in Ephesus. They requested that he not endanger his life by venturing inside the theatre. We are made to wonder if they were already attempting to set up some type of action that would bring the chaos to a halt.

ACT 19:32 Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused: and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.

So often when men enter into mob action there is a complete lack of reason. Emotion takes over, and the result is that after the entire commotion is concluded the damage is beyond belief.

ACT 19:33 And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people.

The Jews in general were a target for the wrath of the mob. This man may or may not have been a Christian. Whichever was the case, his appearance set the crowd on fire. He was not even allowed to speak in his own defense. Order had completely dissolved.

ACT 19:34 But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

Two hours is a long time for an unruly mob to chant in anger. By this time they were perhaps fatigued by their efforts. Could anyone bring a semblance of quietude? Yes, such was upcoming.

ACT 19:35 And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?

If the town clerk had stepped in after an hour he might not have been heard. He allowed the multitude to exhaust themselves. Then he made his move.

His approach was to try to persuade the people that the support for Diana was so great that no opposition was strong enough to destroy her influence.

Surely the rioters realized that Diana was worshiped by nearly everyone in Ephesus. The report was that her image had fallen out of the heavens. How could anyone deny her power?

Some believe what happened was that a meteorite that resembled a human figure had fallen to the earth. Superstitious people had assumed it was the image of a goddess. Diana was considered to be a goddess of fertility. The ceremonies worshiping her were very lascivious. This also probably had something to do with the resistance which was put up against the purity demanded by the gospel of Christ. Some men allow themselves to be overwhelmed by their sexual desires. When combined with religious fervor the result can be serious.

ACT 19:36 Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly.

The town clerk assumed he had proven his point. Paul and his converts would find it impossible to make a dent in the dedication to Diana. The mob needed to stop and think things over a bit. They were in danger of making a serious mistake.

ACT 19:37 For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess.

The town clerk was partly right and partly wrong. Aristarchus and Gaius had not fleeced the people of the city, although the silversmiths had done so. On

the other hand, they had blasphemed Diana. To blaspheme is to speak against in mockery and treat the thing blasphemed as if it was useless. This was exactly what Paul and the other Christians believed and taught. Diana was no goddess. The idols were nothing more than the work of men's hands.

ACT 19:38 Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another.

According to the town clerk, rioting was not the answer. Roman law provided for differences between men. There were officials who had been appointed to see to such matters. The dispute should be left up to the constituted authorities and not settled by violence. Let the Christians state their case. Let the silversmiths state theirs. Then let the deputies decide the issue.

ACT 19:39 But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly.

The clerk felt that he had adequately handled the present matter. There was no need for further confusion. The Christians could not defeat Diana. Why create such a fuss?

If any other problems needed to be handled they could be brought before the courts of the city.

ACT 19:40 For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being

no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse.

Ephesus was what was called a free city in the Roman empire. They had much freedom to govern their own affairs without Roman soldiers watching over their shoulders. The town clerk liked it that way. He did not relish the thought of having to give an account of the reasons for the uproar. They could even lose their status as a free city.

ACT 19:41 And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.

The man must have been relieved when he was able to disperse the unruly crowd. The theatre had been a dangerous place. He was charged with keeping order. He must have breathed a very deep sigh of relief when the assembly allowed itself to be scattered.

When the author of the present comments visited the ruins of the theatre in Ephesus he saw a semi-circle of hewn stones set in rows from the bottom to the top. It was said that thirty thousand persons could have been seated there. With even more jamming their way into the edifice, there may have been as many as forty thousand persons who were now going their own way. The preaching of the gospel sometimes creates much heat and light, even though it is preached with humility and reason.

Chapter 20

ACT 20:1 And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia.

The apostle did his best to go where he could do the most good at a particular time. To remain in Ephesus would risk further chaos and could perhaps endanger the lives of the new Christians there. Paul was not afraid to risk his own life in the preaching of the gospel. He suffered much on it's behalf. But for the good of all concerned, it was wise to say a goodbye to his friends in Ephesus and head back across the Aegean Sea to Macedonia in upper Greece.

ACT 20:2 And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece,

He had traveled this territory before. His efforts had established congregations in Philippi, Athens and Corinth. These little children in Christ could use much comfort and encouragement. Exhortation is somewhat different than introduction to the principles of the gospel. It is not sufficient to leave new converts to fend for themselves. Paul was glad to build on the foundation which had been laid earlier and strengthen the faith of tender souls.

ACT 20:3 And there abode three months. And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was

about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia.

The conflict with the Jews was ever present. This time it seems clear that they were intent on killing him. Since he was planning on sailing they had arranged to capture him as he entered the ship. He foiled their plans by returning by land rather than by sea.

ACT 20:4 And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus.

Paul had collected contributions from many of the Christians in Asia and Greece. This had to be delivered to the poor saints in Jerusalem. There is great danger in handling such funds individually. Paul was happy to have a number of companions to go along with him to insure that he was absolutely honest in his actions and would not divert any part of the contribution to his own private advantage.

ACT 20:5 These going before tarried for us at Troas.

Paul's associates who were mentioned in the last verse apparently sailed on the ship which the apostle had intended to take into Syria where the church at Antioch was located. They landed at Troas and remained there waiting for Paul to join them.

The use of the word “us” here is an indication that Luke, whom I presume to be the writer of the book of Acts, had begun traveling with Paul. The others were waiting for Luke and Paul at Troas when they arrived there.

ACT 20:6 And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days.

According to the original plan Paul would have set sail from the area of Corinth. In order to foil the murder plot of the angry Jews, he found it necessary to move north to Philippi in Macedonia and sail from there. After joining the rest of them the group spent seven days at Troas.

ACT 20:7 And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.

Some religious groups contend that the seventh day of the week is still binding upon God’s people as the day of assembly for worship. This verse denies that fact. Sunday was not a man made substitution for the seventh day. Jesus rose on the first day of the week. The disciples met to take the Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week. Paul told some to lay by in store upon the first day of the week. Paul preached to these brethren on the first day of the week.

The passage does not tell us what time Paul began his sermon. Nevertheless, it seems that it would have been before nightfall. If that is true, and he continued to preach until midnight, this sermon was several hours in length. He was about to depart from them the next day and wished to make the most of the time he was still with them.

ACT 20:8 And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together.

I expect that these lights were openings where light could enter the building. There would not have been any light coming in through them at midnight, but they might well have been open. It does not seem that there were glass panes in these windows.

It is possible that, since it was late and would have been dark, these were torches or candles. However, the next verse is what leads me to see a connection between the word lights and the window in which this young man sat.

ACT 20:9 And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead.

It is not difficult to understand the young man falling off into sleep. I have sometimes seen members of the congregation nodding their heads after I have preached much less than three or four hours.

Eutychus dozed off and fell three stories to the floor or to the ground. Some believe the young man was only seriously injured and thought to be dead. The verse says he was taken up dead.

ACT 20:10 And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him.

Paul then ceased his preaching and began to tend to the young man. Paul handled the situation as both Elijah and Elisha had done when they revived the dead. he stretched his own body out upon the young man. He then informed the bystanders that they should not be overly concerned. Eutychus was alive. Did Paul mean they were mistaken in thinking he had been dead, or did he mean that he had brought him back to life from the dead? Let us take verse nine at face value and assume that Eutychus was actually dead, and that Paul brought him back to life.

Of course, we are still dealing with the age of miracles. Both Elijah and Elisha raised persons from the dead. Paul could have done the same.

ACT 20:11 When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed.

It was Paul who is being discussed here. He returned from the scene where the young man had fallen. He partook of the Lords' Supper with the rest of the disciples, and then left them.

ACT 20:12 And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted.

Here is the answer to our earlier question. They brought the young man *alive* and were comforted because of this fact. The emphatic statement that they brought him alive is a contrast to verse nine which declares he was dead!

ACT 20:13 And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot.

The others went ahead of Paul to board the ship and sail southward and toward Syria. Paul moved over the land rather than going by ship. This no doubt allowed him to make some contacts with present disciples and possible converts. He had told them about how long it would take him to rejoin them.

ACT 20:14 And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene.

The ship is slowly making its way down the coastline as Paul was determined to head for Jerusalem and then Antioch of Syria.

ACT 20:15 And we sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios; and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium; and the next day we came to Miletus.

The reader would do well to consult a map and locate these points to obtain a mental picture of the movement of the group.

ACT 20:16 For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.

Paul did not wish to spend time in Ephesus. We are not told just why, except that he wished to be in Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost and if he had stopped at Ephesus it might have made it difficult to tear himself away in time to get there.

But why was Paul intent on arriving at Jerusalem in time for the day of Pentecost? It is possible that the only reason was that many Jews from various places would be gathered there at that time, and he would be able to preach to them.

There is another possible explanation. Paul's relationship to the law of Moses is very fascinating. He took vows and purified himself. He was willing for Timothy to be circumcized. Now he desired to be in Jerusalem at the time of one of the three major feasts at which all male Jews were expected to be present. He was often found in the synagogue in the places where he introduced the gospel. Is it possible that Paul felt Jews who became Christians were still under obligation to respect certain portions of the law of Moses?

Let me add that at the time of the Jerusalem conference which was discussed in the fifteenth chapter of this book the Gentiles had been given

directions as to what they were expected to do with respect to the keeping of the law. They were to avoid fornication. They were to abstain from idol worship. They were to keep themselves from eating blood and from things that had been strangled. Nothing is said about circumcision, vows, etc. I am caused to wonder if the Jews were under obligation to keep some part of the law of Moses until the destruction of the Jews as a nation when Jerusalem was demolished in A.D. 70. I would not press the position just described. Still, I think it is worth investigation.

ACT 20:17 And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.

Miletus was south of Ephesus a few miles. Paul could call the elders there for a short meeting and then move on quickly toward his destination. If he had gone to the city it might have been far more difficult to leave his friends there and continue his journey. It was very important that he instruct the elders at Ephesus on several critical matters.

ACT 20:18 And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons,

Paul is not simply tooting his own horn. He had something of great importance that he had to tell these elders. It was critical that they respect his honesty and hear carefully what he was about to impart to them. At no time had he abused his

privileges and responsibilities as a preacher of the gospel.

ACT 20:19 Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews:

He had always made it clear that without Christ he could do nothing. He did not preach his own wisdom. It was the wisdom of God he was asking them to respect.

He had been quite willing to continue in the face of much sorrow and much resistance from the Jews who refused to accept Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Redeemer of mankind.

ACT 20:20 And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house,

He had given his all in the attempt to promote the cause of the Lord. Anything and everything that he could contribute to their spiritual welfare had been offered. He had spoken before assemblies. He had also followed the example of his Lord and carried on personal evangelism at every opportunity.

ACT 20:21 Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Though he was specifically appointed by Christ to preach to the Gentiles, Paul always went first to

the Jews on his arrival in new territory. Then, after he had taught the Jews, he would turn to the Gentiles. Usually the Gentiles were more willing to hear than were the Jews.

The fact that baptism is not mentioned in this verse does not mean Paul omitted this most critical part of the conversion process. The emphasis in this verse is that he had not played favorites. He had eagerly shared the truth with both Jew and Gentile.

ACT 20:22 And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there:

When the Spirit of God indicated Paul was to take certain actions Paul considered himself bound to take those actions. He had no choice in the matter. The Spirit had instructed him to go to Jerusalem. He intended to honor the command.

If the Jews in various places where he had been preaching had reacted violently and threatened his physical safety there could be serious danger in the Jewish stronghold of Jerusalem. He had very little idea of just what to expect.

ACT 20:23 Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.

Even though he did not know all the details of what was ahead, he did know he would be afflicted and bound. The Holy Spirit had informed him of that dim outlook.

How had the Holy Spirit witnessed to him in every city? It could have been by vision. It could have been by experience. He had, after all, met just such resistance in cities and villages where the concentration of Jews was much less than it would be in Jerusalem. He was risking his life in going there much like Jesus had risked his life upon entering the city not long before his murder upon the cross.

ACT 20:24 But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

He would not be deterred from making the trip. Obeying the will of God was more important to him than losing his life in service. Regardless of the course of future events, he would find joy in testifying to the power of the gospel as the hope of all mankind. Paul was not the only person to take this position. There have been untold numbers who have allowed themselves to be killed rather than to deny the faith revealed through Jesus Christ.

ACT 20:25 And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.

There has been some debate as to whether or not Paul actually saw the Ephesian elders after he departed from them at this time. He could have seen some of the Ephesians without seeing these specific

men. Some believe that though Paul was an inspired man, he did not speak by inspiration here. They believe this to have been his own personal opinion and hold that he did see these same men later. I do not know.

ACT 20:26 Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.

Ezekiel told the shepherds of God's sheep that when danger was present they were to warn the sheep. If they warned the flock and the sheep did not listen, they had removed the blood from their own head. If the flock heeded the warning both the shepherd and the flock might be saved. Paul had discharged his responsibilities. He was clear.

ACT 20:27 For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

It is altogether too easy to preach a part of the Word of God and leave untouched those portions that are distasteful either to the preacher or to the listener. Cowardly preachers and congregations who have itching ears both contribute to such partial declarations. I have recently been exposed to some thinking from a dear friend who is completely sold on the love of his fellowman, but is lax in the keeping of God's commandments. This man respects and promotes parts of the counsel of God rather than the whole counsel.

ACT 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

As the elders at Ephesus had seen Paul fulfilling his duties toward the Lord, they must follow suit and guard the flock of God jealously. They were elders through the instruction of the Holy Spirit. As elders they were expected to see that God's sheep were led to the greenest of pasture and the clearest of living water.

ACT 20:29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

There are many dangers facing Christians. Some of them are from the outside. Others are from inside the religious community. Paul was directing his words to the elders at a single congregation. However, his words have proven to be all too true in every generation since that time and place.

Wolves see the sheep only as tender morsels upon which they may feed. These marauders who would feed upon God's sheep fit the mold. The souls of the faithful mean nothing to them as long as they are able to gain power, prestige or material possessions. Power hungry politicians and rulers have caused great suffering for the people of God. Many of God's children have lost their lives as martyrs because they would not bow to these arrogant oppressors.

ACT 20:30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

Every bit as disastrous are the efforts of unscrupulous men to infiltrate the flock and pretend to be sheep while maintaining the greedy appetite of the wolves. Corinth had a severe problem with such persons. The strange thing is that some of the sheep seem to cuddled up with the wolves. Many millions of dollars have been donated by the unsuspecting as so-called evangelists beg for contributions to keep their fountains of error bubbling away on the radio and television waves.

Congregation after congregation has been fleeced by greedy preachers who care more about the condition of their own pocketbook and their prestige than they do about mission work and the saving of souls.

ACT 20:31 Therefore watch, and remember; that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.

It was certainly not Paul's fault if the saints at Ephesus were taught error or were trodden down by unloving and materialistic men. The apostle had done all within his power to build them up and prepare them to remain strong. His passionate pleas should have touched their hearts.

ACT 20:32 And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which

is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

He was not in the business of promoting Paul. He commended God, not Paul. He recommended that the Ephesians feast on the Word of God. Long after he was departed from them, they would be able to study and obey the truth which had been given to them.

Every Christian should look forward with the greatest of enthusiasm to receiving an inheritance in heaven. That hope of everlasting life in the presence of all the good people of all the ages is a most precious thing. Compared to the brief tribulation which is endured here during one hundred years, the wonders of heaven are fantastic.

ACT 20:33 I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel.

Paul had not come to them as a wolf among sheep. Their silver, gold and earthly possessions meant nothing to him. Their souls were the object of his preaching. He was convinced of the truth of Jesus' words that if one seeks first the kingdom of heaven, all these things shall be added unto him.

ACT 20:34 Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.

The Lord had said that the apostles were to take no scrip for their journey. The laborer is worthy of his

hire. He has more to offer than the hearer can pay in dollars and cents. At the same time Paul wanted to make absolutely certain that no one would ever be able to say he had become rich while making his hearers poor. He had worked as a tentmaker at Corinth while he preached there. Now we have evidence that he had labored with his hands in Ephesus also.

ACT 20:35 I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

He had attempted to provide an example for them. As he had worked with his hands to avoid impoverishing them, he expected them to work in order that they could care for those less fortunate than themselves. Then he reminded them of that truth which has rung out loud and clear. "*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*" It is not pleasant to be dependent upon the grace of others to have food, clothing and shelter. The person who has an abundance of these things will be made happy as he or she offers that which is extra and above their own needs to those who have not.

ACT 20:36 And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all.

This is a touching scene. Paul did not expect to see these elders again on this earth. Dangerous days

were ahead. It is always difficult to leave those we love. It was a time to pray. I doubt if Paul was the only one on his knees. These people had worked together for several years. Now they would have to hold up and maintain their faith without the direct presence of the apostle to the Gentiles.

ACT 20:37 And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him,

Men were kissing men. Just imagine what the promoters of homosexuality try to do with this verse! Any time the Bible speaks of women loving women, men loving men, men kissing men, etc., these evil persons interpret it to mean sexual attraction. Those who deliberately twist the scriptures to fit their own filthy minds will stand before the judgment seat of God.

It is more common in the east for men to embrace other men as was done here. In the United States we seldom see this kind of expression of genuine affection. However; it is right and proper. Paul himself encouraged Christians to greet one another with a holy kiss.

ACT 20:38 Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.

The elders reluctantly went with him to board the ship as he prepared to go to Jerusalem. He had given them far more than they had given him. The words

of life are invaluable. They knew of his sacrifice and had been strengthened by the impact of his love. When they considered the possibility that they might never see him again, they were filled with much sorrow.

Chapter 21

ACT 21:1 And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara:

After the sad farewell Paul and his company sailed southward along the coast of the Mediterranean. Little of consequence occurred as they passed Coos and Rhodes, landing at Patara. It is worthy of note that one of the seven wonders of the ancient world was located at Rhodes. It was a gigantic statue of Colossus.

ACT 21:2 And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth.

The ship to Phenicia was headed in the direction of Jerusalem. The group boarded and were on their way to the great city of the Jews.

ACT 21:3 Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden.

Paul may have had vivid memories of Cyprus. This was where the gospel had been opposed and a man had been blinded physically because of his unwillingness to see the spiritual light.

ACT 21:4 And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem.

Tyre was a busy seaport, receiving goods from various sources throughout the entire area, including Tarshish. It is possible that the reason for remaining in Tyre for seven days was in order to take the Lord's Supper with the disciples there. Paul was normally impatient in his desire to get to Jerusalem.

ACT 21:5 And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed.

There is a strong bond among genuine Christians, even after being acquainted for but a short time. The members of the church at Tyre went to the shoreline to bid Paul and his companions goodbye. Even the wives and children accompanied them.

It is most natural for God's people to pray when parting from one another. It is not necessary to kneel. However, there are many instances in the scriptures where the worshippers did kneel. It is a sign of deep humility and devotion. Perhaps it should be done more often in present day worship services.

ACT 21:6 And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again.

Those of Tyre went back to their homes while Paul and his group entered into a ship and continued toward their destination in Jerusalem.

ACT 21:7 And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day.

At almost every community the group was able to find Christians. This speaks well for the power of the gospel. The fact that these brethren are happy to entertain Paul's band is evidence that they were Christians indeed and not just in name.

ACT 21:8 And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him.

They are getting close to their final destination. It is not that far from Caesarea to Jerusalem. Philip was one of the seven who were chosen to see that the Grecian widows were not neglected in the daily distributions of the early church.

ACT 21:9 And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.

The gift of prophecy was not limited to men. This time we find four young women who had the power to prophesy.

ACT 21:10 And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus.

Agabus was to bring distressful news to Paul. It is not always easy to speak out for the Lord. I suspect that Agabus would rather not have had to deliver the message which he gave.

Many preachers today find themselves having to speak up on issues which are quite uncomfortable. But, if the Lord has included truth on the issue, the preacher must deliver that truth.

ACT 21:11 And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

The prophets often used object lessons to make their points. This has always been a vivid way of getting a truth across. The girdle which Agabus took from Paul was not a girdle in the sense that most women of our day would understand. Paul's girdle was for keeping his outer garment in place rather than for flattening his tummy.

Agabus tied himself up with the girdle and then proceeded to tell the group that Paul would be bound when he arrived in Jerusalem and would be turned over to the Gentiles.

ACT 21:12 And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.

The “we” here includes the author of the book of Acts. This is almost certainly Luke. Agabus was convincing. Paul’s companions tried to prevail upon him not to put himself in danger by going on to his destination.

ACT 21:13 Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

This weeping and concern only made it more difficult for Paul to do what he felt he had to do. He had gifts from the Gentile Christians which he felt he was obligated to deliver to the needy saints in Jerusalem. He did not wish to die, but he would be willing to be bound, or even to die to promote the cause of his Lord. This proves Paul did not avoid certain situations in the past because he feared for his life. He was quite ready to face death when the occasion demanded it.

ACT 21:14 And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.

It was obvious that the pleading was not about to deter Paul from going forward with his plans. The group finally gave up and prayed that whatever God’s will might be, it would be done.

ACT 21:15 And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem.

Carriage was baggage. It was called carriage because it was carried with them. They were on their way straight into the face of the danger about which Agabus had warned them.

ACT 21:16 There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge.

Now that they were traveling over land it was not difficult for others to move along with them. Some of the Christians from Caesarea decided to accompany them. Mnason was from the island of Cyprus where a man had been struck blind as a result of opposing the spread of the gospel. Mnason must have had a home in Jerusalem where the group could take lodging.

ACT 21:17 And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

There would be a vast difference between the attitudes of the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem and those who had been converted to Christ. The brethren were delighted to see them. They desperately needed the supplies Paul was bringing them from their brethren in Asia.

ACT 21:18 And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present.

The fact that James is mentioned separately from the elders leads some to think he was some type of archbishop. This is not the case. James was a brother to the Lord. He had a unique position because of that relationship.

ACT 21:19 And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.

Paul offered his greetings and then began to tell the disciples of the wonderful progress which had been made as a result of his preaching. He was grateful to God for his providential care throughout his missions.

ACT 21:20 And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law:

The Jerusalem Christians realized the importance of what had been accomplished. They had no jealousy toward the Gentiles who had become members of the body of Christ. They rejoiced at the thought that the family of God was expanding.

ACT 21:21 And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the

Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.

There was a problem however. They had heard that Paul was telling the Jews who were living in Gentile lands that they need not keep the law of Moses, particularly with respect to circumcision, but also in other aspects of the law. This was a serious matter for them. They felt that a Jew could become a Christian only by first becoming a keeper of the law.

ACT 21:22 What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come.

They cautioned Paul that when the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem came together they would be very much concerned about Paul's position on the keeping of the law.

ACT 21:23 Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them;

There was a way they felt Paul could clarify the issue. They began to elaborate what needed to be done. Four of their number had taken a vow as a part of the keeping of the law of Moses.

ACT 21:24 Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that

those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law.

The closing of a vow was often associated with the shaving of the head and purification. The Jewish Christians suggested that Paul could show that he still kept the law of Moses by going through the purification process with them. Would Paul agree, or would he object that he no longer kept the law?

ACT 21:25 As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.

They did not see the necessity of Gentiles keeping the law. In the Jerusalem conference described in the fifteenth chapter of this book, the only things the Gentiles were commanded to do were to refrain from fornication, idolatry, the eating of blood and eating of things which had been strangled.

ACT 21:26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.

Paul did as they suggested. Did he do wrong? He said at one time that he became as a Jew that he

might gain the Jews. In view of the fact that on the Mount of transfiguration God had taught the lesson that Moses and the prophets had faded away before the authority of Jesus, I believe the Jewish Christians were wrong to ask Paul to do what he did. I also believe Paul was wrong to do what they asked.

If that is not correct, there were two separate plans. One for the Jews. Another for the Gentiles. There is a faint possibility that God treated the Jews differently until the destruction of the temple and the Jews as a nation in A.D. 70. This is one of the more difficult portions of the entire New Testament. We hate to admit that Paul the apostle would have made a glaring mistake with respect to the law. Yet everything points to the demise of that law as a rule of practice after the death of Jesus Christ.

ACT 21:27 And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him,

The unbelieving Jews were ready to jump on Paul at the least provocation. Here was a man who had strongly held their own convictions that Christ was an imposter. Now he had turned completely around and was preaching and promoting the Saviour. When they saw him go into the temple for the purification process they were ready to take him by violence.

ACT 21:28 Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this

place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.

They cried out for all the true Jews in Jerusalem to come together in opposition to Paul. The report from the Asian Jews was that he had gone everywhere he could reach telling that the Jews were wrong, that the law was not binding upon them, and that the temple in Jerusalem was not as important as the temple which had Jesus for it's chief cornerstone.

To bring a Gentile into the temple was a serious crime. There was a court of the Gentiles. No Gentile was to pass beyond that court. To do so would be to pollute the entire temple.

We should recall at this point Peter's vision as he was told to go to the household of Cornelius. Peter was informed that God had made the Gentiles clean. He was to preach to the Gentiles just as he would to the Jews.

ACT 21:29 (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)

The reason for the charge that Paul had brought Gentiles into the temple was the fact that they had seen Trophimus, who was one of Paul's group, with him. They only assumed that Paul had taken Trophimus into the temple. We are not told the charge was not true, but it seems likely that they had made a false charge.

ACT 21:30 And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut.

Word quickly traveled around the entire city of Jerusalem. Paul was forcibly removed from the temple, and the door was shut to prevent him from reentering.

ACT 21:31 And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.

There is no doubt about their intentions. Without interference they would have taken Paul's life then and there. We can almost hear the cries of the angry Jews calling out for his death. The chief captain was a Roman who was obligated to keep order in the territory over which he had authority. The report that a mob was forming sent him into immediate action.

ACT 21:32 Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul.

In short order the chief captain went to the heart of the matter. At the sight of the powerful Roman police force, the mob quieted enough that Paul was not killed.

ACT 21:33 Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound

with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done.

The captain removed him from the hands of the angry mob and chained him securely. The two chains were likely attached to a soldier on each side of him. Then the captain wanted to know Paul's identity, and what it was that had precipitated such a commotion. What had Paul done to bring on this kind of frenzy?

ACT 21:34 And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle.

Mobs are not known for their reasoning power. Many did not know the details of what had happened. They disagreed in their witness. This was also true in the arrest and trials of Jesus. They suborned witnesses but the witnesses did not agree.

Paul was to be taken into custody in the castle where the Roman soldiers were quartered. There he would be protected from beatings and loss of his life.

ACT 21:35 And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people.

There was a set of stairs leading up into the castle. Paul's guards had found it necessary to prevent the people from even getting close to him.

ACT 21:36 For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him.

They did not intend to be satisfied until the apostle was dead. Again the resemblances to the events surrounding the last days of Christ are evident. When Pilate asked the mob who should be released unto them, Christ or Barabbas, they cried out “Barabbas.” They were then asked what should be done with Christ. Their answer was, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

ACT 21:37 And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek?

At the foot of the steps leading up into the castle Paul spoke to the chief captain. He politely asked if he could make a request. The captain was shocked. Was Paul, a Jew, able to speak Greek? The captain had no idea he was dealing with one of the best educated and best informed men of his day.

ACT 21:38 Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?

From the commotion which had arisen the chief captain had decided Paul must be an insurrectionist Egyptian who had made trouble before. The man had gained a following of four thousand men with criminal records whom he used to create confusion.

ACT 21:39 But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of

no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people.

Paul quickly cleared the air. He was not that Egyptian. He was a Roman citizen of an important city named Tarsus. The captain would have had no difficulty in recognizing the area from which Paul had come. Tarsus had been granted special privileges by the Roman government. The captain knew it would not be wise to falsely arrest a Roman citizen. He apparently did not recognize at this point that Paul was a Roman citizen. Paul had requested that he be given a chance to address the mob.

ACT 21:40 And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying,

The captain approved of Paul's request to speak to the people. Paul moved up on the stairway and beckoned with his hand. I would not have wanted to be in Paul's position at that time. Stephen had died by stoning in such circumstances. It was a little less threatening this time because of the presence of the Roman soldiers. I would not be surprised, however, if Paul's mind might not have gone back to the time when he held the garments of those who killed Stephen.

Rather than increasing the volume of their cries for his death, the mob became deathly quiet, waiting for him to speak. When he opened his mouth, he spoke

in the Hebrew language. Paul had been educated at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the finest teachers of the Jews. He had also spent many years of his boyhood in the city of Tarsus where Greek was spoken. He could converse fluently in either tongue.

Chapter 22

ACT 22:1 Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you.

Three accusations had been made against Paul. First, he was accused of speaking against the Jewish people. Second, he was accused of speaking against the law of Moses. The third accusation was that he had insulted God and defiled the temple by bringing Trophimus, a Gentile, into it. In the face of the angry mob he is ready to present his defense against the three charges.

ACT 22:2 (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,)

Paul was fluent in both Greek and Hebrew. He was born a Jew and he had been raised in Gentile territory. The mob was impressed when he spoke out in their own language. Rather than drowning out what he said, they quieted down in a hushed silence. They felt the charges were solid. What defense could the man offer?

ACT 22:3 I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.

The apostle began by attempting to establish a common ground between himself and his audience. They were proud to be Jews. He was also proud to be a Jew. He had been educated under the tutelage of one of the greatest Jewish rabbis of the day. They knew of the reputation of Gamaliel. Paul had no doubt been exposed to the principles of the law in the finest fashion possible. If they bothered to investigate they would find that his record as a Jew was unquestionable and that he had the highest regard for Jehovah.

ACT 22:4 And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.

Not only that, he had been fully persuaded that Jesus Christ was an imposter and that his cause should be stamped off the face of the earth. Paul had labored vigorously to do just that. He had not hesitated to subject the followers of Jesus to arrest, imprisonment and even death.

ACT 22:5 As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished.

In addition, he had received letters of permission to extend his persecution of the Christians beyond Jerusalem into the entire area. Damascus was in

Syria far to the north of Jerusalem. Paul thought he was doing God a great favor in fighting against the church of the Lord.

ACT 22:6 And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me.

Then a most unexpected event occurred. About noon, as he neared the city of Damascus, he saw a brilliant light shining down from heaven. It is significant that this was God's way of getting his attention. He had ignored the light of Christ. Now he was stopped in his tracks by a light from above.

ACT 22:7 And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

He knew immediately that this light originated from a power far higher than himself. He fell to the ground in humility. As he did so, he heard the voice of Jesus Christ speaking to him. He was being asked a very pointed question. Why was he so intent on persecuting the owner of the voice.

ACT 22:8 And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.

As he replied to the question he had been asked, he used the word "Lord." He automatically knew this

speaker was superhuman. He was assured that the voice belonged to Jesus.

We can only speculate as to just what ran through Paul's mind when he realized how completely wrong he had been in his determination to eliminate the influence of the Son of God. Jesus, however, would take that same dedication and make it a force for the spread of the gospel into the Gentile world. No man would ever work more diligently to magnify the kingdom than Saul of Tarsus, who would now become Paul the apostle.

ACT 22:9 And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.

This same event is recorded in the ninth chapter of Acts. There it is said that those who were with Saul heard a voice but saw no man. The enemies of the Bible have seen this as a glaring contradiction. It is not! It is quite possible to hear a voice, yet not understand the words being spoken. They failed to hear in the sense that they did not comprehend what was being said.

ACT 22:10 And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.

Saul did not fight back insolently and belittle Christ. He was fully convinced that he had been wrong in the path he had taken. That path must be changed!

But what was he expected to do to make amends?

The reader should note that Jesus himself did not tell Saul what to do. He was told to go to Damascus and he would be told there what was expected of him. Many men think they also must see a great light or have God speak directly to their heart, telling them what to do to be saved. All that this experience did for Saul was get his attention. He would be informed as to what he must do by another human.

ACT 22:11 And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.

The light from heaven was so brilliant that Saul was blinded by its glory. This was appropriate. He had blinded himself to the spiritual light of God's truth, as taught by the Saviour. Hence he was allowed to walk around in physical darkness. He had to be led by his companions until he came into Damascus as he had been commanded to do.

Elymas had a similar experience. Refusing to respect the light of truth, he also was caused to become blind.

Paul had come to Damascus, as he had purposed when he began his journey. But it was under far different circumstances than he had ever dreamed.

ACT 22:12 And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there,

After having arrived in the city, he waited for someone to fulfil the words of the Lord that he would

be told what he must do. Shortly, a man named Ananias appeared. The man was one who respected the law of Moses and endeavored to keep it. He also was held in high repute by the Jews living in Damascus.

This was the man who would inform him as to what was expected of him. In the ninth chapter of Acts we are told Ananias was a disciple of Christ. I take it this means Ananias was a converted Jew who attempted to keep the law of Moses and at the same time be true to Christ. Paul may well have been making a further attempt to gain some degree of sympathy from the Jews. A devout Jew who kept the law had delivered the instructions from the Lord.

ACT 22:13 Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him.

Ananias addressed him as “Brother” Saul. I assume this means he recognized him as a fellow Jew rather than considering him as a brother in Christ. According to Galatians 3:27 one is baptized into Christ. Saul had not as yet been baptized into Christ.

When Ananias called out to Saul to receive his sight, Saul was able to see once more. It must have been a joyous thing to him to be able to see the servant of God who had come to help him do that which would make him right with his Maker.

ACT 22:14 And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest

know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth.

Ananias revealed to Saul that God had specially chosen him for training. But why would God choose a man who had so viciously persecuted the very people he loved? The reason is clear. Saul was a man who did with all his might what he believed to be right. God knew the same energy would be expended in the support of Christianity as had been expended in trying to eliminate it. From the later record, we can see just how accurate this judgment was.

Saul was to see Christ. He was to hear him speak to him. He was to be taught the will of Jesus.

ACT 22:15 For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.

Saul was to become a witness to both Jew and Gentile that Jesus Christ was truly the Son of God. He was to declare the will of Christ to men of both his time and of centuries to come.

ACT 22:16 And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

Saul was still a sinner. He was no doubt convinced Jesus is Lord. He was without doubt penitent of the things he had done in opposition to God. Yet, he was told to arise and be baptized in order that his sins might be washed away. There can be no clearer evidence that baptism is essential to the remission of

sins than we see in the case before us. Dear reader, if you have never been baptized you need to be. If you have been baptized to join some sectarian religious group you are still a sinner. You need to be baptized for the remission of sins and not for the purpose of becoming a Baptist, a Methodist or any other institution apart from the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

ACT 22:17 And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance;

Paul returned to Jerusalem after his momentous experience. He went into the temple to pray. This was where he had gone to pray in the past. It was natural for him to go there. Perhaps further instructions would be given to him if he communed with his Father in heaven. As he prayed, he fell into a trance. In the trance he would be able to perceive that which would not have otherwise been seen.

I refer to him as Paul the apostle now rather than as Saul of Tarsus. It was at this point that he received his commission to go to the Gentile world. The word “apostle” means “one sent.”

ACT 22:18 And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.

Jesus had spoken to Paul personally and commanded that he leave the city of Jerusalem. The

very Jews with whom he had associated and whom he had led would now despise him and refuse to believe his witness.

ACT 22:19 And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee:

Paul had no misgivings about the matter. He knew Christ was speaking the truth. The unbelieving Jews knew exceedingly well that he had fought against the Christians. It is possible that he thought they would realize something miraculous must have taken place to persuade the apostle to change directions so drastically. In that case they might accept his reasons for the change of behavior.

ACT 22:20 And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.

The apostle continued with his account of his encounter with the Lord on the way to Damascus. Paul had reminded Christ that the Jews knew he had gone so far as to promote the stoning of Stephen. He had felt this might relieve him of the charge to preach to those of every nation.

ACT 22:21 And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.

Jesus knew better. He also had plans for Paul. They did not include staying in Jerusalem and trying

to convince the Jews he had seen the light of Christ. Paul was to be the major instrument in fulfilling several prophecies of old that the time would come in which the Gentiles would see a great light and would come into the Kingdom of God.

Jesus had gone almost exclusively to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Peter had received a shock when he was told to go to the Gentile household of Cornelius and preach to them. Now Paul was to take the matter much farther. He is to dedicate his life to spreading the gospel to the Gentile world.

The idea of preaching to the Gentiles had not originated in his own mind. It was a direct command from the Son of God.

ACT 22:22 And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live.

Up to this point the Jews to whom Paul had been presenting his defense had been quiet and listened to what he had to say. When he indicated he had been chosen to invite the Gentiles to be God's people, they went into a frenzy. Anyone who would associate with Gentiles, as Paul had with Trophimus, and who would say that it was his special mission to bring them to God, was fit only to be killed.

ACT 22:23 And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air,

Jews in that part of the world are a very demonstrative people even to the twentieth century.

They did everything within their power to show their displeasure with this *lover of Gentiles*. What a commotion they must have raised!

ACT 22:24 The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him.

The chief captain was a Roman. He was interested in the matter only because he was charged with keeping order. The present chaos was most distasteful to him. He set about to remedy it. In order to get to the heart of it as rapidly as possible, he commanded that Paul be scourged until he revealed what had instigated the riot. He was convinced Paul was the target of the Jews wrath. But what had he done to incur that wrath?

ACT 22:25 And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?

Scourging was a horrible punishment. A whip with several leather thongs was used. Pieces of metal were used at the end of the thongs to cut the flesh of the one being scourged. After receiving a number of strokes from this weapon of destruction, most victims were glad to confess to almost anything. Some died during the scourging. Paul was not at all anxious to be scourged.

As they were in the process of tying him for the purpose of scourging him and forcing a confession, Paul brought their plans to a swift halt. He asked the centurion who was in charge of the scourging if he was prepared to answer to the authorities for beating a Roman citizen who had not had a proper trial.

ACT 22:26 When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman.

The centurion was properly impressed. He straightway went to the chief captain and told him what Paul had said. At times a Roman soldier was punished with the same punishment he had wrongfully imposed on a fellow Roman. Both the chief captain and the centurion could have been scourged themselves if they had caused a man who was innocent to undergo that torture.

ACT 22:27 Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea.

The chief captain came then and personally interrogated Paul. He demanded to know if he was truly a Roman citizen. Paul assured him that this was true. It was one thing to whip a misbehaving Jew. The chief captain knew it was quite another to beat an uncondemned citizen of the Roman Empire.

ACT 22:28 And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born.

There were two means by which a man could become a Roman citizen. If he had been born in another area, he could purchase Roman citizenship. This could be a costly process. In the United States of America there would be little expense involved in becoming a citizen. That was not the case with the Roman Empire.

The chief captain was impressed that Paul had been a Roman citizen by birth rather than having had to buy such citizenship. All talk of scourging was now a matter of history.

ACT 22:29 Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.

To put it in the clearest words possible, they backed off! The chief captain was even fearful that he had endangered his position by having Paul tied up. It was going to be necessary to investigate this matter before proceeding farther. If Paul had broken the Roman law he could be punished. If not he must be released or even protected.

ACT 22:30 On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his

bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them.

The chief captain wasted no time. The next day he untied him and commanded the chief priests of the Jews, and their entire council, to appear before him to explain precisely what Paul had done that caused them to attack him. He had no intention of having to answer to his superiors for punishing an innocent Roman citizen.

Chapter 23

ACT 23:1 And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

As far as the Jews were concerned Paul was a traitor of the highest order. It was a blasphemous statement to say he had lived in all good conscience. How could any Jew live in good conscience while promoting the cause of Jesus Christ whom they considered to be an imposter and a liar.

Yet Paul had done precisely what he claimed. As far as humans go, Paul had kept himself admirably pure. He knew Christ was the Messiah. He would have acted dishonestly if he had refused to obey the will of God. He had no intention of compromising his convictions under the pressure of the Jewish council.

ACT 23:2 And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.

Such an action by Ananias was completely out of order. Ananias was supposed to be a man of dignity and good judgment. He demonstrated just the opposite in this case. The high priest thought the mouth that had said Paul had lived in all good conscience should be slapped for such a monstrous lie!

ACT 23:3 Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to

judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?

If Ananias thought his command to slap Paul in the mouth would shut that mouth he was sadly mistaken. The result was just the opposite. Paul let everyone present know just how dastardly the action really was. Ananias had proved he was just a shell of a man. A whited wall covers something that is better covered up. Ananias high priesthood may have covered up his corrupt character for many; but it did not do that for the apostle, and he let everyone know it.

Ananias was responsible for administering the law of Moses. The law forbid anyone to strike the cheek of an Israelite. Ananias had broken the very law he was charged with administering.

ACT 23:4 And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest?

The assembly was stunned. Did Paul have such little respect for God's high priest that he could talk to him in this way?

ACT 23:5 Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

Paul's reply was justified. The law also said it was wrong to speak evil of a ruler (Exo. 22:28). Paul's defense for his words was that one could certainly

not tell Ananias was God's high priest by observing his actions.

ACT 23:6 But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.

At that point Paul realized he had a way out of his predicament. There were two very different beliefs represented within the council. The Pharisees believed in angels and a resurrection. The Sadducees believed in neither one. Jesus had risen from the dead. This gave Paul a plan of action. He would set the two philosophies against one another.

ACT 23:7 And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.

Basic philosophical conflicts run close to the surface. It did not require more than a single statement for Paul to lay these disagreements bare. We do not know the percentage composition of Pharisees and Sadducees in the council. However, the percentages must have been even enough to prevent complete domination of one belief by the other.

ACT 23:8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.

We would presently classify the Sadducees as modernists. They believed in God but scientific observation predominated over Biblical pronouncements. The Pharisees would today be considered as conservative in thought. We can readily understand what kind of confrontation was just ahead.

ACT 23:9 And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.

As might be expected, the Pharisees were ready to back Paul in his position with respect to the possibility of a resurrection. To them it was quite reasonable that Paul might have seen a spirit or an angel. Of course they would have balked at agreeing he had seen Jesus Christ as the risen Messiah. Nevertheless, they were ready to dismiss all charges against Paul. To continue with the trial could well be fighting against the will of God. Gamaliel once expressed himself with respect to fighting against God. His position was that one who fought against the will of Jehovah was certain to be defeated.

ACT 23:10 And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.

The confrontation was rapidly changing from verbal to physical. As a result, Paul was in danger of being physically injured. The chief captain of the temple guard stepped in to calm the violence. He instructed the soldiers who were under his command to rescue the apostle from the chaotic conditions and deliver him to the security of the castle where the soldiers were quartered.

ACT 23:11 And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

I am curious as to what Paul may have been thinking after being deposited in the castle. Where would he go next? Would he be killed? Would he be released to continue his preaching? How would he know just what he should do?

The answers to these questions came from the mouth of Jesus himself. The Lord appeared to him during the night and gave him further instructions. He was not to be dismayed. Just as he had testified to the Sonship of Christ in the city of Jerusalem, he would also testify in Rome, the capital of the empire under which he lived.

Christ had appointed Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles. Paul was a Jew, and he had first preached to his Jewish brethren. He had then had the privilege of preaching to many Gentiles in major cities. Now Jesus assured him he would preach the truth in the greatest city of the Gentile world. It would take some time before Paul arrived in Rome. He would arrive

there under quite different circumstances than he might have anticipated. But he was to go there, and he was to preach in Rome. His life was not to be ended there in Jerusalem.

ACT 23:12 And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

Some of the Jews were so determined to kill him that they placed themselves under a curse if they failed to destroy him. If they followed up on this promise they soon died of thirst and starvation, because Paul evaded their evil intentions and lived on for some time.

ACT 23:13 And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.

This was a sizable number. It would be one thing for one or two individuals to make such plans. It was considerably more dangerous for as many as forty to band together to do this dirty work.

ACT 23:14 And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul.

It seems that this group of forty were Sadducees. It also appears that the chief priests and elders were

of that persuasion. The Pharisees would not have pursued the issue after hearing of Paul's encounter with the resurrected Lord. This does not imply that the Pharisees were Christians. It does appear that they were less dedicated to murdering Paul after he mentioned the resurrection.

ACT 23:15 Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to morrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.

The forty were convinced that they could get the council as a whole to advise the chief captain to bring Paul back before them for more extensive questioning. Then, while he was still on the way, they would pounce upon him and kill him. Was this not a strange plan for forty men who claimed to be members of the Jewish council? One does not lie to accomplish righteous purposes!

ACT 23:16 And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul.

Paul's nephew got wind of what was about to take place. I do have some question about why Paul's sister's son was in the vicinity of Jerusalem. Paul had been raised in the city of Tarsus far to the north of Jerusalem. He was sent to Jerusalem to study under the great Jewish teacher Gamaliel. I suppose it is

very possible that his nephew had also been sent for a similar purpose.

At any rate, the young man went into the castle and informed Paul of the danger to his life.

ACT 23:17 Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him.

Paul must have had some degree of confidence in the integrity of the centurion to whom he sent his nephew.

ACT 23:18 So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee.

Paul's confidence was well placed. The centurion was cooperative and no doubt wondered what it was that needed to be relayed to the chief captain. This prisoner was not the general run of the mill. The centurion must have felt that any such information should be treated with care.

ACT 23:19 Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me?

The tone of this verse indicates the nephew may have been a lad rather than a grown man. The chief

captain would have been less likely to take a mature man by the hand and lead him away. This officer suspected that what the young man had to tell him was not for the ears of any and all.

ACT 23:20 And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to morrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly.

The plans of the forty were made known to the chief captain. This would have been welcome information. It was not that the chief captain wished to hear it, but that because having received it, he would be prepared to act appropriately to secure the safety of his prisoner.

ACT 23:21 But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee.

The forty were waiting anxiously to see if their plot would succeed. Would the chief captain fall into their trap?

ACT 23:22 So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me.

Now the shoe was on the other foot. The chief captain could counteract the plot without the intended murderers being aware that he even knew of their plans. The lad was told not to let anyone know of the conversation between himself and the chief captain.

ACT 23:23 And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night;

Each centurian had command of one hundred men. Two of these centurians were commanded to get ready to go to Caesarea where the Roman governor had his headquarters. Seventy men on horses were to go also, as well as two hundred spearmen. This means at least two hundred and seventy men, and perhaps four hundred seventy were to make the journey. They were to get up at three o'clock in the morning ready to go.

ACT 23:24 And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.

Paul was to be given an animal upon which he might ride as he was escorted to Felix who served as Roman governor over the local province.

ACT 23:25 And he wrote a letter after this manner:

It was necessary that Felix know the reason for this sizable escort and the prisoner whom they

delivered. The chief captain wrote a letter explaining his reasons. We see that Paul now moved from the Jewish to the Gentile courts.

ACT 23:26 Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting.

Claudius Lysias understands politics. One speaks to the governor with respect; perhaps even a bit of flattery.

ACT 23:27 This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman.

Claudius Lysias makes himself look very efficient. It was hardly necessary to organize an army to move Paul from Jerusalem to Caesarea. It was commendable that he aided Paul in evading the murderous plot of the Jews, but this is more credit than he deserves.

ACT 23:28 And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council:

Claudius implies that he had no real reason to arrest Paul. He was only interested in keeping the peace. The whole situation had deteriorated into mob action and the chief captain had been left in a situation that needed unraveling. This could best be done by shipping Paul out of the scene of the trouble.

ACT 23:29 Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds.

The only thing Claudius Lysias could determine was that Paul had offended the Jews with respect to their own laws. Actually Paul had not broken the law of Moses. When he preached Christ as the promised King from the line of David, he was far ahead of the Jewish council in his understanding of the law delivered by Moses.

Claudius was unable to discover any offense which required punishment by either execution or imprisonment. He had acted to protect Paul rather than to punish him.

ACT 23:30 And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell.

Claudius had acted promptly when he received the news from Paul's nephew that the life of the apostle was in danger. This was definitely related to Roman law. The Sadducees were preparing to bypass the law and take things into their own hands.

We have a new angle to the story now. After ordering Paul to be sent to Felix, Claudius had instructed the Jews who hated him to appear before the Roman governor to let him know just what justification they had for being so hostile. The shoe was on the other foot.

ACT 23:31 Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris.

In harmony with Claudius Lysias' command, the young army escorted Paul by night to Antipatris which was on the route to Caesarea. I cannot help but wonder how forty men could create such a commotion that two hundred and seventy would be needed to protect Paul. It may be that the large force of soldiers and the decision to move at night was a recognition that the forty enemies could muster a much larger force from among the Jews in general.

ACT 23:32 On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle:

The two centurians, with the two hundred under their command, stopped at Antipatris and turned back to the castle where their quarters were in Jerusalem. The seventy horsemen went on toward the city of Caesarea.

ACT 23:33 Who, when they came to Caesarea and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him.

We are told that Felix was a very immoral man. He had been married to several women. He did not hesitate to kill anyone whom he thought might interfere with his power and prestige. Had Paul jumped from the frying pan into the fire? Both he

and the letter from the chief captain were presented to Felix.

ACT 23:34 And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia;

After reading the letter, Felix wished to verify the fact that Paul was a citizen of the Roman empire. He asked from which of the Roman provinces Paul had come. Paul informed him he was from Cilicia. Cilicia was the province where Paul's boyhood home of Tarsus was located. It was north of the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea.

ACT' 23:35 I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall.

Upon being satisfied that Paul was truly a citizen of the Roman empire Felix agreed to hear his case. He made it clear that this would only happen when the Jews who had made accusation against him came to Caesarea to explain their charges. In the meantime Paul was to be held prisoner in Herod's judgment hall, awaiting his trial.

This was not a place where the most dangerous criminals were kept. Since it was to be two years before the apostle would leave this location we are grateful that it was not as unpleasant as it might have been. Still, it must have been a time of anxiety for this mighty preacher of the gospel. He had been

charged with seeing that the word was presented to the Gentile world. God had promised that he would go to Rome and testify there. How could he accomplish these things while he was in bondage?

Chapter 24

ACT 24:1 And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul.

Felix had stated that he would wait until Paul's accusers arrived to clarify the charges against him. Ananias, the High Priest, was more than willing to comply with the order. To make certain that the apostle did not escape his claws he employed one of the most famous orators available. This was to be the chief prosecutor in the case. Things would have looked pretty dim for Paul if the Lord had not been on his side. Paul is thought to have had some type of speech impediment. Tertullus was a talented speaker.

ACT 24:2 And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence,

It is not difficult to see that Tertullus knew his psychology. He began by assuring the governor that everyone knew just how well he was doing his job. If Tertullus could gain the sympathy of the governor before the evidence was even presented, he felt he had the case half won.

ACT 24:3 We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.

He continued to pile on the flattery. How grateful the Jews were to have a wonderful administrator like this great man!

ACT 24:4 Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words.

He did not desire to waste the governor's precious time. But if just a few moments could be spared, he had something the governor would certainly want to hear. It almost makes one nauseated to read the words. Yet such flattery is often effective with men of much ego. Felix was such a man.

ACT 24:5 For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes:

In short and plain words Tertullus said, "This man is a pest." Of course we all know pests should be exterminated. But why was Paul such a pest? It was because he had been causing sedition among the Jews wherever he went. He had been a leader in religious unorthodoxy.

The sedition about which Tertullus spoke was the commotion caused by the Jews when Paul preached the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. It was not the fault of Paul. It was the fault of those who had closed their eyes and stopped their ears to the fulfilment of the prophecies found in their own holy scriptures. A sect is a small portion of the whole which

has separated from it and gone off by itself. This was the picture Tertullus was attempting to paint.

ACT 24:6 Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law.

According to Tertullus Paul had committed a very serious crime against the law by taking a Gentile into the temple. Because of that the Jews had attempted to punish him in accordance with the crime. This would mean death to the apostle.

ACT 24:7 But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands,

Tertullus suggested that they would have succeeded in their purpose, except that the captain of the soldiers intervened and would not allow the Jews to complete the punishment. The orator failed to bring up the fact that the Jews were forbidden to put anyone to death without the permission of Rome. The mob had disregarded that order.

ACT 24:8 Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him.

Unfortunately Claudius Lysias, the chief captain had commanded that Paul's accusers go to Caesarea to present the charges before Felix, wasting Felix'

precious time. The reader will recall that it was not at the command of the chief captain that the accusers appear before Felix. It was by the command of Felix himself. Tertullus may just have made a mistake here in his psychology. Chief captains did not tell governors what to do.

Tertullus had presented his case. The accusation was sedition and disturbance of the peace.

ACT 24:9 And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so.

The Jews who had accompanied Tertullus to appear before Felix agreed with him completely. Paul deserved to die.

ACT 24:10 Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself:

Paul also showed proper respect for Felix as a ruler of the people. However, note the contrast between his plain statement that he knew Felix had much experience and would be capable of honest judgment, and the excessive flattery piled high and deep by Tertullus.

ACT 24:11 Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship.

Twelve days is not a very long time to stir up an insurrection. That was not the reason he had gone to the temple. He had gone there to worship God.

ACT 24:12 And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city:

Nor did the Jews find Paul stirring up trouble with anyone while in the temple. He had not been attempting to gather a mob of followers who would create a disturbance. His actions in both the synagogues and in the city of Jerusalem in general could be examined. No evidence of rabble rousing would be found.

ACT 24:13 Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me.

The proof of the charges simply did not exist. Tertullus' case was full of holes.

ACT 24:14 But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets:

Now if Felix desired to hear just what did take place Paul was prepared to bring him up to date on it. The heresy which the Jews saw in him was not heresy at all. It was his faithful adherence to the

teachings of Jehovah as it had been given in the law of Moses and in the prophets who foresaw the coming of the Messiah.

ACT 24:15 And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.

Paul returned to the same point which had set off the disturbance near the castle in Jerusalem. He believed there would be a resurrection of all men, both the righteous and the wicked. He had hope that life would not end with physical death. The Pharisees would have allowed this. The Sadducees would not.

ACT 24:16 And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

Paul intended that his life reflect his belief in the resurrection. He attempted to keep himself pure in his relationships with both God and men. It was when Paul had made his statement that he had lived in all good conscience unto that day that the Jews rose up in fury earlier. They could hardly repeat that behavior before the Roman governor.

ACT 24:17 Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings.

When Paul began his missionary efforts in the Gentile lands he was very much aware that the

Jewish Christians back in Jerusalem were in dire need of help. In addition, there had been a great famine later on. Paul often collected contributions from the Gentile brethren in order that he might help them share their more bounteous life with the poor. He did this in Antioch and also in Corinth. (See Acts 11:29-30 and I Cor. 16:1-2).

ACT 24:18 Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult.

While Paul was in the process of delivering these gifts to his fellow men he had gone to the temple to purify himself after a vow. He had not been in the middle of a mob, nor was he the center of a commotion until the Jews raised it.

ACT 24:19 Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me.

The fact that those who had made the charges against him had sent Tertullus rather than appearing themselves spoke much about Paul's innocence. They had nothing against him and they knew it.

ACT 24:20 Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council,

There were some who had come along with Tertullus. It was now time for them to speak their

piece if they had any solid evidence to present. Paul had withstood the charges in the presence of Ananias in Jerusalem. He knew he could do the same now.

ACT 24:21 Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day.

Paul was not there because he had gathered a mob. He was not there because he had polluted the temple. He was there because he had preached the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. If that was a crime worthy of death he was guilty. Let Felix give his judgment.

ACT 24:22 And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter.

Felix should have dismissed the case on the spot. Instead he kept Paul in custody with the excuse that he wished to hear what Claudius Lysias, the chief captain, had to say about what had taken place. Then he would have all of the evidence and could make a better decision.

ACT 24:23 And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him.

Paul was allowed a great deal of freedom. A centurian was appointed to see that he did not leave, but he was permitted to have visitors and these visitors could see to any needs which he might have. By this time Paul had friends scattered over much of the Mediterranean world.

ACT 24:24 And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.

Some time after his trial Felix came to the area where the apostle was confined. He had his Jewish wife with him. He was apparently still curious as to many of the details of Paul's preaching concerning Christ. At this time he seems to have been motivated more by his curiosity than by the need for justice.

ACT 24:25 And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

Regardless of the reason for his call to appear before Felix Paul saw the opportunity to present the truth of the gospel to one more person. He did not fail to inform the governor and his wife concerning the need for acting in a holy manner, avoiding evil, and preparing for the judgment to come. This was a basic skeleton for more than one speech made by this servant of God. What should men do? What should

men not do? What will be the final consequences of their actions?

ACT 24:26 He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.

Here we begin to see the wicked nature of Felix. He probably was aware that Paul had carried financial support to Jerusalem for the Christians there. Perhaps if he detained him long enough Paul would break down and offer him bribes to secure release. Or maybe some of Paul's friends would come to his rescue and enrich the governor. Felix was not the only man in a high place to bow to the money god. It is still done.

ACT 24:27 But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.

For some two years Paul was forced to agonize over the need to preach to the Gentile world as Christ had commanded him to do. He was still confined when Felix was replaced by another governor named Festus. Would he be treated any better by Festus than he was by Felix?

Chapter 25

ACT 25:1 Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

There is some disagreement as to the relative merits of Festus, the new governor as compared with Felix who preceded him. On the surface it appears that Festus was much more ready to see that Paul's case came to a conclusion. But the other side of the issue is that Festus may have been a weaker man and bowed to the pressure of the Jews to take action against the apostle.

ACT 25:2 Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him,

The high priest of the Jews was a powerful man. The Jews made up a sizable proportion of the population of the area. When Festus realized the power which was arrayed against Paul he must have been impressed.

ACT 25:3 And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him.

The Jews had a request. Would Festus please send Paul to Jerusalem where he could face trial before the Jewish council. There was no need to have such a trial. That conclusion was already drawn. As far as

the Jewish bigwigs were concerned, Paul was worthy of death. If Festus had sent Paul, the high priest and his cohorts had made careful plans for murdering him on the way.

ACT 25:4 But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither.

Caesarea was the capital of the Roman province. Jerusalem was the chief city of the Jews. Festus had made the trip to Jerusalem as part of his duties as governor. He was now ready to return to Caesarea where Paul was imprisoned.

ACT 25:5 Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.

Rather than sending Paul to Jerusalem, Festus declared that the accusing Jews were to appear in Caesarea and make their charges there. Then it would be determined whether he was innocent or guilty.

ACT 25:6 And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought.

It took Festus a few days to wrap up his business in Jerusalem. He then went down to Caesarea. Caesarea is near the coast of the Mediterranean. It

is at a lower elevation than Jerusalem. At that point Festus was ready to hear Paul's case. Paul was brought before him.

ACT 25:7 And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove.

The Jews had not forgotten their complaints. Paul was a rabble rouser. He had also defiled the temple by taking a Gentile into it. Luke did not spell out these charges in his report. However, verse eight allows us to be quite certain of the nature of the charges. We do not have to guess what they were.

ACT 25:8 While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all.

This time we do not have a famed orator like Tertullus making the charges. We still have the same inspired apostle of God answering the charges. He flatly denied any guilt in any of the three accusations. He had not broken the law of the Jews. He had not defiled the temple, nor had he set himself up against Caesar. They could bring forth no evidence to show that he had done any of the three.

ACT 25:9 But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou

go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?

Although it is not reported here, the Jews must have pressed hard for Paul's release into their custody. Festus demonstrated his weakness by asking Paul if he was willing to appear in Jerusalem to answer the charges. Festus knew Paul was innocent. A man with some backbone and justice in his heart would have turned the apostle loose. Nevertheless the outcome of the discussion here worked into the plans of God for the gospel to be preached in Rome. Paul would go there to stand trial. While there he would make Jesus Christ known to many in Caesar's court.

ACT 25:10 Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest.

No, Paul would not agree to stand trial before the Jews in Jerusalem. He was already in the proper court system. Paul knew that Festus was aware of his innocence. His language seems a bit blunt when speaking to a dignitary of the level of Festus. I think we can understand that he may have been more than a little disgusted at the hint that he might have to face the Jews in Jerusalem.

ACT 25:11 For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things

whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar.

Going to Jerusalem would mean death. Paul had not committed any crime serious enough that he should face capital punishment. There was no evidence whatsoever. There was no reason to be moved to the Jewish court. As a Roman citizen he had the right to appeal his case clear up to the emperor himself. And so Paul took that route.

ACT 25:12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.

After consulting with the council Festus decided to send Paul to Rome to appear before the emperor as he had requested. This council was probably not the Jewish council. That council would have met in Jerusalem, not in Caesarea. It was agreed among the governor and his chief deputies that Paul's appeal would be honored.

ACT 25:13 And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus.

Perhaps King Agrippa felt some need to establish rapport with the newly appointed governor. One might expect that a King would be more prestigious than a local governor; however some commentators believe Festus may have been at least equal to

Agrippa in power and influence.

Bernice had a horrible reputation. She had been married several times, beginning when she was in her early teens. It is thought that she was a sister to Agrippa and was nevertheless living with him as man and wife.

ACT 25:14 And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix:

Paul's case bore upon Festus' mind. After Agrippa and Festus had been some time together, Festus decided to discuss the matter with Agrippa. The first thing Festus brought up was that Paul had been left in bonds. He did not bother to tell how long it had been. It is clear that Paul had become a well recognized prisoner at Caesarea.

ACT 25:15 About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him.

At least Festus was honest about this part. The chief priest and the power hungry among the Jews had very diligently sought a sentence of capital punishment for the apostle. We notice that the request was not that Paul be tried to determine his guilt or innocence. It was that a judgment be made "against him." It is apparent that this judgment was death.

ACT 25:16 To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.

Festus claimed that he had attempted to adhere to Roman law which forbade sentencing a man to death until he had the opportunity to answer the charges face to face with the accusers. Festus makes it sound as though he was a model governor. In truth, he may have acted partly to appease the Jewish accusers and bring the case to a head.

ACT 25:17 Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth.

Was Paul in the hands of the Roman court, or was God himself pulling the strings in this scenario? Everything was working toward a trip to Rome. Paul was commanded to appear before Festus.

ACT 25:19 Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed:

Festus says he was much surprised that the charges had little to do with Roman law. He had expected the Jews to accuse Paul of very serious breaking of the laws over which his court was expected to rule.

ACT 25:19 But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.

Festus viewed the religion of the Jews as superstition. He is not alone in those views. Most of the scholarly world today believes Christians are intellectually inferior and saturated with superstition.

Like Rome, The United States of America is in serious danger of drastic punishment for our attitudes toward God and his Word.

It was particularly the resurrection that Festus regarded as superstition. Paul was making the supposedly ridiculous claim that Jesus Christ had died and then been raised up from the grave.

ACT 25:20 And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters.

Festus did not think such matters were a legitimate case for trial in his court. He had therefore asked Paul if he would go to Jerusalem and face the charges there.

ACT 25:21 But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar.

The entire scene changed when Paul demanded to be sent to Caesar's court for trial in Rome. This would take him out of the domain of the high priest and the murderous Sadducees and Pharisees.

ACT 25:22 Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him.

By this time King Agrippa's curiosity had been aroused. He requested that Paul be brought before him that he might listen to Paul's defense. This was not an actual trial. It was simply a means by which Agrippa's curiosity might be satisfied.

ACT 25:23 And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth.

Many men would have been intimidated by the majesterial pomp displayed by Agrippa and Bernice. We can well imagine that Festus was not taking a back seat either. He would have made an attempt to appear as important as possible in the presence of his two visitors. Yet Paul shows no intimidation whatsoever in the following discourse. His God and Jesus Christ, his Saviour, were with him. He had no reason to fear.

ACT 25:24 And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye

see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer.

Well, here is the man says Festus. This is the one about which I spoke to you. He is the center of quite a controversy. The Jews are thoroughly wrought up over him and are demanding his death.

ACT 25:25 But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him.

Is it not strange that repeatedly those before whom Paul appears say he is innocent of the charges, and yet they do not release him? Festus seems to see his only choices as sending Paul back to Jerusalem to stand trial before the Jews, or granting Paul's appeal and sending him to Caesar's court in Rome. If he is innocent why not turn him loose? Paul would not have had to appeal to Caesar if Festus had released him. God's hand was in it all.

ACT 25:26 Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write.

Festus was in a quandry. What charges could be sent on to Rome? He could find none. He offered a

sincere invitation to Agrippa to question the apostle and see if he could find justification for an appearance before Caesar.

ACT 25:27 For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.

Festus did not want to appear as a fool by sending Paul for a trial without being able to tell what Roman laws had been broken. The only thing that came close to this was the charge that Paul had started a disturbance of the peace. Investigation showed that Paul had not started the disturbance. Festus was in a serious bind.



Chapter 26

ACT 26:1 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself:

No doubt Agrippa was quite curious to see what this notable prisoner would have to say for himself. Agrippa was a Jew. He was one of the infamous Herod family, one of which attempted to kill the Christ child at the time of his birth.

Burton Coffman suggests that when Agrippa said, "Thou art permitted..." he was admitting that Festus had already granted the privilege and that Agrippa was simply reiterating the matter. I think this may be reading more into the statement than is really there. It is probably not significant that he did not say, "I grant thee permission."

One thing is certain. When Paul stretched forth his hand in preparation to speak, those who were present were wise to listen carefully. He always had something of importance to say.

ACT 26:2 I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews:

How could Paul say he was happy in his circumstances? It was not because he enjoyed being in bonds. With all his heart he wished to be at liberty to obey the command of his Lord to go to the Gentiles

and preach the gospel to them. He was happy because he had another opportunity to defend himself of the charges which had been brought against him.

ACT 26:3 Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.

The apostle was not flattering the king. He was honest in saying he was pleased that he could present his case before someone who knew the law and the traditions of the Jewish people. This was different than standing before a Roman authority who knew very little about those who had accused Paul.

ACT 26:4 My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews;

His life had been no secret to the Jewish people. Though he had been raised in Tarsus quite some distance from Jerusalem, the Jews in Jerusalem were acquainted with his dedication to the law.

ACT 26:5 Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

It was very wrong that the Jews had accused him of being disobedient to God. Paul had been a Pharisee. The Pharisees were known as rigid law keepers. Paul

had kept pace with the very strictest of this strict sect. In effect Paul is saying precisely what he had said several times before. He had lived in all good conscience unto that day.

One of the reasons the Jews were so infuriated with him was the abrupt change they saw in him as he moved from persecutor to persecuted.

ACT 26:6 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God, unto our fathers:

He did not say he was being judged for breaking Roman law. He said he was being judged because of the promise God had made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses that the world would be blessed through the seed of Abraham.

ACT 26:7 Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.

It was the same promise the entire nation of Israel held so dear and cherished so greatly. That hope had burned brightly in the coming of Jesus the Christ. His life, death, burial and resurrection had brought the hope created by that promise to reality. It was because Paul had taught the resurrection of Jesus Christ that he was castigated by his Jewish brethren.

ACT 26:8 Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?

There was no reason for anyone to doubt the power of Jehovah to raise a man from the dead. He gives life to each man in the beginning. Why could he not restore that life after it was taken away.

ACT 26:9 I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

Previous to his change of heart no man had surpassed Saul in his efforts to extinguish the cause of Christ. He was just as diligent in fighting against Christ as he was later in supporting him.

ACT 26:10 Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

The church began in Jerusalem when Peter preached the first gospel sermon. That signaled the beginning of a spiritual war between the unbelieving Jews and those who heard and believed the gospel. At that time Saul was on the wrong side. With the authority of the highest among the Jewish officials, he had aided in the capture, imprisonment and execution of the Christians.

Some see this verse as an indication Saul was a member of the Sanhedrin. They suggest that he voted for the death of the Christians as a member of that body.

ACT 26:11 And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

Later on, Paul visited the synagogues with the gospel. The same hatred which he had for the Christians was still present years later in the enemies of Christ when he was now fighting for Jesus. His old allies were now his enemies. The Christians frequented the synagogues even after their conversion. An interesting question is why they were there. Why did they not separate themselves from the life and ceremonies of the law of Moses?

Saul was so incensed against the Christians that he attempted to force them into blaspheming God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. I am sure he did not stop short of murdering them when they refused to blaspheme. When they fled from one city to another to avoid him, he followed them.

ACT 26:12 Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,

In the course of pursuing the Christians from city to city, he had a command from the chief priests to search them out in the city of Damascus. His presence there would have struck fear into the hearts of the saints.

ACT 26:13 At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness

of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.

Before he arrived in Damascus, he ran into an obstacle! In the middle of the day when the sun was the brightest he saw a brilliant light coming from heaven. It was so bright that it outshone the noonday sun. It shone around him and also around all of those who were traveling with him.

ACT 26:14 And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

The entire group fell to the ground. Saul then heard Jesus speaking to him in the Hebrew language. The message was clear and plain. The speaker did not appreciate his efforts to destroy the church of Jesus Christ. That which was happening to Saul at the moment was not at all pleasant. It was something like the pain an animal feels when it rebels against the efforts of its master to guide it with a prod. When the animal kicks to get rid of the prod it only increases his discomfort. That was what was happening to Saul. He was kicking against the guidance of the Son of God. This had led to his serious discomfort.

ACT 26:15 And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.

Saul realized he was speaking to a higher authority than the ones who had commanded him to

kill the Christians. He wished to know the owner of the voice. In answer to his question, Christ said it was he whom Saul was in the process of persecuting.

ACT 26:16 But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;

Christ was in the mind changing business. Saul did not need to be lying or kneeling upon the ground. He needed to be up and at work. But that work was no longer to be the destruction of Christianity. He was to become a witness of the things which he was presently experiencing. He was to preach the glory of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

ACT 26:17 Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,

Christ would be with Saul wherever he went. He would protect him from the Jews who would persecute him, and also from the Gentiles before whom he would appear in the future. We can see here a boldness in the speech of Paul. He might as well have told Agrippa outright that Agrippa would not be able to thwart the cause for which Paul was fighting.

ACT 26:18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive

forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

There was a world of spiritual light available to men through Christ. The Jews had already had some opportunity to open their eyes to that light. Some had done so. Others had closed their eyes and refused to look. The Gentiles had not had the chance the Jews had to view that light. Saul was now expected to take it to them that they might also see the way of the Lord. Such light could help remove them from the guilt of sin and cause them to receive the blessing which had been promised through Abraham.

Those who were to hear the apostle and obey the gospel would be set apart for the service of God by the faith that was in Saul, or later Paul. There are two senses in which this would be true. The word faith is used to speak of the body of faith delivered to the saints. It is also used to speak of the attitude of mind that confidently lives in accordance to that body of truth. As Paul taught, both would be at work. His life would shine out through his deeds. His mouth would declare the truth which had been entrusted to him. It should be true with us also. Both by word and by deed, the faith of Jesus Christ should be offered to men. There is a great inheritance waiting for those who hear and heed the call of the gospel. We must not let men pass it by.

ACT 26:19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:

Paul's actions had not been a matter of his own ambition. He felt he had no real choice. He was bound

to serve his Lord. This must be true, even if it meant spending months or years in chains. Do not believe for a moment that Paul did not realize stiff resistance lay just ahead if he began to preach the Word of Christ.

ACT 26:20 But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

He had been headed for Damascus to make life miserable for the Christians. Now he was to become one of the greatest Christians throughout all history. He had gone to Damascus and he had preached there. He had gone on to Jerusalem and preached there. He had moved through sizable portions of Judaea, preaching to the Jews. His message was that the Saviour had arrived. They must repent and obey the teachings of Christ. As John the baptizer had said, “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Paul could preach, “Repent and obey for the kingdom of heaven is **HERE**.”

ACT 26:21 For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.

It was because Paul had been preaching Christ that the Jews had seized him and attempted to kill him. The question is then, Was Paul responsible for the disturbance in the temple area, or were the Jews the **ones** who were out of order? We know the answer.

Would Festus and Agrippa acknowledge Paul's innocence?

ACT 26:22 Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come:

God's help had been offered to him when he was rescued from the hands of the mob at the temple. But it had not stopped there, and it would not stop. Christ stated in the great commission that he would be with his disciples forever. Have confidence, dear reader. Your present rose garden may have many thorns. The Lord knows and cares. He will someday remove the thorns and provide a place for you in the ultimate garden in the New Jerusalem.

ACT 26:23 That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.

Agrippa needed to know just what Paul had been preaching that brought on such a furious assault from his fellow Jews. Not only would Paul be defending his own actions, he would be doing what Jesus said he would do in preaching before kings. Was there truly anything criminal in preaching the resurrection and the life to men who were lost? Surely not!

ACT 26:24 And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art

beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.

Festus had had all he could take. He burst forth in the midst of the apostle's presentation and declared he must be crazy. He had driven himself mad by religious study. Do not laugh my friends. Men have done just that. By focusing upon certain issues they have damaged their sanity.

But Festus was wrong in this case. Paul was as sane as a man can be. Festus would have been wise to open his eyes to the light which Paul was shining directly in his face. Instead, he was apparently embarrassed by the direction Paul's line of thought was taking.

There are many in this world today who think Christians are mad. How stupid it is to use temperance and self control. Why not eat, drink and be merry? Tomorrow we shall die. O that we might be able to penetrate that lustful and pride filled style of life with the light of the gospel!

ACT 26:25 But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

No, Paul declared. I am not crazy. I am telling you truths which all men need to know. Notice Paul's courtesy toward Festus. He used the adjective "noble." He did not rise up in insolent rebuke, but maintained the dignity all Christians should possess.

ACT 26:26 For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I

am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.

Paul was convinced he was not telling Agrippa very much that Agrippa did not already know. The word had gotten out. There was no reason to hide anything. In fact it would have been disobedience for Paul to have been timid before the king and the governor.

ACT 26:27 King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.

Ah, yes! Agrippa knew something of the prophets. As a Jew he knew of the prophecy of Moses that a prophet would arise like unto him. He knew of the fifty-third chapter of the book of Isaiah. He knew of the prophecies that even the Gentiles would have the light of God's word preached to them. Paul was giving both Festus and Agrippa an invitation to honestly face up to the evidence that the Messiah had arrived in the form of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

ACT 26:28 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

If we can believe Agrippa was serious in his statement, we find him within an eyelash of baptism into Christ. Some believe he was being sarcastic. Others believe he was dead serious. Either way we have no information to indicate that Agrippa ever moved from "almost" to "completely."

There have been so many like Agrippa. They have heard the truth, and known that it is the truth. Yet something interferes with their movement from “almost” to “completely.” Let us be proud to be Christian. It may be that we can help someone who is almost a Christian to become altogether a Christian.

ACT 26:29 And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.

Paul did not pull any punches. He laid it right on the line. This may seem bold in the presence of two dignitaries such as those to whom he was speaking. However, kings and governors need Christ at least as much as the least of us. Paul acted accordingly.

ACT 26:30 And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them:

This little informal trial had been completed. Agrippa had satisfied his curiosity. It really did not make any difference in Paul’s future. Even if the two men decided he was absolutely innocent there is no reason to believe he would have been released. He had appealed to Caesar. The appeal had been recognized. Both of the men and the woman entered into a conference to discuss their thoughts about what the apostle had said.

ACT 26:31 And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.

There was a concensus among them that Paul had done nothing deserving his punishment by death. But they went even farther. He had not even done anything which justified him having been imprisoned.

ACT 26:32 Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.

What if Paul had been set free before this time? Would he have been murdered by the angry, unbelieving Jews? It may be that God's providence was in action through the entire period of his imprisonment. He was to carry the Word of God to the greatest of judges in the Roman Empire. Jehovah is far wiser than men.

Chapter 27

ACT 27:1 And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band.

Paul had appealed his case to Caesar. It was necessary that he be taken to Rome for that appearance. Thus Paul joined a number of other prisoners who were all placed under the supervision of a centurion named Julius. Some believe this was a motley group, perhaps consisting of very hardened criminals. It would be difficult to prove that.

Augustus was a popular name. It could have simply been a choice of the soldiers who made up the band.

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

It was late in the year and there were dangers in directly crossing the Mediterrean from Caesarea to Rome. Even in normal conditions the sailors would have been more inclined to follow coastlines than to venture out into the open sea. Therefore the centurion found a ship that was headed for Adramyttium in Asia Minor. He hoped to go north from Caesarea along the eastern coast of the sea and then transfer his prisoners to another ship going from Adramyttium to Rome.

We do not know whether or not Aristarchus was a prisoner. He is mentioned in other places in the New Testament as being associated with the work of Paul.

ACT 27:3 And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself.

They were moving up the coastline. Sidon was north of Caesarea. When they landed at Sidon the centurion allowed Paul to meet friends in that port. This would imply that Paul was being given special treatment. It is hard to believe that most of the prisoners on board would have been granted such permission. Even at this early stage of the journey a certain respect for the apostle has become evident.

ACT 27:4 And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary.

They were beginning to move westward toward Rome by this time. It was felt that better time could be made by sailing. In some manner the island must have provided protection from wind that was impeding their progress. We can already see some of the signs of serious storms which would strike them later on.

ACT 27:5 And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia.

Now they had moved closer to the coast of Asia Minor and were moving westward near that coast. Myra was a port on the southern coast of the province of Lycia. They were coming near the western end of Asia Minor. It would soon be necessary to decide whether to go by the large island of Crete on the north or on the south.

ACT 27:6 And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein.

The centurion found the ship he had hoped for. It was one traveling from Alexandria to Italy. It had apparently followed the same route around the Mediterrean as did the ship on which Paul and the other prisoners had been sailing.

ACT 27:7 And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone;

They were moving away from the coastline as they went from Asia Minor toward Crete. The many days required to cover this distance tells us they were still confronted by contrary winds. It would normally not have taken as long to go that route.

ACT 27:8 And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The fair havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea.

After the difficult trip from Cnidus to Crete they found a port named Fair Havens on the south of that island. Everyone must have been a bit relieved to reach a secure place. It was not the most desirable place to stop, as we will see later. There was a small city nearby where supplies could be replenished if needed.

ACT 27:9 Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them,

We are not told how much time was spent. The fast that was already past was the one associated with the Day of Atonement. This took place late in the fall. It was well known that sailing became more difficult in this time of the year.

Paul once again demonstrated his leadership qualities. A follower would have been satisfied to lean back and let things go as they would. This was not Paul's manner of life. He was in the habit of initiating action.

ACT 27:10 And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.

I am inclined to agree with other commentators I have read who see this as Paul's personal opinion rather than a revelation from the Spirit of God. Simply looking at the circumstances from a human point of

view Paul could see that setting sail at that time would involve terrible danger to both the ship and the passengers. He even predicted that there would be loss of life.

Later, as he spoke through the Spirit of God, he comforted the rest by saying there would be no loss of life if certain conditions were met. This turned out to be true. No lives were lost. The Holy Spirit does not contradict itself, nor does it make incorrect statements, and then later adjust them.

ACT 27:11 Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul.

Though the centurion had considerable respect for Paul, he felt the shipmaster knew more about these things than Paul did. Therefore he was ready to disregard Paul's warning.

ACT 27:12 And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west.

As mentioned before, Fair Havens was not as desirable a spot to spend the winter months as other nearby ports. Consultation between the centurion, the shipmaster and the soldiers resulted in a decision to leave Fair Havens and try to reach Phenice which

was about thirty-five miles to the west, still on the island of Crete.

ACT 27:13 And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete.

They waited until they observed a south wind which would not hinder their progress. Then they loosed anchor and sailed along very near the shoreline of the island. Surely they could make such a short distance safely. Even if the wind did change, they were close to the shore where they felt the danger would be slight.

ACT 27:14 But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon.

They did not anticipate what then happened! They ran into a small hurricane. The wind was so strong it took complete control of the ship and began to drive it around without mercy.

ACT 27:15 And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive.

It was useless to fight the storm. All that could be done was to try to survive.

ACT 27:16 And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat:

As they came close to an island they labored hard to bring up a small lifeboat which they finally succeeded in bringing on board the larger mother ship.

ACT 27:17 Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven.

The helps mentioned here were some sort of cables that were passed around the hull of the ship to give added support against the waves. They then moved away from the small island because they feared they would be mired in quicksand. This left them buffeted in the open sea.

ACT 27:18 And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship;

I have been on a small ship only one time. There was only a gentle wind. Yet when I walked across the deck of the ship I found myself having to be a bit careful about keeping my balance. I cannot imagine what it would be like to find one's self in a wind like the one described here. I can imagine that one might well find himself tossed into the air and crashing down on the deck as the ship tossed about.

The lightening of the ship would have been casting much unnecessary cargo overboard. The higher the ship rode in the water the better the chances were of avoiding disaster on striking bottom.

ACT 27:19 And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship.

By the third day it became necessary to rid themselves of the rigging of the ship. Only the sails themselves were retained to guide the ship later on if the wind abated.

ACT 27:20 And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.

For a number of days neither the sun by day or the stars by night could be seen. The storm continued without interruption. The tempest was so great all hope was given up.

ACT 27:21 But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss.

At the very point when the seasoned sailors were ready to admit defeat, Paul gave them a message of hope. He first scolded them for not paying attention to him when they were at Fair Havens. If they had listened to him the present catastrophe could have been prevented.

ACT 27:22 And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship.

In spite of this, there was good news. Not a single passenger would lose his life. The ship would be lost but the passengers would not.

ACT 27:23 For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve,

Previously Paul had spoken through his own judgment. He had said there would be both loss of property and loss of life. Now, speaking through the inspiration of the Spirit of God, he said just the opposite. An angel of God had appeared to him and provided him with the information.

ACT 27:24 Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.

The angel had assured him that he would reach Rome and appear before Caesar, and that everyone on the ship would be safe. The fact that the angel put it the way it was presented indicates that Paul had been praying for his fellow shipmates. It looks as if he had asked for their lives and God had given them to him.

ACT 27:25 Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.

The soldiers should have been starting to believe God also. Paul had the utmost confidence in him and was sure that he would keep his promise. It was

evident to Paul that God was behind much of what had taken place. The Lord wanted him to present the gospel to those in Rome. He would see that Paul had that opportunity.

ACT 27:26 Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.

The angel even went so far as to inform Paul of the manner in which they would be delivered from the storm. They would be grounded upon an island. At this point the name was not given. Later that will be revealed to us.

ACT 27:27 But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country;

After fourteen days and nights of being driven to and fro by the tempest, the sailors decided they were approaching land. We do not know how they knew. Maybe they could hear the waves breaking over rocks on the shore.

ACT 27:28 And sounded, and found it twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms.

In order to verify their conclusions they dropped a line to the bottom of the sea and found it was but twenty fathoms deep. Since a fathom is equal to six

feet, the bottom was one hundred twenty feet below. At the next sounding the depth had decreased to fifteen fathoms or ninety feet. They were rapidly approaching land.

ACT 27:29 Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.

The best they could do at that point was to try to anchor the ship to keep it from being demolished on some rocky beach. They apparently cast out every anchor they had and anxiously waited for daylight. It says nothing about any prayers. That might have been appropriate!!

ACT 27:30 And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship,

The sailors decided upon a plan to save their own lives. They pretended to drop some anchors out of the front of the ship. What they were really doing was attempting to lower the small lifeboat where they could get aboard and leave the rest of the passengers to a watery grave.

ACT 27:31 Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.

Paul knew what they were doing. He spoke very directly. Unless the sailors remained in the ship everyone would lose their life.

ACT 27:32 Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off.

The sailors heard Paul. They allowed the small boat to fall into the sea with no one aboard. This was fortunate for all concerned. If the sailors had tried to make land in the small boat they would no doubt have drowned. With no one left on the ship with sailing skills the entire group of passengers would have met a similar fate.

ACT 27:33 And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing.

The storm had been so severe those aboard the ship had eaten only enough to keep them alive. Paul reminded them that they needed some nourishment to keep on going. There were to be strenuous activities ahead. They would need strength.

ACT 27:34 Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health; for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.

Then Paul made God's promise even more definite. His statement is hyperbole, or exaggeration, but he

told them not a hair of anyone's head would fall. The point was that the damage to human life would be nil.

ACT 27:35 And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat.

The apostle set the example by eating some bread before the rest. Now we find prayer mentioned. It is Paul who led the way. He gave thanks to God in front of all of them. Then he ate.

ACT 27:36 Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat.

The storm was not over. But now there was hope. Others began to follow Paul's example and take nourishment. Their spirits were much higher than before.

ACT 27:37 And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls.

Up to this time we did not know how many persons were on board the ship. Luke uses the word "we" here which lets us know he was present with Paul and Aristarchus. We had not been told how large the ship was. Now we find it was large enough to carry two hundred seventy-six persons. This is a sizable ship.

ACT 27:38 And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.

With the added strength provided by the food, and with the renewed hope provided by Paul's message from the angel of God, they began to throw the cargo overboard and further lighten the ship. It would be able to go farther up on the shore before it was grounded.

ACT 27:39 And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship.

When the day came they could see the land. They had not yet grounded, but seeing the mouth of a creek they felt they might be able to maneuver the ship into the end of the creek where it would hold it fast.

ACT 27:40 And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoised up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.

They hoisted the anchors and raised the sail. This allowed the wind to drive them into the mouth of the creek.

ACT 27:41 And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the

forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.

This verse is a little difficult because it uses the words “two seas.” This probably only means two bodies of water came together at the point where the mouth of the creek was. The ship then ran aground and stuck fast. The storm was not able to dislodge it. However, the violence of the waves was sufficient to break up the back part of the ship.

ACT 27:42 And the soldiers’ counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape.

Roman law specified that if a guard allowed prisoners for which he was responsible to escape, he could be punished with the same punishment planned for them. These soldiers did not look forward to that kind of future. They advised the centurion that it would be wise to kill all of the prisoners rather than see them escape.

ACT 27:43 But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land:

It would have been a sad day for Christianity if the soldiers had succeeded in persuading the centurion to carry out the massacre. The centurion

did not go along with the plan. He took the responsibility in order to save the life of Paul. It seems logical that he gave command for the soldiers to go first and see that the prisoners were rounded up as they reached the shore. This, however, might have been difficult because of the difficulty all of them were encountering in getting to the land.

ACT 27:44 And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.

This must have been quite a sight. Men were floating everywhere. Do not get the idea they were floating on a peaceful sea. The storm was still tossing the waves. They would have found it necessary to cling tightly to whatever was found on the surface of the water. But, as Paul had predicted through the advice of the angel of God, not a single life was lost. Everyone escaped.

Chapter 28

ACT 28:1 And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita.

It is not absolutely certain, but it is commonly believed that the island called Melita by Luke is the one called Malta today. It lies about fifty miles from Sicily and around one hundred seventy-five miles from the mainland of Italy. Luke, Paul and the others would have ascertained the identity of the island from the islanders.

ACT 28:2 And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.

The word “barbarous” leads the modern reader to envision them as savages and uncivilized people. This was not Luke’s intent. They were neither Greeks nor Romans. This first part of the word barbarian was taken from the fact that those who heard them speak had difficulty in understanding them. It seemed that they were saying “bar bar.”

Their actions show they were not savages. They showed great hospitality to the victims of the shipwreck. It was still raining from the storm. The weather was cold. The islanders built a fire and did everything possible to make their visitors comfortable.

ACT 28:3 And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there

came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.

Unlike some present day preachers, Paul pitched in and took part in the labor of gathering sticks for the fire. As he was unloading an armload of sticks, a poisonous serpent came forth. Having been agitated by the fire, it was ready to attack. It bit the apostle on the hand.

Some liberal commentators deny that poisonous snakes exist on the island of Malta. They look with suspicion on the Bible record here. The fact is that today the population of the island of Malta is so dense poisonous snakes are unknown. That was certainly not the case in the days of Paul. Luke was a physician. The people knew the snake was poisonous. To deny the snake was poisonous is to deny the credibility of the scriptures. I do not wish to follow such folly.

ACT 28:4 And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.

Notice that the natives knew the snake was venomous. Venom is poison! They fully expected Paul to be dead within a matter of minutes to hours. According to their thinking Paul must have been a vile criminal who deserved to die. He was probably about to face his deserved punishment.

ACT 28:5 And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.

It did not happen as they expected. Paul just shook his arm and the viper fell off into the fire. The apostle showed not ill effects whatsoever. This was most amazing.

ACT 28:6 Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.

After some time had passed, during which they saw no evidence of pain or discomfort, the pendulum swung in the opposite direction. They decided Paul must be a god, and not a mere man.

Why must men live in extremism? Our outstanding athletes are treated as if they were minigods. The very rich are worshipped for their money. Such individuals may be worthy of a degree of commendation for their accomplishments. The honors they are awarded far exceed their contributions to society, or to the Kingdom of God.

ACT 28:7 In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously.

It is doubtful that Publius offered quarters to some two hundred seventy-six persons. He either had much help from the citizens of the island, or the “us” Luke spoke of included only the leaders such as officers among the sailors and soldiers.

ACT 28:8 And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.

Kind acts are often rewarded in unexpected ways. Publius had been kind to his visitors. Paul returned the favor by helping Publius' father. He laid his hands on the man and prayed. The man became whole.

ACT 28:9 So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed:

Not only Publius, but many others, were made well by Paul. Jesus had forecast just such things when he gave the great commission. He had told his apostles that they would be able to heal the sick, and that if deadly serpents bit them, they would not die.

ACT 28:10 Who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.

This is strange behavior toward prisoners. Paul had risen to a place of honor among those who had become acquainted with him. Again and again we see Paul, with the assistance of God, controlling the attitudes of the people around him.

ACT 28:11 And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had

wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux.

They were on the island of Malta for quite some time. Since it had been late in the fall that the storm arose, simple calculation tells us the departure from the island took place in the early part of the following year.

They began their journey on board a ship of Alexandria. They were about to close their journey on a second one. The sign of Castor and Pollux identified the ship. We would sometimes even call our rowboats by name. Castor and Pollux were thought to be sons of the god Jupiter. The superstitious sailors expected protection from these false gods.

ACT 28:12 And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days.

They were now headed for Italy and Rome once more.

ACT 28:13 And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli:

To fetch a compass was to “go around.” By the time they arrived at Rhegium a south wind began to blow. This was received with great joy. They needed to travel northward. The wind would be at their back. Puteoli was in Italy. They had to make it across the Mediterranean!

ACT 28:14 Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome.

The gospel had traveled ahead of Paul. There were brethren in Italy. Paul was allowed to stay with them for seven days. He was able to spend the Lord's day with them. This would have been interesting. If Paul continued to be chained to a Roman soldier, that soldier must have received an earful! If the soldier was relieved by another soldier every so many hours, there were several of them who heard about the Lord Jesus Christ.

ACT 28:15 And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.

As the prisoners moved toward Rome, the Christians in Rome heard of their arrival. Would they be ashamed of the apostle's chains? He must have been a bit anxious. It was not to be so. They came to Rome to meet him! This gave Paul reason to offer thanks to his Father in heaven. His courage was strengthened for the unknown which faced him in his future appeal.

ACT 28:16 And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.

The centurian was able to deliver his prisoners to his superior officer. What a relief that must have been to him. Much had taken place since he began in Caesarea. He must have wondered if this moment would ever come.

Paul was not kept in a dungeon. He was treated with a degree of dignity. A personal guard was chained to him constantly. It would be some time before action was taken on his case. In the meantime, he had more freedom than one might expect.

ACT 28:17 And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.

Paul was not content to bide his time. It was his custom to go to the Jew first wherever he found himself. He did his best to follow that plan in the present circumstances. He was in Rome as a result of Jewish opposition to his preaching of Christ in Jerusalem. He would present his case before the Jewish leaders in Rome. They would come to hear him because they would be in sympathy with those back in Jerusalem. Warnings would have come from Jerusalem that he was on the way. They would need to resist him.

And so Paul asked them to come together where he could speak to them. He began by stating that he

had broken no custom, nor harmed any of the Jewish people. In spite of that he had been taken as a prisoner and handed over to the Roman authorities. Actually it was the Roman officer in Jerusalem who had arrested him; however, the Jews were the ones who had continually pressed for a sentence of death to be passed on him from the Roman government.

ACT 28:18 Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me.

The apostle reminded his fellow Jews that he had been declared innocent by one court after another. They had found no crime worthy of death. Still he had been confined to appease their fury.

ACT 28:19 But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of.

It had finally become necessary for him to appeal his case all the way to Caesar's palace. That was why he was in Rome. Paul still loved his people. He did not accuse his brethren as a whole. It was the chief priests and the Jewish leaders who had been so insistent on seeing him killed.

ACT 28:20 For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.

Paul could have been extremely bitter toward all the Jews. He was not. He wished to see them safe in the arms of Jesus. He had therefore called these Jewish brethren together to explain to them the importance of the Son of God as the fulfilment of the hope for a Messiah which had so long dwelt in their hearts.

ACT 28:21 And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee.

Surprisingly, they claimed to have heard nothing of his arrest and the trials in the homeland. Perhaps they were honest in this claim. If so, it would give Paul a more neutral ground from which to work. Any animosity would be built up at the moment rather than having festered for many months.

ACT 28:22 But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.

They had gathered because they were interested in what Paul would have to say. They had heard there were Jews who had followed the teachings of Christ. They considered them renegades and called them a sect because they were but a small section of the main body of Jews who still rejected the Lord. They knew there had been much opposition to him.

ACT 28:23 And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging;

to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.

It was difficult for Paul to go to them for the hearing. They, therefore, came to his place of lodging. Once there, they heard him explain the law and the prophets, as they pertained to Jesus Christ.

I would like to add that this should be the way to reach Jews for Christ in every century. the difficulty is that many of the Jewish rabbis today do not know the books of prophecy very well. They have spent enormous amounts of time on the Torah, or books of the law, but they have neglected the prophets. It requires a knowledge of both the law and the prophets to set the complete case for Jesus as the horn of salvation promised by Jehovah.

ACT 28:24 And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.

This is always the way it is when the gospel is preached. There are three classes of persons. There are those who gladly hear the Word of God. There are those who shut their eyes, close their ears and harden their hearts; and there are those who find it easiest just to ignore it and act as if it did not exist. Some in Biblical times were pricked in their hearts and follow this with repentance and baptism. Others were cut to the heart and fell upon the speaker to kill him.

ACT 28:25 And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers,

The Jews departed in a state of confusion. The thing that brought the meeting to a close was Paul's reference to a prophecy of Isaiah.

ACT 28:26 Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive:

Isaiah was talking about those of his own day who were blinding themselves to the truth. Yet the prophecy certainly has a dual application. It applied just as well to the time of Jesus as it did to the time of Isaiah. Paul knew that, and taught it.

ACT 28:27 For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

Isaiah had said that some would hear and not understand. They would see but not perceive the importance of what they saw. They would have hearts scarred with pride and greed. They would refuse to be converted to Christ. Those to whom Paul had spoken fit the mold. Their rejection of the Lord would have dire consequences.

ACT 28:28 Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.

Very few Jews have embraced the teachings of Christ. The Gentile world has been far more receptive than the Jews. It is interesting, however, that as I write these notes there is an increase of interest among the Jews. Would it not be wonderful if large numbers of Jews were to believe and serve? Paul himself said, *“If the Jew be converted it is as life from death.”* But why was the Jew especially mentioned?

I would rejoice to see a world in which great numbers of Jews were applying their abilities to the spread of the Kingdom of Heaven.

ACT 28:29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.

When the Jews who were listening to Paul heard him mention an offer of salvation to the Gentiles, they left amidst much discussion. We can understand why.

ACT 28:30 And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him,

Paul had a hired house. This is evidence that he had some amount of wealth. We do not know the source of his income. He served as a tentmaker during his missionary journeys. Nevertheless, his family must have had sufficient funds to send him off to

school at the feet of the famous teacher Gamaliel. Paul may have inherited some money.

During these two years the apostle wrote a number of the epistles to various places and persons. Among these are Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. He no doubt rejoiced to see visitors come and discuss the Word of God with him. The palace guards must have received a double dose of the truth while they were chained to him.

ACT 28:31 Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

As long as the great man lived we can be certain he continued to speak out for the Master who had appeared to him in brilliant light on the Damascus road. The same confidence with which the apostle preached must be a part of our own presentation of the Word of the Lord today. We are also blessed with much freedom to preach and teach concerning the Kingdom. We must be faithful unto death.

There are many who believe Paul was released from prison and traveled freely preaching Christ. There are things mentioned in his letters to Timothy and Titus that do not fit into what took place previous to this time. They believe he was then imprisoned a second time and lost his life in behalf of his Lord. Luke ends his record with Paul's two year stay under guard. That is where we must also leave it.

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