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by Abe Lincoln

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Acts of the Apostles

By
C. W. "Abe" Lincoln



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“Acts of the Apostles”
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**This book is dedicated to
Dot Lincoln Gibson
for her loving support and Christian
companionship.**

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Preface to the Sunset Bible Study Library

Since 1962 Sunset International Bible Institute has been a leader in teaching God's Word, training local church leaders and preparing preachers and missionaries for effective ministry. Developed in the laboratory of preacher training and proven in the crucible of practical ministry, the Sunset curriculum has grown to forty core courses used both in our resident school and distance learning applications. In 1989 the Sunset Video Studio was inaugurated to record each course of study in a professional format. Those courses, each with a companion study guide, have been used to teach thousands of individual students and develop a world-wide network of video satellite schools in local congregations and mission fields.

Now in printed form that same library of trusted Bible study material is available through Sunset Institute Press for an even wider circle of Bible students, thanks to a benevolent God, an excellent editorial staff and a number of faithful supporters who believed in the project.

This book is the result of a multi-step process which began with a videotaped course. The voice track of the videotape was first transcribed then formatted and edited from spoken to written style. The goal of the editorial process has been to produce a readable document while protecting the course content and the style and personality of the teacher. We believe the goal has been achieved and that each of the forty books planned for the Sunset Bible Study Library will likewise achieve that goal.

Special gratitude must be expressed to Cline Paden and Truman Scott who began the video course series in 1989, to Bob Martin, who directed Sunset Video Studio, to Virgil Yocham and the staff of Sunset External Studies Division who

wrote the study guides, and to the staff of Sunset Translation Center who edited the manuscripts and to each faculty member of Sunset International Bible Institute who took extra time to prepare and present these courses in the studio.

In addition to the English version, this book and its companion volumes are being translated into the major languages of the world to produce a Bible study library which can be used on the mission fields of the world to mature Christians, train church leaders and grow churches that plant other churches.



A companion workbook on this study is available for purchase through Sunset International Bible Institute External Studies, 1(800) 687-2121.

Introduction

The book of Acts is the hinge on which all the New Testament swings. It bridges the gap between what the Gospels promise and what actually comes to pass concerning Christianity. In the Gospels you read of what will be and in the Acts of the Apostles you read of that coming into existence. The church that is promised in Matthew becomes a reality in Acts. The sending of the Holy Spirit promised in the Gospels comes to pass in a display of power in Acts. The long sought redemption hinted at in the Old Testament and previewed in the Gospels is finally experienced in the book of Acts.

Abe Lincoln, one of the finest elders and teachers I have ever known, presents the early teaching of the apostles in a way that only one with the same heart and boldness can. The establishment of the church in Jerusalem and the progress of the church, spread throughout Judea, Samaria, and the entire world, is presented in Acts and Abe does a marvelous job of leading the readers through the journey. As you travel this journey you will discover that the church that was started in Jerusalem is the same church established in every city where the apostles preached the gospel.

The disciples of the early church who acts are recorded in this book of action were not merely men of words and ideas; they were men of action. There is the bold and dramatic movement from Jerusalem and its upper room to Rome and its prison. In the book of Acts, we see a growing group of men and women filled with the dynamic power of a new life. The book of Acts becomes the story of Holy Spirit empowered men who took the gospel far and wide into every nook and hamlet of the then known world.

Abe Lincoln has a unique and incisive way of expressing the spiritual truths presented in Acts. He has given us a

scholarly, evangelistic and warm exposition of the book of Acts. His research on this book is the work of several years of preparing and teaching it in the Sunset School of Preaching, now known as Sunset International Bible Institute. He has influenced thousands of students and other people by his simple, yet profound, approach to this book.

I commend this book to you and pray that you will not only read it, but study it. And may the Spirit which motivated and powered heroes of the book of Acts make us equally adequate for the times in which we live. May God richly bless you as you read and study the material contained in this book.

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY OF ACTS

In many ways the book of Acts is the most neglected book of the New Testament. It bridges a deep chasm between the last words of John in his Gospel, where he presents the proof of the deity of our Lord, and then, beginning in Romans, the twenty-one epistles addressed either to individual Christians, or to various congregations of the Lord's church in the first century. Without the book of Acts, we would not have examples of conversions and recorded sermons of the apostles. This book is the divine guide in all matters pertaining to the establishment, growth, organization, worship, and activities of the church of Christ. Without this book we would not have an account of Jesus sending the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, as we will see when we get to our study of Acts 2, and we would not have a specific and accurate account of the use of some of the empowering miraculous gifts which came from the Spirit and were used among the servants of the Lord in the apostolic age. We will also learn about the indwelling of the Spirit from our study of this book.

The Writer of Acts

This study begins with some introductory material. To begin with, who wrote Acts? From two main passages and strong external evidence, we know that the writer of Acts is the beloved physician Luke. The two passages, Luke 1:1-3 and Acts 1:1-2, clearly show that Luke is the author of both the gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, especially when the

books' beginnings are compared:

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eye witnesses (notice that Luke was able to talk with those who had first hand information about Christianity) and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you might know the certainty of the things you have been taught (Luke 1:1-3).

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen (Acts 1:1-2).

Of the strong external evidence that also leads us clearly to the conclusion that Luke wrote the book of Acts, one document, which was written in the 2nd or 3rd century, tells us that Luke was a prophet of the New Testament who wrote the book of Acts. Writers such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, and Eusebius were notable men who wrote after the first century about Christianity, and all of them state that Luke was the writer of this book. We know that the Holy Spirit is the author, but Luke was the writer.

Let us consider at this point who Luke really was. We know that Luke was a companion of Paul and a co-worker in the gospel. This is proven in the following way: The writer of Acts is included in the sections that are called the "we" sections: "we concluded," "we had this experience," etc. When one gets to Acts 16:10, chapters 20 and 21, and then chapters 27 and 28, there are more passages where it says "we" did thus

and so. So whoever the writer was, he was a co-laborer with the apostle Paul. Philemon 24 also speaks of Luke as a companion and co-worker with the apostle Paul. The stories recorded in Luke and Acts about diseases and their traits cause us to think that whoever wrote these two books had some interest in the language and practice of medicine. In Colossians 4:10-14 we learn that Luke was a Gentile, and he was a dear friend and a physician.

So, it is clear from the Bible and external evidence that Luke wrote the Book of Acts, and was a Gentile doctor who was a dear friend, companion, and co-worker with Paul on his journeys.

The Date of Acts

The evidence indicates that Luke wrote this letter after the end of Paul's two years of Roman imprisonment, recorded in Acts 28. When the book is concluded in a victorious way, Paul is in the imperial city of Rome in his own rented house. He is teaching and preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the things concerning our Lord, and no one is forbidding him. What a victorious conclusion to this marvelous book! But that is when the book closes, and so we put the date at about A.D. 63. Consider the evidence for this date. **First**, we have the way Acts is concluded (28:30-31). Obviously, this book was written before Paul's trial or death. Secular history tells us that Paul suffered death through the infamous decision of Nero in about A.D. 67. There is no reference at all to Paul's death in this book. There is no hint of Nero's persecution of the church in and around the city of Rome in A.D. 64. **Second**, there is no reference to the Jewish war or to the destruction of Jerusalem, which occurred in A.D. 70. Also, there is no discussion of the Gnostic heresy of later years, against which the epistles of John speak. Finally, we believe that Paul was able to go teach and preach Christ for a number of years before his final appointment of death. We conclude, then, that the book was written around A.D. 63, after Paul was released from

his first imprisonment. A reading of Philippians 1 and the little book of Philemon, both written while he was imprisoned, supports this conclusion and gives one the idea that Paul was anticipating his release.

The Recipient of the Book

It is observed in Luke 1:1-3 and Acts 1:1 that the books are addressed to Theophilus, whose name means “One who loves God.” Some have said it means “a friend of God,” but most definitions share the concept that it is “One who loves God.” What a beautiful name! Names are very significant, and one will also notice that he is referred to as “most excellent” in Luke’s account. In the book of Acts, first in 23:25-26, then in 24:3, and also in 26:25, every time the expression “most excellent” is used, it has reference to a governor or some person with an official capacity in the Roman empire. So we know that Theophilus is the intended recipient of the book and we can infer that Theophilus was some person with an official capacity in the Roman Empire.

From the events that Luke pays special attention to throughout the book, Theophilus obviously wanted to know if it were possible for a person to be a government official, and, at the same time, be a devoted disciple of the Lord. As a result, the book of Acts addresses this issue perhaps more than any New Testament book. In Acts 10 a centurion, Cornelius by name, became obedient to the faith. In Acts 16 a jailer in Philippi and his entire household became obedient to the faith. There is no indication that these public servants ceased to be such servants in the body of Christ. It seems that God does permit a person to be His minister, as Paul refers to such ministers of the government (Romans 13), and, at the same time, be His faithful servant in the body of Christ. We will learn more about this concept through Paul’s imprisonment, Peter’s imprisonment in Acts 12, and other references in the New Testament.

Therefore, the recipient of the book of Acts was

Theophilus, who we believe had a pressing question on his mind. This book answers his question, while giving us the history of the early church.

The Purpose and Design of the Book

As the name suggests, Acts covers the important deeds and actions of the Apostles, and the text especially emphasizes the deeds of Peter and Paul. Through a historical account of the early church, the book's purpose and design focuses on Jesus as the Messiah, the work of the Holy Spirit, and Christian living for the new converts – both Jew and Gentile. This is accomplished through a look at various topics that include Jesus as the long expected Messiah, which is proved by prophecy and His resurrection; the promise of Jesus to baptize with the Spirit, as seen in Acts 1; the empowering and the indwelling of the Spirit; the Christian's responsibilities and privileges in relation to the government; that one comes into the family of God through a process known as conversion, in which a "new birth" is experienced. The whole Jewish economy was fulfilled and superseded by the law of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. We learn from the book of Acts about the universal nature of Christianity. That all of the promises and blessings of the gospel are for all people. We learn in the study of Acts 10, that God does not show favoritism; and every needed line of information pertaining to the work and worship of the church is given in this book.

The Promise and Ascension

Instructions From the Resurrected Christ

In my former book, (that is, the gospel of Luke) O, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing

proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:1-3).

We will learn about the origin, the progress, and the dispersion of the church beginning in Acts 1 and continuing through Acts 8:4, according to Christ's instructions. These few chapters will tell us about the beginning and the progress of the Lord's church in the city of Jerusalem. In Acts 2, we will learn specifically about the establishment, or the birthday, of the body of Christ.

In Acts 1 we have the days of expectation, the events that led up to the beginning of the church. Notice in these first few verses, that Luke refers to all that the Lord began to do and teach. Our Lord wasn't just a teacher; He was a doer. This is the action of the Lord, as well as the doctrine of the Lord, as recorded in the gospel of Luke. Luke tells us in Luke 24 about the bodily ascension of our Lord, which is the event recorded in the context of Acts 1.

Before His bodily ascension back to heaven, Jesus gave the apostles His first set of instructions. He gave what we call the Great Commission. Notice that the Lord had given orders to the apostles. He ordered them to go and preach the gospel to every creature, and to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). The Lord gave these orders by, or through, the Holy Spirit. That would indicate that the entire ministry of our Lord, His teaching and His ministry, as recorded from His baptism, was under the leadership, influence, guidance, and instruction of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' second set of instructions for the apostles is found in Acts 1:4-5, which says,

On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with

water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

This is the last promise that our Lord gave the apostles concerning the sending of the Holy Spirit, but comment will be reserved about what the baptism of the Holy Spirit really was until chapter 2. In 1:6 we read, "*So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"*" By the nature of that question, it is seen that they still do not have the full appreciation and understanding of the redemptive spiritual kingdom of Christ that the Lord was going to establish. The Lord, rather than getting into an in-depth discussion since He had presented the truth over and over again prior to His death, responded in this way:

He said to them, 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:7-8).

The Lord said, "If you will wait here in the city of Jerusalem until the appointed time, what I send from the right-hand side of the father, the Holy Spirit, will guide you into all truth and make you remember all that I have previously spoken to you. At that particular time, you will know the answer to this question you have asked. You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you."

We need to observe in the book of Acts that every time the Holy Spirit "came upon" people, or "fell upon" an individual, it was a miraculous empowering from the Spirit, not the indwelling of the Spirit. This will be emphasized repeatedly, because this concept is so misunderstood in the world today in regard to the work and nature of the Holy Spirit. So Jesus said

in Acts 1:7-8 that you will have miraculous power from the Holy Spirit. It will come upon you “*. . . and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*”

We will see the carrying out of this promise. The church will be firmly established in Jerusalem. They will go to the other provinces of Judea and finally go into Samaria (Acts 8). Paul will begin his ministry among the Gentiles in chapters 13 and 14, and from that point we will read about all of his other missionary tours, ending in the imperial city of Rome. Our study will begin in Jerusalem (Acts 2) and end up in the city of Rome (Acts 28). The Lord said, “Here is what will occur: I’m giving you my marching orders; you are going to be my witnesses to the farthest parts of the world.”

So, we can see from scripture that before Christ ascended into heaven, He gave the disciples two important instructions. He gave them the Great Commission by telling them to go into the entire world, and He gave them the Promise of the Holy Spirit by telling them to wait for the gift His Father promised.

Also, within these first three verses of Acts chapter one, there are two specific words that require further comment. The word “apostle,” as used in verse 2 of this text, means “one sent forth with a commission.” The apostles had to have certain credentials, or qualifications, in order to be apostles of Christ. In contrast, we will learn in Acts 13 and 14 that there were apostles of churches. The context enables us to determine whether or not they were apostles of Christ or apostles of the various churches. The church at Antioch sent out some brothers, making them men who were “sent forth with a commission” to teach and preach the gospel of Christ. But the apostles in Acts chapter one were the apostles of Christ.

“Kingdom,” as used in Acts 3:1, is the second word that requires more comment. Sometimes the word “kingdom” refers to the body of Christ, the church. Sometimes it just refers to God’s dominion and rule over our lives, in our hearts, and in our minds. This was the message that the Lord presented prior

to His death on the cross. He said that the kingdom was near and He asked the brothers to pray for its coming (Matthew 6:9-10). We are going to read about the actual establishment of this kingdom in Acts 2.

The Resurrected Ministry of Forty Days

The record tells us that the Lord presented Himself alive after His suffering and death on the cross. We are told in Acts 1:1-3 that during the forty-day period before His ascension, He was presenting the convincing and infallible, one version says, proofs of His bodily resurrection from the dead. This is the only place in the New Testament that tells us the length of the post-resurrection ministry of Jesus. During this time, Christ was speaking to them about the things concerning the kingdom of God, God's rule and reign in their hearts and in their lives, beginning on the day of Pentecost.

Remember that Jesus really did present Himself alive after His bodily resurrection. The Lord did this on ten different occasions as recorded in the gospels. Notice the characteristics of these appearances. They were visible appearances. They were audible; the Lord was speaking to them, as we read in verse 3. He was tangible; they could handle Him. Luke 24:39 tells us this, as does John 20, when Thomas had to be convinced of the bodily resurrection of the Lord. Sometimes His appearance was very sudden (Luke 24:13). It was intermittent, as John 20:19-26 would indicate. But the main theme of the Bible is Christ and His kingdom, and the Lord spoke to His disciples after His resurrection about His kingdom.

The Ascension

Chapter one of Acts is leading up to the occasion that Luke records in Acts 2. To get a better picture of this, we must consider Luke's account of the ascension in both his gospel and in the book of Acts. In the Gospel of Luke's account of the ascension, the events leading up to the bodily ascension of

Jesus and the ascension itself are recorded (Luke 24). In Luke 24:46-47, Luke records Jesus' final message to His disciples:

He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem.’

In Acts 1:8 we read what is recorded in Luke 24:48: “*You are witnesses of these things.*” And then, in verse 49, Luke records, “*I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.*”

Luke then records the ascension of Jesus back to heaven:

When he led them out as far as Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came about that while he was blessing them (while he was praying for them), he left them and was taken up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple, praising God (Luke 24:50-53).

Verse 53 ought to be remembered, because in Acts 2, the apostles are in the temple area when the gifts from the Spirit come upon them, and they begin to praise God in foreign languages and to preach the gospel. Remember that Luke tells us that they were spending a lot of time in the temple praising God.

In the Acts account of the ascension, Luke writes in Acts 1:9-10,

After he had said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going,

when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. Obviously, here are two angels from heaven. ‘*Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way* (of course, that means visibly and bodily) *you have seen him go into heaven.’ Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying (Acts 1:11-13a).*

In that upper room were the apostles, who are listed along with some others:

Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers (Acts 1:13b-14).

Something interesting to note is that this is the last reference we have to the mother of our Lord and to His brothers.

Notice in these verses some things about the bodily ascension of the Lord. Our Lord was taken up, a cloud hid Him, and He ascended back to heaven. He ascended in a glorified body to heaven, and He began to rule and reign at the right hand of the Father, as we are going to read when we get to Acts 2. The record says in 1:10-11 that two angels stood by the apostles and said Jesus will come a second time. That is such an important topic that Hebrews 9:27-28, Philippians 3:20, 2 Thessalonians 1, and I John 3, tell us that our Lord will one day appear visibly and bodily.

From the Ascension to the Day of Pentecost

After learning of Jesus' ascension in Acts 1, we are then told about Jesus' followers and what they did during the ten days between the ascension and Pentecost. The apostles and 120 others were all meeting in an upstairs room (1:13), but who are these assembled 120 persons? They are the apostles of Christ – Luke records their names – and certain disciples, the relatives of Jesus, and His mother. We know that our Lord appeared to more than 500 people at one time (1 Corinthians 15), so it is possible some of these people, after becoming one of His followers, were part of the 120. Also, Jesus had a lot of disciples in Galilee where He had done much of His teaching and preaching, and some of these could have been present as well.

What did these disciples do, prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit and the power they would receive from the Spirit on the day of Pentecost? The record tells us that they were joined together constantly in prayer. Notice the importance of seeking God's blessing and will in the matter of preparation for the forthcoming redemptive spiritual kingdom of our Lord. What a proper way to be prepared for the beginning day of the church of the New Testament. They devoted themselves to prayer. This is not the last time that we will read of their being publicly and even privately devoted to the matter of prayer.

Other events took place during this time. One of the most important was the selection of the successor to Judas. The next chapter will begin with Luke recording for us in Acts 1:15 that selection process.

THE TIME OF PENTECOST

The Selection of Mathias to Replace Judas —The Fallen One

The Reason Described By Peter

In this chapter, beginning in Acts 1:15, we learn about the selection of Matthias to be an apostle of Christ. One hundred twenty people had come together. Peter stood up, as he was the spokesman, and he made reference to what the Holy Spirit had prophesied through David concerning Judas (1:16). It is very important to observe that God is a God who can foreknow the events of the future. I do not know of a passage that says He has chosen to foreknow every event; however, God, in His foreknowledge, was able to see the choice that Judas would make in allowing Satan to dominate his life, to be overcome with covetousness and sin in his life. God can foreknow, without forcing men to do what they do. We must understand and appreciate God's foreknowledge. We are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God, as Peter said in I Peter 1:2. Yet, we were not forced to become disciples of our Lord. We had the choice. But God in his foreknowledge saw what choice people would make.

Peter then told about what happened to Judas. Judas (go back to Matthew 27 and read the account there) was given to worldly sorrow, not Godly sorrow, and worldly sorrow leads to death. He threw the money he had received for his betrayal at the feet of some of the leaders of Judaism. He went out and hung himself, the record tells us, and they took the proceeds of the evil deed that Judas had done and bought a plot of ground. This is referred to in Acts 1:18, and Luke describes this field

that was bought with Judas' money. The record tells us that after Judas hung himself, the body fell from where he was hung, into this field, and the body burst open and all of his bowels gushed out. Not a beautiful picture is it? But we need to know what happened to this man who had all the potential of being the same kind of an apostle and servant that the other men were. He fell through his own transgression. Acts 1:25 helps us understand this, "*. . . to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.*" The nature of his sin is described along with the consequences of the sin. Now that Judas has so sinned, there needs to be another apostle selected.

A New Apostle Chosen—Matthias

In this meeting we are told the qualifications of an apostle. Acts 1:21-22 says,

Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.

The Lord selected the first twelve apostles from among John's disciples, which would, of course, tell us that John had baptized them. In John 1, we can get a full picture of the disciples of John hearing the Lord and then becoming His apostles. However, along with having been among the disciples from the time of John the Baptist, the new apostle also had to be an eyewitness of the bodily resurrection of the Lord. There were two men who met these qualifications. One was Justus (also called Joseph or Barsabbas), and the other was Matthias. The Lord only needed one of them, so all they could do was pray. *Then they prayed, 'Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this*

apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs' (Acts 1:24-25). They drew lots, and through this process the Lord selected Matthias to be the apostle. Luke says he was added to the eleven apostles, and will be one of the twelve that Luke will refer to beginning in Acts 2.

The Great and Amazing Beginning

The Apostles Filled With the Spirit On Pentecost

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place ("they" were the apostles, as we see in 1:26). Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what appeared to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them (the twelve) speaking in his own language (or dialect) (Acts 2:1-6).

In the verses following this passage, Luke gives a list of all the various nations represented on the day of Pentecost. However, for the remainder of this chapter, we want to (1) learn the meaning of the day of Pentecost, (2) study the nature of the Holy Spirit, (3) learn about the event called the baptism with the Holy Spirit, and (4), study about the miraculous empowering from the Holy Spirit which came upon the apostles.

The Day of Pentecost

We see that the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit (2:4). We need to learn the significance of that statement. In

the chapters to follow, it will be explained in further detail. However, let us look in this chapter at a few topics that will contribute to our understanding of the statement made above. To begin with, let us think about the day of Pentecost. This word means “fiftieth.” In Leviticus 23:15-24 and Exodus 23:16, we learn that Pentecost occurred fifty days after the Passover Sabbath. It was seven weeks and then the next day, so this annual feast called Pentecost would occur upon the first day of the week, Sunday. That is very significant to know, because the events recorded in Acts 2 regarding the establishment of the church, took place on the first day of the week.

Four Names Given To This Feast

There are three names given to this feast in the Old Testament, and one name given in the New Testament. It is called the **Feast of Harvest** in Exodus 23, since it occurred during the wheat harvest. They would harvest the “firstfruits” and offer this as a “wave offering” to the LORD, as He had instructed. It is called the **Feast of the Firstfruits** in Leviticus 23, and the **Feast of Weeks** in Deuteronomy 16, as well as in Exodus 34. The New Testament refers to it as **Pentecost**, which means “fiftieth.” Many of the Jews considered this one of the greatest feasts of the year. It caused the gathering of one of the largest groups of people in the city of Jerusalem.

The Nature of the Spirit

Luke tells us in the first few verses of Acts 2 that the apostles were filled, or influenced and controlled, by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. But before we talk about their being influenced by the Spirit, let us spend a little time discussing the nature of the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit is God, and He possesses the same divine attributes of deity that God the Father, and God the Son possess. The scriptures refer to the Holy Spirit as eternal (Hebrews 9:14). In 1 Corinthians 2:10b Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit being

omniscient, “*The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.*” Since He possesses the attributes and characteristics of the essence of deity, He was able to reveal the message of the gospel of Christ to the apostles and teach them what they had to receive (1 Corinthians 2).

Only God could reveal, make known, and even confirm that redemptive message. The Holy Spirit has the same nature and essence of God, being co-eternal and co-equal with God the Father and God the Son. In Psalm 139:7ff, we learn that He is omnipresent. A person cannot go anywhere without finding the presence of the Holy Spirit of God. He performed miracles (1 Corinthians 14). Paul discusses the miraculous gifts from the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 4:4-11 and affirms that the Holy Spirit was the source of these miraculous gifts, and that the Holy Spirit gave gifts as He willed to give those gifts.

The Holy Spirit is a divine Person. He possesses the attributes of divine personality. Nine times, in John 16:13-14, our Lord spoke of the Holy Spirit as a divine Person. He was life, He was thought, volition, action, speech, individuality, character and influence. In 1 Timothy 4:1 Paul said that the Holy Spirit speaks, and He empowered the apostles to speak foreign languages, as we are seeing in our study of Acts 2. The Holy Spirit teaches and witnesses (John 14:26; 15:26). The Holy Spirit hears and guides (John 16:13). Second Timothy 3:16 tells us that the Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the Old and New Testaments, as well as every prophet of God. These are characteristics of a divine person who possesses intelligence. The Holy Spirit can be grieved, and He can be resisted and blasphemed (Ephesians 4:30, Acts 7:31; Matthew 12:32). Only a divine personality can be treated in this manner. The Holy Spirit is pictured as a divine being that is living, speaking, acting, influencing, blessing, reconciling, transforming and loving.

The Baptism With the Holy Spirit

A Prediction and A Promise

At this point, we need to look at an event called the baptism with the Spirit. The baptism with the Spirit was a prediction and a promise (Matthew 3; Mark 1:8; Luke 3). There are several promises recorded by Matthew and Luke concerning the sending, or the baptism with, the Spirit. In the third chapter of Matthew, we read of the ministry of John the Baptist. The record tells us he came preaching in the wilderness of Judea. His message was, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near*” (Matthew 3:1). Matthew then records that some had come to hear John, the great servant of the Lord, preach. Some of them were Pharisees, and some were Sadducees. Notice what John said to these impenitent people who were now his audience,

. . . ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our father.” I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax (here is God’s judgment about to come upon the Jewish nation) is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. (Next is the prediction or promise of the baptism with the Spirit.) *I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire’* (Matthew 3:7b-11).

The baptism with the Spirit was not anything administered by man. We see that from the context of Luke 3, as well as Matthew 3. In John 1:33-34 John the Baptist declares that Jesus

would be the baptizer. Anything that took place before Pentecost could not be the baptism with the Spirit. We learn that from Acts 1, where the Lord said that what John had predicted and promised, would come in a few days (1:5).

Whatever the event called “the baptism with the Spirit” was, Jesus would be the administrator of it. John said, “The One who is coming after me, the Lord Jesus Christ, will be the one who will baptize with the Spirit and with fire.” Luke’s account is very similar to what we read here in Matthew, but he adds an interesting statement that we want to look at. First, the record tells us that the ax is laid at the root of the trees (Luke 3:9a), “*... and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire*” (Luke 3:9b). This is almost word for word the same as Matthew 3:7. The people wanted to know what to do to repent. Some of the people present in the audience, like soldiers, were asking what all was involved in repentance. They were in a state of great expectation, and all were wondering about John, if perhaps he might be the Anointed One, the Christ (3:15). John said, “I am not worthy to even tie or untie His sandals.” Then, however, (and this is the part Luke adds)

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Luke 3:16b-17). Notice that John was speaking to them all. “*John answered them all, ‘I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you (all of you) with the Holy Spirit and with fire’*” (Luke 3:16).

That is a key passage of scripture, because if we just had Acts 1 as the only reference regarding the baptism with the Spirit, we might conclude that only the apostles were given this

promise. But from Matthew's account, and especially now with Luke's account, we see that He was speaking to all of the people who were present. Some were impenitent, and some were believers—obedient believers—who had been baptized by John and who were anticipating the coming of the Lord's kingdom.

The power to perform miracles is not the baptism with the Spirit. In the Old Testament certain men were given power from the Spirit, and the apostles were empowered by the Spirit before the day of Pentecost. Luke 10 tells about the limited commission and some of the gifts from the Spirit that were granted to the apostles in that limited ministry. The miraculous gift of inspiration was not the baptism of the Spirit. Holy men of God in Old Testament times, with that gift, spoke as the Holy Spirit guided them and moved them (2 Peter 1:21). Second Timothy 3 confirms this by explaining that every scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. Therefore, we know the baptism with the Holy Spirit was a prediction and a promise that could only be administered by Christ. It is for everyone and not just for the apostles. We also know that it did not give power to perform miracles.

The Power-Giver Is Distinguished From the Power

The baptism with the Spirit did not have reference to the miraculous gifts, but the Holy Spirit gave these gifts. It is very important that we understand the difference between the power-giver, the sending and the giving of the Holy Spirit, and then the Holy Spirit giving these gifts, as He wants to give them. Jesus was to give, or send, the Spirit, the power-giver. The Lord referred to the promise given by the Father. We have already read that in Acts 1, as well as in Luke 24:49. Jesus is God's spokesman, and He promised the sending, or the coming, of the Holy Spirit. Jesus referred to this event in John 7, where a statement is made concerning the sending, or the coming, of the Holy Spirit. We see that Luke refers to Joel's promise in Joel 2 as the "pouring forth of the Spirit." We will

comment on that in a moment. When John the Baptist referred to this event, he called it the “baptism with the Spirit.” Whenever the Lord referred to it, He called it the “sending of the Spirit.” We are going to see this in John 7, as well as in John 14, 15 and 16. In John 7 the Lord came to Jerusalem for the great feast, and He stood and cried out saying,

... ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive (notice they had not yet received the Spirit; they were to receive the indwelling Spirit as obedient believers). Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified (John 7:37-39).

The Spirit could not be sent until after the Lord was glorified. In Acts 2 Jesus was glorified at the right-hand of the Father, and then He sent, or poured forth, the Holy Spirit of God. We are trying to see how Jesus refers to what we have just read in Acts 2 in its fulfillment.

In the last few verses of John 14, the Lord talks about the coming or the sending of the Holy Spirit. In John 14:26, Jesus says, “*But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*” Notice that the Father would send the Holy Spirit to the apostles in the name of Jesus, and after the Spirit was sent, He would empower them with the gift of revelation. They would receive power (Acts 1:8) to receive the revelation from the Holy Spirit and the confirming gifts that the Holy Spirit gave. In John 15:26, we read, “*When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.*” Jesus’ promise in this particular passage is that He would be at the right-hand side of the Father when he sent the

Holy Spirit to the apostles.

John 16:7-13 is also a very important passage of scripture. It tells of the function of the Spirit through the apostles. He would come and convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. We need to understand that the sermons of Acts 2 and 3, and other apostolic sermons, convicted people of their unbelief and unrighteousness and of the judgment to come. That is what the Lord said the Spirit would do in the message of truth (16:9). He then talks about other things that He would like to present to the apostles, but they could not yet bear these things (16:12). John 16:13 says,

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

The Nationalistic Concept of the Apostles

There is one other thing that we need to look at before we try to draw a conclusion about what the event, “the baptism with the Spirit,” really meant, and what is included in that expression. In Mark 10, beginning with verse 35, the prophet tells us of a conversation that Jesus had with some of the apostles. They did not yet understand the design and nature of the coming of the kingdom of our Lord, and so a request was made of Jesus. “*Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him. ‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.’*” And he said, “Well, what do you want me to do?” They said, “Allow us to sit in your glory, one on your right and one on your left.” Our Lord had talked about the fact that the apostles would sit with him ruling in the time of regeneration (Matthew 19:27-30). We need to understand that the apostles on this occasion thought that somehow the Lord was going to be ruling upon the earth as some sort of sovereign ruler, rather than ruling from heaven, and they wanted their position to be right next to Him if possible. The

Lord said, “You do not know what you are asking. You do not understand how you will be ruling through the gospel, through the Word. The Spirit will make all of this possible and I will be ruling and reigning from heaven at the right-hand of the Father.”

He then asked them a question: Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized? Notice that the Lord referred to the baptism here in a figurative way to describe His death on the cross. The only reason this is referred to in this way is that we might see that the term “baptizing” in this context is used in a figurative way. It refers to the actual event of His death on the cross, but it is still a figurative expression. So the term “baptizing” is a figurative term, just as the term “poured forth” is a figurative expression that we read about when we get to Acts 2:17. Although these are figurative expressions, they have actual reference to the sending of the Holy Spirit by Jesus on the day of Pentecost.

Conclusion

The event called “the baptizing with the Spirit” has occurred, but before this chapter draws to a close, we must read Acts 2:17, where Peter is standing up and speaking to this huge audience present on the day of Pentecost. He says that all of this is the result of what was spoken of through the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28).

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.

The baptizing with the Spirit, and the outpouring of the Spirit, are different ways to refer to the same event. In the New Testament, the expression “poured forth” means to pour out oil or whatever is being poured out. This is seen from comparable

studies in John 2:15 and Revelation 16 particularly, and in Titus 3. In these passages an unlimited pouring of all of the contents is referred to. So in Acts 2 all of the Spirit that was to be sent, given, or poured forth, had been poured forth, or had been sent by Jesus from heaven itself. The term poured forth and baptizing are figurative expressions used in the New Testament to describe the actual, literal sending of the Spirit by Jesus on the day of Pentecost.

In the next chapter we will continue this study of the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit, and will look closely at the conclusion of Peter's sermon on Pentecost. May God continue to bless us all in our study of this, a most important section, of His word, and may He bless us with further understanding of the Holy Spirit and His working in our lives.

THE HOLY SPIRIT (1)

The Holy Spirit Given

The Spirit Poured Forth As Promised

We have seen so far in our study that John the Baptist said that Jesus would be the administrator of the baptism with the Spirit. The Lord would make it possible, as we read from Acts 2:17 and the following verses, that in the last days, God would pour forth the Spirit. Here, the promise is found that the pouring forth of the Spirit would occur in the last days. Peter said that this is what Joel had prophesied (cf. Joel 2:28-32).

We have seen that the baptism with the Spirit was the promise of the coming, or the outpouring, of the Spirit by Jesus on the day of Pentecost, and that the expressions “poured forth” and “baptism” are figurative expressions that are used to describe the actual, or literal, sending of the Spirit on that day. Before studying the empowering gifts from the Spirit that we read about in Acts 2, we read in Acts 2:33, toward the conclusion of Peter’s Messianic sermon which convicted 3,000 people of their unbelief and unrighteousness, *“Exalted to the right hand of God, he (that is, Jesus) has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.”* Earlier, in John 7:35, we learned that at that particular point in the Lord’s ministry, the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet been glorified. Peter is now stating in Acts 2:33 that Jesus has been glorified, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He is now exalted there, and so it is the appointed time for the sending of the Spirit.

The Greek expression “poured” in this verse is in the Greek aorist tense, which means a complete act at one point of time in the past. We do not know how long it took for each of

the apostles to praise and magnify God and His greatness in all of the various languages of the people who were present in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, or how much time elapsed between Acts 2:1 and 2:33; but in 2:33, Peter goes back to the very time that the Spirit was poured forth or sent. He said, regarding the promise of the Father to pour forth the Holy Spirit, or to send the Holy Spirit, that this has already occurred. When he said, "*He has poured forth this . . .*" it meant that the complete act, at one point of time in the past, has been completed today. When Jesus sent the Spirit that day, then that promise of the sending, or the baptizing with, the Spirit occurred.

The Spirit Is Intended for All People

In order to further confirm this point, we go to Acts 10. Acts 10 is greatly misunderstood by religious people today. The chapter deals with Cornelius, the first uncircumcised Gentile to hear, believe and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to become a fellow-heir of the body of Christ, the church of our Lord. Some unusual events took place in this chapter. First, we are told of the traits and characteristics of this man Cornelius. He was an outstanding man, a God-fearing man, but he was a sinner, and he knew he was a sinner. He was obviously pleading for God to help him understand more about Jesus. According to Acts 10, he knew a few things regarding the Lord, but not enough to produce faith in Him, which would save him. So he was appealing to the Father in prayer, and God heard his prayer. An angel appeared to him and told him to send for the apostle Peter, who would come and speak words by which he and his household could be saved. After several days, Peter finally came to Caesarea in Philippi, where this man Cornelius and his household were. They greeted one another (Acts 10:23), and Peter, after some introductory comments, began to preach to this man, presenting the very words by which Cornelius and his household could be saved. In Acts 10:43 Peter said to Cornelius,

'All the prophets testify about him (that is, Jesus) that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.' While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.

In Acts 1:8 Jesus had promised that the apostles would receive power, that it would "fall on them." Earlier it was pointed out, that every time a passage says, "concerning the Spirit," it means that the Spirit had fallen on certain individuals, or had come upon them, and it had reference to some miraculous gift from the Spirit. This was not the indwelling of the Spirit that every Christian then, and even today, received at the point of believing obedience to Christ. While Peter was presenting the words by which Cornelius and his household could be saved, the Spirit fell on all those who were listening to the message. Peter is preaching, and Cornelius and his whole household are listening, as well as all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter. God wanted the events of Acts 10 confirmed with a sufficient number of reputable witnesses. In Acts 11:12 it is seen that six brothers were accompanying Peter. All seven of them are astonished that the empowering from the Spirit, in the form of the gift of tongues, has come upon Cornelius and his household. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also (10:45), and they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. We will come back to these verses a little later when we discuss the empowering from the Holy Spirit, but this serves as an example of the directed power of the Spirit without the laying on of the hands of the apostles.

Peter and those with him were astonished. They now recognized that on the day of Pentecost, Peter had proclaimed, without a full understanding, that in the last days God would pour forth His Spirit upon all flesh (Acts 2:17; Joel 2:28). In

the last days, how much of the Spirit would be poured forth? **All** of the Spirit would be poured forth, or sent, upon all flesh.

The words “poured out” in Acts 10:45 are in the Greek perfect tense, which denotes a process completed in the past, but continues having present results. Something in the past had occurred, so Peter goes all the way back to the beginning to explain what it was. Acts 11 talks about Pentecost as the beginning. Peter is explaining to the apostles and brothers there why he had gone and preached Christ to an uncircumcised man and his household and why he had not only talked to them, but had fellowship with them, taught them, and baptized them into Christ. They did not understand, so Peter had to explain it to them. The first sixteen verses of the chapter record that explanation. When they heard it, they immediately stopped their controversy with Peter and began to praise God, saying that truly, God has granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life. Peter is explaining the events in the order that they took place, and he said, *“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning”* (Acts 11:15). When the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius, it meant that the Spirit came upon him to empower him with some miraculous gift. Peter said, “As I began to speak these very words by which Cornelius and his household could be saved, the sermon was interrupted, and the Holy Spirit fell on them just as he did on us at the beginning!” Peter had to go all the way back to Pentecost to find another incident where the Holy Spirit had directly empowered a servant of the Lord.

In Acts 2 we learned that the Spirit fell on the apostles and empowered them on the day of Pentecost. No one laid their hands on the apostles in order that they might receive some gift from the Spirit. In Acts 10, while Peter is preaching, the Holy Spirit, without the laying on of hands, empowered Cornelius and his household with the gift of tongues. The purpose of the empowering from the Holy Spirit was to convince both Jew and Gentile that God was going to save the Gentiles, just as He was the Jews, on the basis of faith in Christ, and that Cornelius

did not have to be circumcised in order to be saved. The first few verses of Acts 15 illustrate that truth where Peter, years later, had to refer to Cornelius' salvation in the discussion which took place in Jerusalem, to prove that point. But here, in Acts 10:45, Peter said, "Oh, I am amazed and astonished. I understand now for the first time that when Jesus sent the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, it was sent one time for all time and that it was for all men. Since the Holy Spirit was sent upon all flesh, I can understand how the Holy Spirit was available to empower Cornelius." It was the will of the Spirit to do so on this occasion. This shows that the sending of the Spirit, the baptizing with the Spirit, was an event that took place on the day of Pentecost.

We need to be reminded of the significance of what we have seen here in Acts 2 regarding the sending, the pouring forth, or the baptism with, the Spirit. That event took place as recorded here on the day of Pentecost. It was the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit by Jesus as He said He would do in John 14, 15 and 16. The terms "poured forth," and "baptism," are figurative expressions, which are used by the New Testament to describe the literal, or actual, sending of the Spirit. We can begin to see that what Jesus promised to do was to send the power-giver, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, the Helper. After the Lord sent the Holy Spirit, He immediately began to give gifts as He willed, in the first century. We are going to see in our study that the Holy Spirit gave gifts directly to the apostles (Acts 2), to Cornelius (Acts 10), and, we would infer, to Saul of Tarsus after he was converted (Acts 9). It is not as clear regarding Saul as it is with the apostles in Acts 2 and Cornelius in Acts 10. Without the laying on of hands, the Spirit directly empowered the apostles and empowered Cornelius and his household with the gift of tongues, and we know the purpose of such empowering.

The Effect of the Holy Spirit's Power on the Multitude

Having looked at the baptism with the Spirit, we want to consider some of the miraculous gifts from the Spirit. We will see that some received the Spirit directly to empower them, and others received the Spirit to empower them through the laying on of the apostles' hands.

The Apostles Empowered by the Holy Spirit to Speak in Tongues

We see that when the Holy Spirit "came upon" the apostles (Acts 2:4), they were "filled with" the Holy Spirit. The expression means "to be influenced by," or "controlled by." If we say a person is "filled with anger," we know that he is controlled and influenced by that anger. If one is filled with the Spirit, he is influenced and controlled by the Spirit. There are passages that teach us that we are to be filled with the Spirit. We are to be influenced by the Spirit's message and demonstrate it in our praise to (Ephesians 5:18-19), and in our worship of God in the singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

The context of a passage helps us determine whether or not it was a miraculous empowering or the ordinary empowering through the word. In Acts, the record tells us that after the apostles were filled with the Spirit, He began to immediately influence the apostles. The Spirit gave the apostles the ability to speak in foreign languages. They began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled and willed to give such gifts to them (1 Corinthians 12:11; Hebrews 2:3-4).

The Effect on The Crowd

Notice the effect of the gift of tongues on this huge audience on the day of Pentecost. "*When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language (or dialect)*" (Acts 2:6). We get the word "dialect" from the word that is

translated “language.” It was not just the language that these people spoke back in their home country, it was the very dialect of that language which they heard from each of the apostles. We do not know how long it took for Peter and the other apostles to speak in each of the dialects of the people present, but they did not need any kind of interpreter.

The Crowd’s Question

In the next verse we read that the crowd was amazed and marveled, saying “These twelve men are Galileans, they are from another province, we know their dialect.” We know that Peter had been identified prior to the death of our Lord on the basis of his being a Galilean and by his dialect. Here, on the day of Pentecost, the crowd is saying, “Here are Galileans, and they are speaking the very dialect, the very language, that we speak in our home country.” In Acts 2:9 Luke tells us there were Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and even some proselytes from the district of Rome. Here were all these different cultures, and although they were Jewish in the religious sense and could understand the Jewish language, they came together and began to hear each of the apostles praise the wonderful works of God in their own dialect. The record tells us that they were amazed. They said, we hear them, each of the apostles, in our own language to which we were born. So the gift of tongues which the Spirit gave the apostles meant the ability to speak in a foreign language, flawlessly, perfectly in the very dialect of that language. That ought to clarify the minds of some people who are confused about whether or not people are promised by the Holy Spirit to receive such gifts today. We will see in a later chapter that the Holy Spirit did not give such miraculous gifts beyond the apostolic age.

The Accusation

The effect that the gift of tongues had on this audience was one of bewilderment and astonishment. They were amazed, and

some of them even cried out, in a mocking way, that the apostles had drank too much wine (2:13)! They said the Apostles were “drunk on grape juice,” which was a term of derision, but in 2:14, we read, *“Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: . . .”*

The gift of tongues had already served its purpose. They are no longer proclaiming this message using the gift of tongues. In 1 Corinthians 14:2 Paul affirmed that those who had the gift of tongues in the apostolic age spoke not to men, but to God. In the study of 1 Corinthians 14 we see that through the gift of tongues men were given the ability to either sing to God or pray to Him in a foreign language. They did not use the gift of tongues to preach the gospel. When you preach the gospel you speak to men. But in the use of the gift of tongues, they spoke to God, or toward God. The gift of tongues had been completed on the day of Pentecost, and as Peter is standing with the eleven, he raises his voice and begins to speak to the multitude. He is speaking in their Hebrew language, or dialect. Anyone in the temple area, as we will learn in Acts 21 and 22, spoke the Jewish language, and as Peter started speaking to them he said,

... ‘Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning!’ (Acts 2:14b-15).

It was only nine o’clock in the morning and this was a very serious, as well as a very jubilant, feast day. The very idea of a person being drunk in the temple area at nine o’clock in the morning was unheard of, so Peter refuted the statement that some had made. He said, *“No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: . . .”* and he quotes the passage that we have already looked at in 2:17, where Joel said that the empowering from the Spirit would take place in the last days (Joel 2:28).

Go back to some Old Testament references to see what

Joel predicted in chapter 2. It is recommended that you read Isaiah chapters 10 and 13. When you read those two chapters, it will enable you to see that in the Old Testament, when reference was made to the day of the LORD, it meant God's judgment upon a wicked nation or city. The day of the LORD came time and time again upon wicked nations and upon wicked cultures in Old Testament times. The day of the LORD foretold by Joel was the day of God's judgment upon the Jewish nation, which took place in September of A.D. 70. The apostle Peter is warning the people in Jerusalem of the consequences of their unbelief and unrighteousness. If they do not turn and believe in Jesus, then those who are living in Jerusalem will experience God's judgment. The day of the LORD will come upon them.

How The Holy Spirit Was Received

Peter's sermon begins in 2:22. Before we get to that sermon, however, it will be helpful to look at how people in the first century received the Holy Spirit to empower them with miraculous gifts. We tend to say that the first century was the only time that people were promised by the Spirit that they would receive miraculous empowering or gifts from the Holy Spirit, so we need to go to several other places in the New Testament in order to see that the Holy Spirit also gave gifts through the laying on of the apostles' hands. However, it must be stressed again that it was the will of *the Holy Spirit* to give these gifts (Hebrews 2:3-4). This must be made abundantly clear. Hebrews 2 is the section of scripture we will refer to in our discussion of miracles, their nature and design, and the period of time during which they were performed. The writer has already spoken of the superiority of Jesus in Hebrews chapter one, and in chapter two he says,

We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and

every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him (Hebrews 2:1-3).

Emphasis needs to be given to the phrase, “was confirmed to us by those who heard him.” God has not promised to confirm any message through us today or through any other person. He revealed it and confirmed it once and for all. Jude verse 3 emphasizes that point. God bore witness with “them.” How did God witness to them? “*God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will*” (Hebrews 2:4). That is a key statement. Here were miraculous deeds from the Spirit. They were given to people in the first century according to the Holy Spirit’s own will.

We need to be impressed with the fact that it was the will of the Spirit to empower the apostles on the day of Pentecost, and only the apostles, until we get to Acts 6. We will go through some references in Acts 3 and 5, arriving at Acts 6 to see how some people other than the apostles were finally empowered by the Holy Spirit through the laying on of the apostles’ hands. Our study of these matters begins in chapter four. May God bless us in our study and give us proper understanding in matters dealing with His Holy Spirit.

THE HOLY SPIRIT (2)

Introduction

In the last chapter we studied that Jesus sent the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit was “poured forth,” which is a figurative expression used to describe the actual sending of the Spirit by Jesus on the day the church began, that being the day of Pentecost. We have also noticed that the Holy Spirit gave these miraculous gifts according to his own will. First Corinthians 12:11 says,

All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines,” and Hebrews 2:4 tells us, “God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

We have noted that the Spirit conferred these gifts directly upon the apostles (Acts 2), and upon Cornelius and his household.

The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God (Acts 10:45-46).

We are going to see in this chapter that the Holy Spirit gave gifts to some people, in addition to the apostles, through the laying on of the apostles’ hands. This will become a pattern, as we will see later from Acts 6, Acts 8, Acts 19, and 2 Timothy.

The Holy Spirit and Miraculous Gifts

Miracles, At First, Were Limited to the Apostles

From Acts 2 to Acts 6, only the apostles had been empowered miraculously by the Holy Spirit. It was the will of the Spirit to give miraculous gifts only to the apostles, until we get to Acts 6. How do we know that? Look carefully at Acts 2:14, Peter is standing up with the eleven.

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: ‘Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning!’
(Acts 2:14-15).

Acts 2:43 says, “*Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.*” In Acts 3 we have the record of a forty-year-old man who was born crippled. He was immediately and completely healed by the miraculous gift of the Spirit through Peter and John, two of the apostles. In Acts 5:12a we read, “*The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people.*”

Seven Deacons and Miraculous Power

In Acts 6 we read that some people other than the apostles, specifically seven public servants of the church, received gifts from the Holy Spirit through the laying on of the apostles’ hands. Acts 6:1 says,

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

This complaint came to the attention of the apostles in Acts 6:2:

“So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, ‘It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.’” The solution to the problem was for the church to select from among its members seven servants. It is important to notice that the apostles gave the church the opportunity to select these public servants. If we follow that example today in allowing the church to choose from among its membership, the members can determine whether or not men meet the qualifications of elders and deacons. They are given the opportunity to select such men. We will do this if we want the kind of unity that they had in Acts 6. The qualifications of these men were that they were to be men of good reputation and full of the Spirit. They had already received the gift of the Holy Spirit when they were immersed into Christ (Acts 2:38), they were Spirit-filled, and had wisdom. How could the church know that these men were filled with the Spirit? By observing them, it was obvious they had the fruit of the Spirit as a part of their lives, as part of their character and personality. Galatians 5:22-23 tells us that the Holy Spirit through His message produces the kind of fruit listed there. The apostles said to the congregation,

Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word. This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them (Acts 6:3-6).

With the laying on of the apostles' hands, the Holy Spirit gave miraculous gifts to these seven servants. Acts 6:8 tells us that Stephen was full of grace and power. When did Stephen,

one of the seven, receive the empowering from the Holy Spirit? It was only after the apostles had laid their hands upon him. So the Spirit determined to give these miraculous gifts to these seven men, but the Spirit did that through the laying on of the apostles' hands.

The Case of the Samaritans

In Acts 8 we read about another one of these seven whose name was Philip. He is later called an evangelist (Acts 21:8), but here in chapter 8, Philip had already had the hands of an apostle laid upon him, and by this he received miraculous gifts. Afterward, he went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed Christ. Acts 8:5-7 says,

Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed.

Philip, along with Stephen and the other deacons, received the Holy Spirit to empower him through the laying on of the apostles' hands. After they heard the gospel preached by Philip, a great number of them believed what they heard. We are told in 8:12-13,

But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

When people today believe as the Samaritans did, they will respond to the Lord and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins

and will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:38). Acts 8:13 tells us that even Simon himself believed. Simon had been a magician and used his illusions to amaze people, but he was intellectually honest. He became an obedient believer as well. And after being immersed, he continued to observe Philip. He knew about magic and illusions, but these were real signs and great miracles taking place. So, it is beyond question that Philip had received the Holy Spirit to empower him with miraculous gifts through the laying on of the apostles' hands.

The next few verses are very significant, beginning with 8:14:

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 8:14-16).

Sometimes people read these verses, take what they want, and leave the rest. However, notice very carefully that none of the people at Samaria had received the Holy Spirit to empower them until the apostles arrived. We are told that the Holy Spirit had not yet fallen upon any of them though they had the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as promised in Acts 2:38. Remember, when the Holy Spirit fell upon people, or came upon people, it was meant to empower them with a miraculous gift, or gifts, from the Spirit. Do not confuse the empowering with the indwelling.

Philip, although empowered by the Holy Spirit through the laying on of the apostles' hands, could not lay his hands upon the Samaritan Christians so they would receive miraculous gifts from the Spirit. Instead, two of the apostles had to come from Jerusalem. This is important for us to understand. The Holy Spirit chose to empower people through the apostles, so Peter

and John, two of the apostles, came down to Samaria. The record tells us that they began laying hands on the Samaritan Christians and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. This was not the gift of the Spirit to indwell them. Every Christian receives the indwelling Spirit upon immersion. It is given as a seal (Ephesians 1:13-14). However, the apostles laid their hands upon certain Christians to receive the Holy Spirit to empower them. Read Acts 8 again, and see that this is correct in the context.

Simon had been baptized in Acts 8:13. After Peter and John came to Samaria, Simon saw something. Acts 8:18-19 says,

When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, 'Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.'

Simon was overcome by temptation. He had repented of all of the evil that he had done before becoming a Christian. Suddenly, however, he confronts temptation. What if I had the ability to use and pass on these gifts? He thought somehow that these gifts from the Spirit were determined by the apostles rather than by the Holy Spirit of God. Peter responded to Simon,

Peter answered: 'May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin' (Acts 8:20-23).

Peter explained the receiving of miraculous gifts to Simon. The Holy Spirit determines who will receive the miraculous gifts. The apostles are involved because the Lord used them, and the laying on of their hands, to give gifts. The Spirit had chosen to give various gifts to some of these Samaritan saints. Simon had an evil heart because he thought he could ask the apostles and they would be willing to sell the gift of God to him. Peter told Simon that he must repent of this kind of thinking so that God would forgive him. Simon responded in turn.

Note: This teaches us that after we are baptized into Christ and become a son or daughter of God in that act of faith, we have access to the throne room of God any hour of the day or night. We can pray to God to be merciful to us, to give grace and to forgive us. We confess our sins and pray for forgiveness only if we are in a covenant relationship with God. Simon was a genuine believer and he was baptized into Christ. He was not told to start all over to become a believer. He was told to repent and pray. That proves that his faith that led him to be baptized into Christ was a genuine faith (Acts 8:13). Acts 8 is a very significant chapter. It helps us understand the difference between our receiving the Spirit to indwell us as sons of God and those who received the Spirit in the first century to empower them with miraculous gifts.

The Case of Cornelius

In Acts chapters 10 and 11, as mentioned before in our study, we read about Cornelius, who received the Spirit to empower him. Cornelius, as we have seen, received the gift of tongues directly, without the laying on of hands. Peter stated as much in his explanation to the other apostles (Acts 11) when he returned to Jerusalem. In Acts 11:15 Peter said, *“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them (the Gentiles) as he came*

upon us at the beginning.”

In Acts 10 the scriptures tell us that Cornelius received the Spirit to empower him with the gift of tongues. Acts 10:44-46a says,

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Obviously they were speaking in the dialect of Peter and these brothers, because they knew that Cornelius and the others were exalting and praising God in a foreign language. It was a foreign language to the Gentiles, but a language well understood by Peter and the Jewish brothers.

Then Peter said, ‘Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.’ So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days (Acts 10:46b-48).

It is very important to understand Acts 10, because in the way Cornelius received forgiveness of sins, he is not an exception in any way. He heard, believed, and responded to the gospel message, like every one since the Day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:38). God has only one new birth that must be experienced by everybody in order to be saved.

However, there were some exceptional things that took place in Acts 10. First, an angel was dispatched to Cornelius to tell him to send for the apostle Peter, who would preach Christ to him. Then, while the sermon is being presented, the Holy Spirit, without the laying on of hands, empowered him. Acts

10:47 makes it clear that Cornelius had received the Spirit. He received the Spirit to empower him with the gift of tongues before he was baptized into Christ. But it was at the point of baptism that he received the Holy Spirit as a gift to indwell him. Before he was baptized, he received a gift from the Spirit, the gift of tongues. At the point of baptism he received, like every obedient believer, the gift of the Holy Spirit as a proof of his sonship (Ephesians 1:13-14). So do not be confused into thinking that somehow Cornelius was saved by faith before he was immersed into Christ. He was not saved until he was baptized for the forgiveness of sins and received the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:48; 2:38).

The Case of the Disciples in Ephesus

In Acts 19 we read about Paul coming to the city of Ephesus. He met some of the disciples there, and he asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” That appears to be a rather strange question to ask. Yet, it is not strange if you start reading in Acts 2 and then study Acts 19. Acts 2:38 declares that at the point one’s faith convinces him of the need to be immersed into Christ, he receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. This gift of the Holy Spirit dwells in every Christian.

Paul knew that they had been baptized, and so he said, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They said, “No we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit that we could receive.” Notice the next question: “What baptism did you receive?” They answered, “John’s baptism.” Paul then explained to them that John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus. John's ministry prepared people for the coming of Jesus. He taught people to repent. They came confessing their sins and were baptized, according to Mark 1, for the remission of sins. They were being baptized by faith, looking toward the coming of Jesus Christ. So their repentance and baptism were an expression of their faith in

Jesus, who was to become their atoning sacrifice on the cross.

From the day of Pentecost on, anyone who had been baptized was baptized again for the forgiveness of sins and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul explained to them the purpose of John's baptism. By his explanation of John's baptism, it is clear that it lasted until the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Beginning on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was promised and given, people were baptized on the basis of their faith in Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross. When the Ephesians heard Paul's explanation, we read in Acts 19:5, "*On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.*"

It is rather interesting that people turn to Ephesians 2:8, read that we are saved by grace through faith, and sometimes wrongfully conclude that baptism is insignificant. Yet being baptized into Christ is an act of faith by which we are able to receive God's gift of grace. Not only is baptism significant, but also the twelve people at Ephesus made it clear that what one knows when immersed is important. The Ephesians in Acts 19 heard for the first time the design and purpose of John's ministry and baptism and when that ministry was concluded. They understood this, and being believers in Jesus, they were baptized. Luke then writes in Acts 19:6, "*When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.*" Paul, the apostle, placed his hands on them, and they received miraculous gifts.

The Case of Timothy

There is one other reference that will conclude our study of how people receive the Holy Spirit to empower them through the laying on of the apostles' hands. In 2 Timothy 1 Paul reminds Timothy about an event that had taken place earlier in his life. It was when Timothy had Paul place his hands on him. Second Timothy 1:6 says, "*For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.*" We do not know what gift

the Holy Spirit gave this young evangelist, Timothy. We just know that he received a gift from the Spirit through the laying on of Paul's hands. This happened at the time that the eldership laid their hands upon Timothy. In 1 Timothy 4:14 Paul said to Timothy, "*Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.*" Perhaps you can picture in your mind this event. When the elders laid their hands upon Timothy, perhaps Paul was part of that group. Whatever group it was, it was through the laying on of Paul's hands that willed the Holy Spirit to give Timothy a miraculous gift.

Conclusion

What do we now understand about the Holy Spirit? When the Holy Spirit fell, or came, upon people, it meant that the Holy Spirit gave miraculous gifts according to His will. ". . . *the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied*" (Acts 19:6b). These are two of the miraculous gifts that Paul includes in the list in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. We have also read from Acts 6, Acts 8, and Acts 19, that the Holy Spirit gave gifts according to His own will through the laying on of the apostles' hands.

Next, we will take up a study of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. As we continue on in this important study, let us as pray for God's blessings as we search for the truth in regard to God and His Holy Spirit.

THE INDWELLING OF THE SPIRIT

Introduction

We have been studying the Holy Spirit as a Divine Person of the Godhead. We have discussed the nature of God as seen in the Holy Spirit of God. We have studied about the sending of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, a one-time event which took place when Jesus poured forth the Holy Spirit of God on all flesh.

After having studied that the baptism with the Spirit was simply the promise of Jesus to send the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, in the last chapter we studied how people received the Holy Spirit to empower them. Now, we want to study how all Christians receive the Holy Spirit to indwell them.

The Fact of the Indwelling Spirit

The Initial Promise—In the Gospels

In Acts 2:38 there were three thousand people who were convicted of their sin and unrighteousness. They said to Peter and the other apostles, brothers what shall we do (2:37)? Peter replied, repent. To repent means to make a commitment that leads to a change of one's behavior and life. There must be the commitment to change one's mind before repentance can ever take place. Being convicted of their sin, they asked, what must we do to remove the sin from our lives? This is the response to the cross of Christ that had to be made:

Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy

Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call’ (Acts 2:38-39).

Receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit meant to receive the Holy Spirit to indwell in them. Only those who were saved believers would receive the indwelling Spirit as a gift. Having been immersed into Christ, by faith, a person’s sins are forgiven and the promised gift of the Holy Spirit is received. In Acts 2:41 Luke writes, “*Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*” Those who had received the Holy Spirit’s teaching through the apostles’ word had been convicted of their sin. The Holy Spirit does not indwell in a Christian apart from the word of God. Only those who receive and accept the word of God are promised the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit really indwells us in conjunction with the indwelling of the Spirit’s message in our heart.

The Recipients—

The Spirit Given to Indwell Obedient Believers

Acts 5:32 is another passage that discusses the receiving of the Holy Spirit as a gift. We are not talking here about the Spirit that empowered some with miraculous gifts. Rather, we are talking about what every saved disciple receives, which is the indwelling of the Spirit in his spirit, which is contained within his body. In Acts 5 the apostle Peter stands before the Sanhedrin court speaking in defense of his faith and devotion to Christ. He claims to be a witness of the resurrection of Christ and the forgiveness of sin made possible by Christ. He said in 5:32, “*We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.*”

The Nature of the Indwelling Spirit

In Romans 8 we have a tremendous chapter that deals with the indwelling of the Spirit, the benefit and blessing of the

indwelling Spirit and even what the Spirit does for us. For example, Romans 8:9-11 says,

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

This passage teaches that one must have the Spirit of God living in them. If one does not have this Spirit, they do not belong to Christ. That is why in the last chapter, in studying Acts 19, Paul asked the Ephesian disciples if they had received the Spirit when they were baptized. They said they did not know the Spirit was given. That is why Paul explained the need for them to be baptized into Christ. We do not belong to God without his Spirit dwelling in us.

The Spirit Indwells In the Church

In 1 Corinthians 3 we understand that the Spirit does indwell in the Christian, and thus, the church. In 1 Corinthians 3:16 Paul says, “*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?*” This is another passage that tells us of the indwelling of the Spirit.

In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Paul speaks of the indwelling spirit in a sanctuary. In this context, Paul is pleading with God's people not to allow immorality, the sin of fornication, to come into their life. Such a sin is not only against God, but also against one's body. He says, your body is not for sin, but for the Lord, so he reminds them,

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the

Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

The Spirit, through the apostle Paul, could not have made it any clearer. The Holy Spirit dwells in our body, and so our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. When does God give us the Spirit to indwell us? He gives the Spirit when we are baptized, by faith, for the remission of our sins.

In 2 Timothy 1 Paul pleads with his son in the faith, Timothy, to keep a sound pattern of teaching. Second Timothy 1:13-14 says,

What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

This passage clearly states that the Holy Spirit dwells in us.

The Spirit's Relationship To The Christian

As A Seal

With the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, what does the Spirit become to us? Ephesians 1:13-14, 2 Corinthians 5:5 and Galatians 4:6 tell us that the Holy Spirit becomes our seal. It is proof of being a child of God and a great motivation for us to glorify God in our bodies.

A literal seal, in the first century as well as in our day, is used to make a mark upon a document. In our culture, we can have a business transaction notarized. They will place upon a piece of paper a seal. If one has a marriage certificate or a driver's license, there will be a seal upon it that is used to prove that it is authentic and connected to the government in some way. The obvious point is that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is God's seal upon us. Just as a paper seal makes something

authentic and denotes ownership, so the Spirit is proof that we belong to God.

Think about that application with regard to our becoming an authentic son or daughter of God. When we respond to the gospel of Christ by faith, when we trust in the perfect sacrifice of our Lord, when we demonstrate our trust by an obedient faith, when we acknowledge our Lord, when we repent of our sin, when we confess Jesus as Lord, and when we are immersed into His death, at that point the Holy Spirit is given to us as a seal. This is for God's benefit as well as ours. The Lord can say, "Those people are my authentic sons and daughters." How important it is to appreciate what the Holy Spirit has become to us as a seal!

As Our Pledge or Earnest

In Ephesians 1 Paul states that the Holy Spirit has become God's down payment for us. If you begin the process of buying property, most of the time you have to give some money as a down payment. That down payment is a promise that the full amount will be paid. It is only a down payment, but it is a significant amount to assure the owner of the property that the remainder of the money will be paid. Paul talks about the Holy Spirit becoming a down payment guaranteeing a glorified body. In 2 Corinthians 5:1-5 we see Paul talking about the glorified body that we will receive when Jesus comes again, or that we will receive if Jesus should come before we die physically. What assurance do we have that we are going to have a glorified body? We have the promise of God, and that promise is the indwelling of the Spirit in this present body.

As Proof of Sonship

In Galatians 4:6 Paul says we have a special relationship with God because we are sons. "*Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.'*" That son-relationship enables us to enjoy a very intimate relationship. Again, the Spirit becomes a

guarantee that we are genuine sons of God. That is the proof.

An Encouragement To Glorify God

How do we know all of this? God has revealed this to us through His word. That is where we have learned this truth. The Holy Spirit becomes an encouragement to us to glorify and honor God as we serve Him daily. What, then, do we conclude from our study of the Holy Spirit? First, the Holy Spirit, on the day of Pentecost, was made available to all mankind. In Acts 2 it was first made available to the Jews, and then, in Acts 10, it was made available to the Gentiles. Next, we learned how people in the apostolic age were able to receive the Holy Spirit to empower them with miraculous gifts. We found that only through the laying on of the apostles' hands and according to the Spirit's will were these gifts passed on. Examples of the laying on of the apostles' hands were found in Acts 6, Acts 8 and Acts 19. Finally, we have just learned that when every Christian receives the indwelling of the Spirit, it is a seal, and proof of his son-ship.

The Holy Spirit's Enabling

Explanation of the Phenomenon

In Acts 2:4 we find the apostles were able to speak with other tongues, or foreign languages, "*... as the Spirit enabled them.*" For a person to speak in a language he has never studied, he has to have miraculous help from God. The Holy Spirit gave the apostles the ability to speak in all the foreign languages of the different nations that were represented in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. All of the various nationalities and ethnic groups are listed in 2:9-11. Luke summarized the list in 2:5, "*Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.*" Luke continues in 2:6-8,

When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in

bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: ‘Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?’

The word language here means dialect. They each heard the apostles speak in his or her own dialect spoken in the nation where they lived before coming to Jerusalem for Pentecost. These visitors to Jerusalem were totally amazed, knowing that the twelve apostles who were speaking were Galileans. How was it possible they were able to hear and understand the apostles in their native language?

In looking at 1 Corinthians 12-14, we see the design and purpose of the gift of tongues, which was given to people in the apostolic age. In 1 Corinthians 14:22 Paul says, “*Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers . . .*” Tongues were a sign of the presence of God and were intended to help unbelievers. If one were an unbeliever, and knew for a fact that the person they were speaking to had never studied their language, it would certainly get their attention.

There are those in the religious world today who think they have the same gift that the apostles had, but the word of God is very specific. In Acts 2 and Acts 10, to speak in a tongue meant to speak in a foreign language, a language native people understood. It was not some random ecstatic utterance. When they heard these people from Galilee speak flawlessly in their language or dialect, they gave their full attention to Peter as he spoke the Gospel message for the first time. Speaking in tongues was a sign to the unbeliever. It accomplished the very purpose for which the gift was given.

Speaking In Tongues Was Toward God, Not Men

As Peter is about to stand and give an explanation for the *sending of the Spirit*, and the *empowering from the Spirit*, the people continue to talk about what has just happened. Acts 2:12

tells us their reaction: “*Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, ‘What does this mean?’*” Some in the crowd were mocking and saying that the apostles had drunk too much wine. Up until now, each of the apostles had spoken in each of the languages of the people present on that occasion. Peter, as the spokesman for the apostles, began to speak to this large audience. If, at this point, one applies 1 Corinthians 14:1-2 to these verses, we learn that when people exercised the gift of tongues in the first century, they did not speak specifically to men, but to God. They might offer a prayer, or words of praise to God, in a foreign language, and the people would understand it, but it was specifically offered to God. Apparently this is what happened on the day of Pentecost. Acts 2:11b says, “... *we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!*” The unbelievers heard some kind of praise or wonders of God in their own language. As a result, they benefitted from the speaking in tongues, which got their attention as a miracle from God, but the message they understood was hearing the wonders of God declared.

When Peter stood to speak in verse 14, things changed. Peter was not using the gift of tongues, he was in all likelihood using the commonly understood Aramaic language, the language spoken by devout Jews. Acts 2:5 describes these men as God fearing Jews. In Acts 22:2a Paul was permitted to speak to a large audience in the temple area. “*When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.*” In the temple area they spoke in the common Aramaic dialect, so Peter was speaking to the people using the language they all knew.

Acts 2:14-15 says,

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: ‘Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning!’

That obviously was a sufficient explanation. This was a holy annual feast day. It was early in the morning, nine o'clock. He makes it clear that these men were not drunk, but that this was the fulfillment of the words of the Prophet Joel. He takes them back to Joel 2:28-32, which predicted the sending of the Spirit.

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; . . .

The Destruction of Jerusalem Foretold

The phrase, “*In the last days . . .*” most likely refers to the last days of the Jewish nation before it was destroyed in AD 70. To fully understand this text we need to go back to the Old Testament and examine the phrase, “*Day of the LORD*.” Some scriptures one can study regarding this phrase are Isaiah 13:11,6-10,12,117-19; 19:1,4,17; 34:4-5, 8; Hosea 10:7-8; and Joel 1:15; 2:1-2, 10-11, 28-30. For hundreds of years the phrase, “*Day of the LORD*” to the Jewish mind meant “a day of terrible wrath and destruction by God,” which was God coming in judgment on a nation. We must be sure we understand any scripture in context. There are some New Testament passages that also refer to the “*Day of the LORD*” as a day of judgment. In fact, that is the message of Acts 2:17-21. On the day of Pentecost God made a judgment related to Israel. From the covenant God made with Abraham, circumcision was a sign of being a Jew in covenant relationship with God. You were circumcised on the eighth day and entered a covenant with

God, but beginning on the Day of Pentecost, the believer was told to,

... ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 2:38).

This was a judgment God made in changing the way man entered into a covenant with Him. That is the significance of the phrase, “Day of the LORD” in verse 20. It is true that Jesus is coming again and that final coming of Jesus is what some passages remind us of. But we must always remain true to the context.

The study of Old Testament terminology is a study within itself. However, the scriptures listed above will help you in your understanding of Acts 2:17-21. We will continue with our study of this phrase “Day of the LORD,” as we proceed to chapter six.

THE FIRST GOSPEL SERMON

Introduction

We need to study Acts 2 over and over again to learn about apostolic preaching and how to reproduce it today. If three thousand people were convicted of their sin, as we find in this chapter, we need to analyze this powerful sermon. We need to learn how to speak today so that people will respond to the Lord. We need to study Acts 2 and learn about the establishment of the New Testament church. We need to learn about the law of pardon from sin and the receiving of the gift of the Holy Spirit. We need to see how the early disciples glorified God in the church.

It is also important to understand what the phrase “Day of the LORD” meant in the Old Testament, as we studied in the previous chapter. All the Jewish people our Lord spoke to would have had a similar understanding. During his ministry Jesus used similar terminology to tell people of coming destruction. A careful reading of Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21, will show Christ telling of the destruction of Jerusalem. One must read Luke 21, as it is the key to understanding the accounts of Matthew and Mark. Luke was a Gentile and avoided using Jewish terms that his Gentile readers would not understand.

The significance of understanding this terminology as it related to judgment, is that Jesus, during His earthly ministry, gave a sign that would come prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. That sign would be an army surrounding the city (Luke 21:20). Jesus said the events in Luke 21 would happen in “this generation” (Luke 21:32). A generation in the Bible is about 40 years (Numbers 32:13), so some of the generation

Jesus was speaking to those who would see the “Day of the LORD” before they died. Those who respected what Jesus taught concerning the sign and the time, fled the city of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, before Rome destroyed the city.

There are other passages that use the phrase “Day of the LORD” or “name of the LORD,” such as Romans 10 and Acts 22, which are related to salvation by faith at the point of being immersed into the death of Christ. In Acts 2:20, in this context, the deliverance and the salvation from the “glorious day of the LORD” referred to the judgment of God against Judaism as Christianity is exalted.

Christ, the Fulfillment of Messiah Prophecy

Beginning in Acts 2:22, the apostle Peter proclaims the first sermon that includes the life, death, burial and resurrection of our Lord.

Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.

Peter does not make any additional comments about the life of Christ, or tell of any new miracles in order to prove Christ’s deity. Peter’s audience is aware of the miracles performed by our Lord. The apostle John wrote,

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30-31).

Suppose someone were to say that we need miracles today in order to make believers out of unbelievers. We would say that is exactly right. Open the Bible to the gospel of John, and

read about the great signs recorded for us. Read all of those miracles, particularly the miracle of the resurrection of Christ, believe what is written there, and become a believer. We do not need some new sign today. We need to believe what the inspired apostles of Christ, who tell us about Jesus' life, have recorded here. Peter said that, "*Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you . . .*" (Acts 2:22a). In other words, He was one who was sanctioned by God to you. How did God do that? With miraculous gifts and wonders. That is the intended effect of miracles and signs. Something was done that clearly said, "I am the Son of God, now believe." God performed all of these signs and wonders among you. This is something that Peter's audience knew. The miracles were not done in secret with only a few people aware. They were done in public and were well known.

Peter continues in 2:23: "*This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.*"

We should realize what this statement meant to this devout Jewish audience. Most of them had not understood that the Old Testament had predicted that the Messiah to come would be rejected, suffer and die, and be raised again. They did not understand the Old Testament prophecies found in Isaiah 53 and Psalms 16 concerning Jesus. They thought that the Messiah would restore the kingdom in a literal, nationalistic way as it was in the days of David and Solomon. They failed to understand that Jesus was to set up a spiritual kingdom. Peter said, "God knew all of these events would happen, without forcing men to do what they choose to do."

The concept of freedom to choose is made clear over and over again in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, Peter discusses those, ". . . who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God . . ." (1 Peter 1:2). That does not mean that we were forced to become the chosen people of God. We, of our own free will, on the basis of our faith, chose to become

sons and daughters of God. God, because He knew what would happen before it happened, was able to see what choice we would make. That is the only way we can understand prophecy in the Old Testament. Prophecy is based on God's foreknowledge. He was able to see certain events and certain choices that people would make. God in his foreknowledge knew that His Son would suffer and die on the cross. He knew when He would die, where He would die, and how He would die. He knew He would be nailed on a Roman cross, to suffer and die as a criminal.

Peter says it was a pre-determined plan, with God's foreknowledge. God had pre-determined that a sacrifice had to be made for our sins. That sin sacrifice would be Jesus Christ (Romans 8:3; Hebrews 13:11). Peter tells his audience that what they did to Jesus, God in His foreknowledge decreed would happen. But they did it, and they chose to do it by asking the Roman government to put Him to death.

Three Proofs of Christ's Resurrection

In Acts 2:24 Peter introduces the resurrection of Christ, and this becomes the heart of the sermon that we are analyzing. *"But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him."*

The crowd has now heard the apostle Peter say that Jesus was raised by God. They have to have proof. There are three points that prove that God had raised Jesus from the dead. Peter did not just make a statement and then resort to some subjective approach. He did not say he was raised and we know it because we feel it. It took objective testimony. It took proof to convince the audience that God had raised him from the dead.

The first proof that God raised his Son from the dead is in 2:25-26. We have the testimony of the prophet David. The audience listening to Peter believes that David was a prophet of God. They believe what he had written in the Old Testament. Now they will understand for the first time what David meant

when he wrote in the sixteenth Psalm: “*David said about him: ‘I saw the Lord always before me.’*” (This is a messianic prophecy about Jesus.) ‘*Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.*’ (Here is the confident attitude that Jesus had before his death upon the cross.) ‘*Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, . . .*’”

Jesus had perfect confidence that His body would be raised again on the third day. He predicted, eight times in the gospels, that He would be raised on or after the third day. He knew that God would authenticate the purpose of His death by raising Him on the first day of the week. With confidence and hope, He said, I will look forward to that event, “. . . ‘*because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay*’” (Acts 2:27).

Some translations use the word Hades instead of grave. Hades is the place where the spirit of man goes, where the spirit of Jesus went, at the point of death. Yet, the spirit of our Lord did not stay in the Hadean realm. He stayed there during the time that His body was in the tomb, but David had predicted correctly that Jesus’ soul would not be abandoned in the spirit world of the dead. God did not allow Jesus’ body to decay as other bodies did. “*You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence*” (Acts 2:28).

We learn about the confident attitude that our Lord had, even in agony, and pain, and suffering, as He approached His death on the cross. Peter’s application of the sixteenth Psalm that he just quoted is in 2:29, “*Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day.*” David was one of the few people buried inside the walled city of Jerusalem. Perhaps Peter pointed in the direction of the tomb as he spoke. He said David, the patriarch of God, died and was buried. He is not talking about where his spirit went at the point of death; he is talking about his body, and because Peter is talking about David’s body, Acts 2:30 says, “*But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his*

descendants on his throne" (cf. 2 Samuel 7:12-16). Peter's first point in his sermon has been to prove that the resurrection of our Lord was spoken of by David. The audience believed in the book of Psalms. They just had to be shown the meaning of what David said in the sixteenth Psalm, the prediction of the resurrection of Christ.

Peter's second point in his sermon begins in 2:32, "*God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.*" Think about the significance of that statement. Here are twelve apostles, twelve reliable, trustworthy men. One doesn't make that statement to that crowd unless they are willing to have their testimony examined. Yet, no one in the first century was able to prove that the apostles were false, or lying, witnesses.

Later, in chapters 4 and 5, we find that the apostles were brought before the Sanhedrin court, where there was an attempt to intimidate them. The Sanhedrin threatened them and finally beat them for preaching about the resurrected Jesus. The apostles would not be intimidated, however, and went back to the temple courts with the same message.

The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 5:41-42).

No one was able to prove that the apostles were false witnesses. They were reliable and trustworthy men who had first-hand information about Jesus. According to Acts 1, the Lord spent 40 days with the apostles, convincing them that He had been raised from the dead. He said, here is my body, touch it, look at the wounds. Twelve witnesses are a sufficient number to testify of Jesus' resurrection. In 1 Corinthians 15:6 Paul said, "*After that, he appeared to more than five hundred*

of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.”

Paul would go on to say that in total, there are more than 500 witnesses who saw Jesus after His resurrection. We have historical, documented witnesses, which is why we believe today.

We can trust in the reliability of these competent first century witnesses. Of course, we are not permitted to see the risen Lord at this time, but these people did. That is how we believe in any kind of history. We look at the reliability of those who were eyewitnesses during that time. There was an obvious opportunity for someone to say no, these men are not reliable, but that did not happen. This information had a strong impact on this audience, and they believed Peter’s second point.

The third point in Peter’s sermon concerned the sending of the Spirit (2:33). “*Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.*”

Peter goes back to the events of the day. He reminds them that the power they saw displayed was the result of God sending the empowering of the Holy Spirit. He tells them, “You have just heard us, the apostles, speak foreign languages. Where do you think we got this Holy Spirit to empower us today? We got it because Jesus gave it to us.” There is proof that Jesus had to have been raised from the dead. Only someone who had been exalted to the right hand of God would be able to send the promised Spirit. What did that prove? It proved the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise. In John 15:26-27 Jesus said,

When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

That is the purpose for Jesus being with the Father and not in the tomb. Having been raised, ascended and exalted, He had poured forth the Holy Spirit.

The Crowd's Response to the Sermon

The effect of these three points in the sermon is seen beginning in Acts 2:34-35:

*For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,
'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until
I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'"*

When would Jesus start to rule and reign at the right hand side of the Father? After He ascended in bodily form back to heaven. He sat down on David's throne as his descendent (2:30). On David's throne, which in reality is God's throne, Jesus is reigning as a priestly King. In reading Psalm 110, one sees the kind of King Jesus is. He is a priestly King. That proves the redemptive spiritual nature of His kingdom. Jesus has all authority, dominion and power that exist. The resurrected Lord has authority over all the rulers of the earth.

The conclusion to the sermon begins in 2:36: "*Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.*" Peter says, "Know for certain that Jesus is now both Lord and Christ." The response to the information they have heard about the death, burial and resurrection of Christ is stated in verse 37: "*When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'*" They had understood and were plagued in their conscience. To be a murderer is a terrible sin, but how must they have felt to have murdered the Son of God? In chapter 3:17 Peter will say, I know you did it in ignorance; but here, they are convicted of their sin and understand that it is what separates them from fellowship with God. They want to know, "Is there possibly anything that we can do about our sin problem?"

Peter's Response to their Question

Peter answers their question by saying, “*Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 2:38). If they believe what they were told, they were to change the direction of their life. On the basis of their faith that God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ, they were to be immersed for the forgiveness of their sins. Then they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Observe for a moment the meaning of the word “for” in the phrase “for the forgiveness of your sins.” The Greek word is *eis*. It is used approximately 1,700 times in the Greek New Testament. This word means that someone does something “with a view toward” something. There are no exceptions at all regarding how this word is used in the New Testament. Our Lord used the same word when He instituted the Lord’s supper as recorded by Matthew in Matthew 26:28: “*This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*” Look very carefully at the meaning of this word. There are some who would say this word means “because of some past action.” Thus, some would have Acts 2:38 read “. . . ‘*Repent and be baptized because you have been forgiven of your sins.*’” However, the Greek New Testament and a Greek lexicon clearly state that this is not the case.

Who, then, is included in the promise of Acts 2:38? Verse 39 says, “*The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.*” How is it the Lord calls us? Second Thessalonians 2:14 tells us, “*He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” We are all called the same way, by the gospel, which is the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (cf. I Corinthians 15:1-4).

In Acts 2:40 Peter gives a warning: “*With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’*” I like the exhortation that the apostle gives this audience. He does not

just say, “Now you have heard the truth about your relationship with Christ. If it is convenient, or if you have the time, consider what I have said.” No, he pleads with them. Gospel preaching involves not only convicting people of their sin and teaching them what the will of the Lord is, but it also involves a sincere pleading to respond to the love of God.

Luke then tells us how seriously they took Peter’s message. Acts 2:41 says, *“Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”* This is the beginning, or the birthday, of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is an astounding event, which we will study in closer detail in the next chapter.

PREACHING PRACTICED

In our study we have seen how the Lord built His church in the city of Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. In Matthew 16:18 we have the promise that Jesus made to Peter. Peter had just been asked by Jesus who he thought Jesus was. Matthew 16:16 says,

*Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ In 16:18-19 Jesus replied, *And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven;**

...

Jesus said He would build His Church on the fact that He was the Son of God. He told Peter that He would give him the keys to open the kingdom of heaven.

In chapter six we saw how the Lord used Peter to open the kingdom through his preaching. People responded to that message. Acts 2:41 says, “*Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*” The Lord continued building His church through Peter and the other apostles as they preached about Jesus and His resurrection. Beginning in 2:42, and continuing to the end of the chapter, we learn something about how the church of our Lord, in the city of Jerusalem, put into practice the apostles’ teaching.

The Church and Its Practice

Devoted to the Word of God and Worship

Acts 2:42-47 tells us,

They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Luke said that these new Christians continued devoting themselves to the apostles' doctrine. Apparently, the apostles were the only teachers in the Lord's church at this time. These men were empowered by the Holy Spirit of God and had received the miraculous gift of knowledge. The word "devoted" in the original Greek literally meant "being strong toward," so we have an example of the New Testament church as it began, being devoted to the apostles' teaching. God wants us to be just as devoted to His teaching. We are not trusting in some commandment to save us; we are trusting in the Commander. That means we have great reverence and respect for what the Commander said through His inspired men. The early church was reacting very strongly toward the apostles' doctrine.

Devoted To Fellowship

They were not only devoted to the apostles' teaching, but also devoted to fellowship. There was a joint participation in the work of Christ. In some passages, this word fellowship

refers to financial giving. These Christians will certainly be involved in helping one another, but in this context fellowship refers to their being constantly together. They are individual Christians and individually they make up the church. But the church will have a great impact on this first century world because of their collective fellowship.

Devoted to the Breaking of the Bread

Luke says that they were devoted to the breaking of bread. In 2:46 we will discuss the fact that they shared meals together. Along with the apostles' teaching and their collective fellowship, there was a special time to remember the Lord's sacrifice. In Matthew 26:26 Jesus instituted the "Lord's Supper." He told the apostles that the next time He would eat the Supper with them would be in the Father's kingdom. During the breaking of the bread, I will have communion, or fellowship, with you. I will be at the right hand of the Father. I will be the sovereign Lord in heaven, but I will still have communion with you. Paul calls the Lord's Supper a remembrance (1 Corinthians 11:24). When we eat the unleavened bread and drink the fruit of the vine, we are having communion, or fellowship, with Christ. Luke says they were devoted to this breaking of bread.

We know that the church came together on the first day of the week, the day we know as Sunday. In Acts 20:7 Luke says this about the Church at Troas: "*On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight.*" We would have to study 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 to have an in-depth study of the design and purpose of the Lord's Supper, but the only example from the scriptures for the breaking of the bread is on the first day of the week. Every week has a first day, and when that day comes along we are to be devoted to the breaking of the bread. This gives every Christian the opportunity to commemorate and proclaim the Lord's death by participating in the breaking of bread.

Devoted To Prayer

They continually devoted themselves to prayer. The early church teaches us of the significance, the power and the privilege of prayer. When we study Acts 4, we will find brothers praying so they will be even more bold as they face persecution. The apostles are devoting themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word in Acts 6. If we think we can accomplish the Lord's work without prayer, we have been deceived into thinking we can accomplish the Lord's work without the Lord. We need to mix our efforts with a lot of prayer because the Lord, our partner, is our strength.

Filled With Awe

Acts 2:43 says, "*Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.*" They had an attitude often found in the New Testament, a tremendous feeling that causes one to pause and take notice of the events happening. God had offered His Son, Christ, as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. The Lord had been resurrected from the dead and had ascended back to heaven. Now the mercy and the grace of God have made it possible to have forgiveness of sins. That message just kept being repeated and each time it was told, more and more people became members of Christ's church. It was impossible for them not to feel a sense of awe toward God. We need to have the same spirit of awe for the same reason in the body of Christ today. Luke says many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. We will study the design and purpose of miraculous signs in chapter eight.

Lived in Unity

Acts 2:44 says, "*All the believers were together and had everything in common.*" Notice how unified the church was. There was no dissension. Our Lord had prayed for this kind of unity before His death. In John 17:20-21 there is the fervent prayer He prayed for those of us who would believe in Him

through the apostles' word. He said,

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

Jesus prayed for a spirit of oneness, so that God would be glorified and unity would capture the attention of the unbelieving world. If the world cannot see unity in the church, then we will not have credibility in the teaching and preaching of the gospel of Christ. The world must see that we respect and honor the Lord's prayer.

Had All Things In Common

The early church was unified according to Acts 2:44-45: "*All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.*" Notice the generosity of the early disciples. They chose on their own to give. We will learn later in our study about the church and the individual grace of giving, but notice here they were not commanded to sell their possessions and property. They did so because they wanted to. We learn in Acts 5 that Ananias and Sapphira owned some property. Peter said while they owned that property, it was within their control. Even after they sold it and received the money, what they did with the money was their choice. They were free to give all, a portion, or nothing to the work of Christ. Their problem was that they chose to lie to God. In the beginning days of the church many chose to sell property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have a need. What a Christ-like spirit and an unselfish nature on the part of these early disciples!

Their Daily Activity: They Praised God and Grew in Numbers

Luke writes in Acts 2:46-47,

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

These Christians are amazing. It is interesting that here the early church was using the Jewish temple for their meeting place, and they met there every day. They ate and shared a meal together. The kind of fellowship they enjoyed resulted in a sincere heart. They also understood that praising God is the aim of the church that belongs to Christ. God is being praised in their lives, in their teaching, and in their worship. The word “favor” means a “pleasing attractiveness.” When unbelievers saw the church, there was something pleasingly attractive that got their attention. These same Christians are soon going to be persecuted. The unbelieving Jews are going to try to intimidate and misrepresent the brothers, as told in Acts 4 and 5. To what extent the average Jew believed or disbelieved their Jewish leaders as they misrepresented the Christians we are not told. But at this point, the people in general looked upon these young disciples with “favor.” The average Jew on the street saw the sincerity, the unselfish love and caring concern these Christians had for each other.

Any time a person responds to the gospel of Christ as they did in Acts 2, the Lord, in the process of saving them, adds them to the church. As the gospel message was told daily, there was a daily response and a daily adding to their number. By the time we read Acts 4:4, the number of Christians has reached five thousand.

Pentecost—The Day Of Beginning

We have read about the establishment of the church of Christ on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem by the apostles of Christ as they preached the good news of our Lord. There were many things that began for the first time on the day of Pentecost. One of those is the New Covenant. A study of Hebrews 8:7-13 and 9:15-28 teaches that a testament, or covenant, cannot be put into effect until after the death of the testator. Our Lord lived and died in the Law of Moses time frame. The New Covenant did not start until after His death, so the proclamation by the ministers of the new covenant (2 Corinthians 3) starts here in Acts 2. This is very important because we live on this side of the cross. The only way we can learn what we must do in order to be saved is by looking at the examples of New Testament conversions as found here in the book of Acts.

There were nine separate events that occurred on Pentecost; all were beginnings and tie in together.

- 1) It is here that we find the beginning of the new covenant of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Hebrews 8:8-9:15-17);
- 2) It was the beginning of the preaching in the name of Jesus Christ, as the Lord had predicted (Luke 24:46ff);
- 3) Pentecost was the beginning of immersion in the name of Jesus Christ with a view to the remission of sins (Acts 2:38);
- 4) It was the beginning of the sending of the Holy Spirit by Jesus from the right hand side of the Father (Acts 2:1-4, 33);
- 5) It was the beginning of the giving of the indwelling Spirit to the believer (Acts 2:38-39);
- 6) It was the beginning of the reign of Christ on David's throne (Acts 2:30);
- 7) It was the beginning of the fulfillment of the

- prophecies of Joel (Acts 2:17ff);
- 8) It was the beginning of the building of the Lord's church through the apostles, as we have already noted, and
 - 9) It was the beginning of the work and worship of the New Testament church.

Miscellaneous Notes About the City of Jerusalem, Pentecost, and the Church

The city of Jerusalem was the birthplace of the church that Christ built. The day of Pentecost was the birthday of the church of Christ and it was the beginning of the establishment of the kingdom, the redemptive spiritual kingdom of Christ. It came on the first day of the week, Sunday, known as the Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10). Pentecost, according to the prescription of the Law of Moses, could not come on any other day. This day marks the first time that the gospel of Christ in all of its fullness and perfection was preached. It was the first time it could be preached in its fullness. Until this time the gospel that was preached was either a gospel in promise or a gospel in preparation.

The church that Christ built was new. It was the original God-appointed and God-created body. It was not a branch of anything else then in existence. It was not a development of anything that had preceded it. There was nothing carried over into it from any religion being practiced at that time. Some former laws were restated and eternal principles incorporated, not because they had formerly been binding, but because they were right within themselves.

HEALING AND PREACHING

Healing and Freedom in the Name of Jesus

There are several objectives to reach in the study of Acts 3. It is in this chapter that we will learn something of the design and nature of New Testament miracles. While we are studying miracles, we will also study about how long they were intended to be given to people in the first century, and we will see the purpose of miracles in order to understand them as well. We will also see in this chapter that the Old Testament predicted that the Messiah to come would be rejected by His own people, that He would suffer and die and be raised again the third day. We will analyze the redemptive gospel sermon and see how this message of Christ motivates people to respond to the gospel of Jesus.

A Forty-Year Bondage Turned To Freedom

In Acts 3:1 we find that two apostles, Peter and John, were going up to the temple, which was their place of meeting for daily teaching as well as public teaching. Corporate worship was conducted there in the temple. They were going there at the ninth hour, which according to our way of determining time would be three o'clock in the afternoon. This was the designated hour of prayer for the Jewish people. Whether or not Peter and John intended to pray with the people in the temple, we do not know. They did not pray, but they are going to have the opportunity to teach and preach the gospel of Christ. The record tells us that a certain man (who was forty years old, Acts 4:22), who had been lame from the day of his birth, was carried by some people every day. They would set him down every day at the gate of the temple that is called "Beautiful." This gate was 75 feet high, 60 feet wide, and was covered with

Corinthian brass. Mentally picture a huge opening into the temple area with a gate of such dimensions and beauty, and one can understand why it was called the Beautiful Gate. The fellow was placed there at the entrance to the temple each day so he could ask for donations from the people who were entering the temple.

Peter and John were part of the crowd that was entering the temple area, and the man was asking them to give him something that would aid him financially. Peter and John, the record tells us, looked at him and told him, "*Look at us!*" (Acts 3:4), and he gave them his attention. He was expecting to receive money from them. "*Then Peter said, 'Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give you'*" (Acts 3:6a). Notice the servant concept that the apostles had. They had learned that, and learned it well, from the perfect servant, Jesus. Peter continued speaking to the man:

'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.' Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him (Acts 3:6b-10).

The Providential Effect— Wonder and Amazement By the People

While this man, who had been cured immediately and completely, was clinging to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and ran to them at Solomon's Colonnade. However, before we move on to 3:12, we need to define the word "miracle."

The Definition and Nature of Miracles

A miracle was something that a person could observe with his natural senses. He could see with his eyes and understand with his mind what had occurred. It was something that was accomplished by divine power, without any adequate explanation, or human or natural cause. In other words, a miracle was something that transcended God's laws of nature. It was something that went beyond what is normally observed in God's working through the laws of nature. It was something that humans, or the laws of nature, could not reproduce, something that transcended those laws. For example, here was a forty-year-old man. He had never walked. Everyone was familiar with this person. They obviously knew something about his condition (Acts 4:22). Whenever we read about a supernatural event referred to as a miracle, immediately we know that we are reading about something that goes beyond God's working in nature. The people who observed these events knew that they were miracles. They were of such convincing persuasion that the enemies of Christianity could not deny that they were miracles. That is very interesting.

When we read the gospels, we find that no one questioned whether or not the Lord performed miracles. There were some who were guilty of unbelief and hardness of heart to the point that they attributed the miraculous power to Satan rather than to God. The Lord said concerning such people that they had committed an eternal sin. Anyone so hardened by the nature of sin in their lives that, though they could not deny that a miracle had taken place, they would question the source of it, would have to be a terribly evil and wicked person.

The Nature and Character of New Testament Miracles

The Obvious Reality of New Testament Miracles

Since we have already defined a miracle as something that transcends God's laws of nature, in other words, something that

cannot be explained on the basis of natural law, we are now looking at the nature of New Testament miracles. These miracles were of such a nature that even unbelievers could not deny that they were miracles.

To demonstrate this point, Acts 4:14-16 tells us what effect that the healing of a 40-year-old man had upon the Jewish Sanhedrin Council, which was the highly esteemed religious governing body among the Jews. This Council has brought Peter and John before them. Luke writes,

But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. ‘What are we going to do with these men?’ they asked. ‘Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it.’

They conferred privately, without Peter, John, and this healed man being in their presence. In speaking to each other, it is obvious that they would like to have denied the miracle taking place, because of the confirming effect of the deity of Christ that this miracle had on the people. However, here is this 40-year-old man (the record tells us of his age in 4:22), whom they could not deny had been born a cripple. Now he is completely healed; it was done immediately, and it was accomplished through Peter and John, two servants of the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul lists the miraculous gifts that the Holy Spirit gave as He willed (1 Corinthians 12:11). One of these gifts was the gift of healing (1 Corinthians 12:9), a gift which had been given to Peter and John. They had used this gift to heal this man who had been born a cripple.

The nature of New Testament miracles was so convincing in its approval of the power of God that even the enemies of Jesus could not deny that they were miracles. Today, so-called miracles are not of that nature, so many people do not accept

them, and a lot of religious groups do not accept the claims of other religious groups. However, in this case, those who did not believe in Jesus had to acknowledge that a miracle had been accomplished through Peter and John. With that in mind, we should ask at this point what the purpose was for the Holy Spirit to give the gift of healing to people in the first century.

Why the Holy Spirit Gave the Gift of Healing to People in the First Century

In Mark chapter 16, the Lord promised that there would be gifts from the Spirit. One of these would be the laying on of hands upon people so they would be healed. Mark 16:20 tells us, *"Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it."* A key expression is "...confirming his word..." The disciples confirmed, or made strong and valid, their message with the miraculous gifts that the Spirit gave them.

There is another section of scripture that teaches the same truth. In Hebrews chapter 2, the writer is trying to get the Jewish Christians to be faithful to Jesus and to abide under the priesthood of Christ, our great High Priest, rather than to be drawn away from Him and go back to an inferior covenant, the first covenant, following after the old priesthood. The Hebrew writer is setting forth the preeminence and superiority of Christ over everything with regard to the first covenant, and he says in Hebrews 2:2-3,

For if the message spoken by angels (referring to the first covenant, the law of Moses) was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.

Notice how God confirmed this great message of salvation. “*God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will*” (Hebrews 2:4).

There are passages of scripture, such as Jude 3, which tell us when they had confirmed “the faith,” which was the system of salvation and is believed as the substance of religious truth, that it was once and for all confirmed. God does not have to reconfirm His message in every day and age. He does not have to confirm the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, because that has already been revealed and confirmed. In writing this one chapter book, Jude had intended to talk about the common salvation available to everyone. However, he felt that he had to write about something more urgent.

Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.

The word faith here is the substance of Christian doctrine. It is what one believes. This expression “once for all” literally means that whatever is done has to be of enduring validity and never needs repeating. That ought to reassure us that the apostles in the first century church had certain credentials that proved that they were apostles.

So, the Holy Spirit gave the gift of healing to people in the first century to confirm the message of salvation. The Lord gave the apostles His credentials. They could go forth, and God revealed to them the message that they preached and taught them the words they were to say. He then gave them the empowering gift of the Spirit to confirm and to validate that message. When this was done, it was done once and for all, so what was revealed and confirmed in the first century, is valid from then on. It does not have to be reconfirmed over and over again. We need to go back to the confirming nature and signs

of the first century gospel and believe the message.

The Purpose For Which Miracles Were Given Was Fully Accomplished in the Apostolic Day and Age

Now that we have defined the meaning of the word miracle, studied in the context of Acts 3 and 4 as to the nature of first century miracles, and talked about the design and purpose of these miracles, let us ask ourselves this question: Was the purpose for which the miracles were given fully accomplished in the apostolic day and age? The answer is yes, because when the Holy Spirit came and empowered the apostles, He guided them into all proof (John 16:13; Jude 3). These scriptures emphasize that all truth was revealed and confirmed.

However, that was not the primary design and purpose of miracles. There was a greater design and purpose of these miracles and credentials that the Spirit gave the apostles, so we can understand why Paul said that miraculous gifts would cease. He makes that statement in 1 Corinthians 13:8. Miracles ceased when the design and purpose for which they were given had been fully accomplished.

If we go and build a huge physical structure, while we are building, we will have scaffolding inside, as well as outside, the building. That is the design and purpose of the scaffolding: it is used to build and erect that huge edifice. After the building is completed, what does one do with that scaffolding? It is not repainted, and drapes certainly are not hung on it. It is removed. It has accomplished the purpose for which it was set up to begin with. God used miracles to bring new things into existence. The Lord never performed a miracle and then said, “That miracle proves that Moses was a prophet of God, or that proves that the Old Testament is the word of God.” God has already revealed and confirmed that portion of His will.

The Lord performed miracles to prove that He was the unique and only begotten Son of God. Because He performed these miracles, we can trust what we read in the gospels,

believe in Him, and through our faith, have eternal life (John 20:30-31). Here is the gospel being preached as we read from Hebrews chapter 2. God gave the apostles, and others, through the laying on of the apostles' hands, the miraculous gifts of the Spirit to reveal and confirm all truth, which, as previously studied, has already been done in the first century. Since the time of the apostles, the Holy Spirit has not promised to give miraculous gifts to people. There is no design for them and no purpose to them. We need to respect what the scriptures have to say concerning the cessation of miracles.

Note: We are not talking here about God working when we pray. We certainly believe that God works in ways that we may not even fully understand according to the laws of nature. But God uses medication, rest, food, and whatever is at His disposal, according to what we call natural law, to bring about the restoring of health. A miracle is something that transcends natural law and did not require faith on the part of the unbeliever before they could receive the blessing of a miracle. That is obvious, as we see in Acts chapter 3 and read that this man who was crippled had received this blessing of healing. He did not fully know about our Lord. Peter is the person who informs the multitude that the source of their power was their faith in Christ and through the name of Christ.

Over and over again, when we read about New Testament miracles, we need to understand what we are studying, and what is meant by a miracle. We need to know the design and purpose for which miracles were given. This will enable us to understand why it is no longer the will of the Spirit to give people miraculous gifts. We are not questioning the power of God today. He has as much power today as He has always had, but it is not His will to do the same things as He once did. God made Adam and Eve the way He did, and He is not going to

make another couple the same way He made Adam and Eve. It is not because He does not have the power to do so; it is that it is not His will to do it.

One time the Lord rained down manna from heaven to feed His people. God has the power to do that today, but it is not His will to do that. We need to learn how to respect His will in the matter. It is not a matter of questioning God's power; it is a matter of respecting what His sacred will teaches us.

This miracle got the attention of the audience and was used to confirm the credibility of the apostles. The signs of an apostle were being used and now they are going to stand back and listen with respect to what Peter has to say about Jesus. If the Holy Spirit would work such a great miracle through Peter and John, then they are credible people. They have to be servants of God, because only God could work a miracle of this nature.

Peter's Messianic Sermon

The Testimony of the Old Testament

Peter responds to the audience that has gathered around him and John, saying, “. . . ‘Men of Israel why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?’’’ (Acts 3:12). Peter and John refused to take credit for the miraculous gift of the Spirit that was brought about through them in the name of Jesus Christ. Peter gives an explanation of how the man was healed.

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this

man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him (the faith that Peter and John had in the person and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ) that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see (Acts 3:13-16).

This miracle was done immediately, and it was done completely. Peter said that this man was now in perfect health; in fact, we read earlier how he was able to leap and jump and walk to the temple area. That impacted the audience. They knew that if it were only God who could work a miracle of this nature, and He had accomplished it through Peter and John, then they were trustworthy men in what they would tell them with regard to salvation by faith in Christ. If this man was saved from sin, then he had to have heard, believed, and obeyed the gospel. The miracle drew the audience and Peter said that he wanted to use it to confirm his message. He now preaches this great sermon that has to do with the nature of the Old Testament prophecies concerning our Lord.

The Old Testament predicted the coming, rejection, suffering and death of our Lord, Jesus Christ. We know the design and purpose of His sacrifice on the cross. He had to become our propitiation (cf. Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; I John 2:2; 4:10, NASB). God had to be satisfied by a perfect sacrifice for our sins. Peter said in Acts 3:13 that God has glorified His servant Jesus. When we read the word "servant," it does not strike us with the same conviction as it did a Jewish audience, because they were familiar with the great prophet Isaiah, who wrote, in what we now know as Isaiah 43:1 through chapter 53, about the great suffering Servant. Therefore, when the Servant was mentioned to this Jewish audience, immediately they thought of the book of Isaiah. Some of them may have immediately thought of Isaiah chapter 53, where it tells about the design and purpose of the Lord's death upon the cross for our sins. All of the Old Testament prophets had

predicted the same thing.

In Acts 3:18 Peter said, “*But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer.*” Whenever the apostles preached to a Jewish audience, they had basically one concept to get them to understand, which was the fact, as Peter has presented here, that they must understand the kind of Messiah that was predicted from the Old Testament. When they came to understand that concept, how Jesus was the One who perfectly fulfilled all of the Old Testament, then they had faith in Jesus as the Messiah. To illustrate how that was taught over and over again, turn to Acts chapter 17. The apostle Paul has come to Thessalonica and went to the Jewish synagogue. Notice what he preached to the Jewish audience:

As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. ‘This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ,’ he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women (Acts 17:2-4).

In order for Paul to reason from the Scriptures, he would have to reason from the Old Testament Scriptures to see whether or not the Messiah was to be rejected, to suffer and die, and to be raised again. When the Jews saw and learned from the Old Testament that Jesus was the One who fulfilled all of these prophecies, they became believers. Luke tells us that some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas along with the great multitude of God fearers who were Gentiles, the Greeks, and a number of leading women. Outstanding men and women responded to the gospel of Christ when they heard it presented in this way. The Old Testament was very clear in stating that when the Messiah came His own people would

reject him. Some would respond to Him, but the majority of them rejected Him.

In John 1:11 the apostle said that the Lord came to those who were His own, but they did not receive Him. It was tragic that Jesus was not the kind of Messiah that they really wanted. They wanted a victorious redeemer who would come and rescue them from the oppression of Rome, who would set up an economic base and a source of prosperity for them in an earthly and nationalistic kingdom. And yet, in Daniel 2:44, Daniel prophesied that the God of heaven was going to set up a kingdom unlike the kingdoms of men. In this kingdom, Jesus would serve as a priestly King. Time and again, in the gospels, the Lord said, "*You have to repent to get into my kingdom, you've got to be poor in spirit, you have to experience the new birth, you have to become like children.*" The Lord said that His kingdom was not, as He told Pilate in John 18:36, a kingdom of this world, and if it were of this world, He would have already conquered Rome. But that is not the nature of His redemptive spiritual kingdom.

That statement of the Lord's does not rule out the need for God's ministers and servants in civil government to accomplish their design and purpose, but the Lord did not commission the church to be ministers who wage war and conquer other nations. Governments can be used by the Lord to accomplish His design and purpose for government, but that is not the nature of the Lord's kingdom. His kingdom was redemptive and spiritual. His kingdom has to do with the forgiveness of sins and God ruling over our hearts through His word, as He is our sovereign Lord and controls us as His willing servants.

This passage in Acts 3:13 tells us that the God who we understand is the God of the Old Testament, glorified His servant, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is sitting at His right hand. Christ has been glorified, but for what purpose did He come to this earth? God announced beforehand, by all of the Old Testament prophets, that Christ came to suffer. This has been fulfilled. The reason for His suffering was so that He would be

our atoning sacrifice. God knew that all of this was going to take place, so when this Jewish audience recognized that Jesus was the promised Old Testament Messiah to come, and that this was to be the nature of the Messiah, they were made believers.

In Acts 3:17-20 Peter says,

Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus.

They had acted ignorantly by bringing about the death of the Lord, so after Peter exhorts them by saying that since Christ had come and suffered, been raised, and now glorified, they must renovate their thinking entirely. They must start thinking about the way God wants them to think: in harmony with His will.

Acts 3:19-20 is very similar to Acts 2:38. We know that the Jews were told on the day of Pentecost to repent and be immersed for the remission of sins. Here, they were to repent and turn again, which is the act of obedient faith that involves the new birth process, being born by the water and the Spirit. Peter tells them to repent and be immersed, so that their sins may be wiped away, or be blotted out, and seasons of refreshing may come from the Lord. The indwelling of the Spirit and the indwelling of Jesus are the result. Christ is sent to indwell us by faith. He indwells us as does the Spirit. God has sent Jesus the Christ, Him having been appointed for us. Peter then tells us that heaven must receive our Lord until the period of restoration of all things, about which God spoke by the mouth of all of His holy prophets from ancient times.

We have seen in our study thus far that the Lord predicted

though all the Old Testament prophets that when the Messiah came, he would be rejected and suffer. He would be raised from the dead and exalted and glorified at the right hand side of God. He would be our propitiation. He would be our satisfaction, or God's satisfaction for His dealing with sin in such a wrathful way. God has to deal with sin in that way in order that He might be perfectly just and righteous in pardoning us through our faith in Jesus.

PERSECUTION AND HARASSMENT

The Predicted Messiah

The Prophecy of Moses

In the last chapter, we studied from Acts chapter 3, analyzing what is called The Messianic Sermon. Peter made particular reference to Moses in his statements, and the audience would certainly believe what Moses said. In referring to a statement found in Deuteronomy 18:15, Peter said that Moses stated, “*The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.*” Peter will then continue to explain the meaning of that Old Testament prophecy. In 3:21 Peter said, “*He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.*” Peter was referring to the Old Testaments prophets when he mentioned “holy prophets,” but now he is going to be more specific. Peter says,

For Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you’ (Acts 3:22; cf. Deuteronomy 18:15).

All the Prophets Prophesied

During the ministry of John the Baptist, several people were asking him if he was the prophet of which Moses had spoken. John always denied that he was, but he always proceeded to tell about the coming of the Lord, who was the great Prophet, the One who would come as Prophet, Priest, and King. The prophecy found in Deuteronomy chapter 18 was

fulfilled only in the Lord Jesus Christ. Since He is that Prophet, being the One who speaks the mind and will of God, then we should pay attention to what He has to say. Peter sounds this warning:

Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people. Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days (Acts 3:23-24).

The Time of the Restoration of All Things

Peter is speaking of the time for all things to be restored, including what was said in 3:21. We see from this that we are living in the time of the restoration of all things, but just what does this expression, “the restoration of all things,” mean?

In 2 Corinthians chapter 5 we read that we have been given, through Christ, the ministry of reconciliation. In that chapter, Paul discusses how it is possible for God to pardon us through the sacrifice, the perfect and absolute sacrifice, which Jesus made on the cross for our sins. Because of His sacrifice we are involved in the great Messianic presentation. It is called the ministry of restoration, or reconciliation, of all things, of all times, and of all people to our Lord. To be reconciled to, or brought back into, the proper relationship with God carries with it the idea of restoration.

From the time that Jesus ascended back to heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father, followed by the sending of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost and the preaching of the gospel of Christ, during our time, until the day that Jesus comes again, we will have been living in the time of the restoration of all things. When Jesus returns again, we know that His purpose will be not only to judge the world, but also to reward the righteous (Hebrews 9:27-28). We will spend eternity with Him.

People will not be restored to God when our Lord comes again. *This gospel age, this period of time from Pentecost until*

Jesus comes, *is the* restoration period of time. Peter said that all of the prophets who spoke, not only Moses, but Samuel and all those who spoke after him of the Messianic day and age, spoke of these days, the days of the present gospel age and dispensation. We need to appreciate that truth. There is not going to be another period of grace when God will extend His pardoning mercy and forgiveness to people. This is the only time that He will do so, during this present gospel age. This is why Peter makes such a strong plea for attention to be paid to the Lord. If attention is not given to Him, then those who fail to do so will be destroyed from among the people.

Jesus is the Promised Seed of Abraham

The Jews were heirs of the things predicted by the Old Testament prophets. In Acts 3:25 Peter reminded his listeners,

And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.’

Genesis 12 is where this great Messianic covenant was made to Abraham. This is where God told Abraham that it would be through his seed that all of the families of the earth would be blessed. Here is the Messianic promise of the coming of our Lord, and through Him we will be blessed concerning the matter of salvation.

Peter then describes the way the offspring of Abraham would be blessed. *“When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways”* (Acts 3:26). God extended the gospel of Christ to the Jewish people first. He intended, as we will see in Acts chapter 13, to use them as a light to the Gentiles. God said, “I will save you, and in reconciling you to me, I will send you to the Gentile world so that you can preach the same gospel to them and they will also have the privilege of being fellow

members and fellow heirs of the same spiritual body, the church, that you are in.”

God said that the gospel was to be offered to them, Peter’s listeners. God rose up His servant and sent Him to bless them. The intent was that every one of them would turn from their wicked ways. The Lord came to save us from our wicked ways. By faith, we turn from sin, and we are then reconciled to God. By faith we are immersed into the death of our Lord, buried with Him, and raised with Him, in the process becoming one with the Father, becoming an heir of God, and having access to all spiritual blessings and benefits, the greatest blessing being the forgiveness of sins.

Opposition and Apprehension

Opposition From the Enemies of the Cross

The response to this sermon in Acts 3, is seen in Acts chapter 4. Luke tells us that the captain of the guard, who is under only the high priest’s temple authority, came up to Peter and John along with the priests and the Sadducees. The Sadducees were primarily interested in keeping a right relationship with the Roman authorities. They were more intent on focusing on their political status than on their religious standing. Because of their concern over how the Romans may react, they are greatly disturbed. They see the tremendous response that is given to the preaching of the gospel of Christ, that the church of the Lord is growing by leaps and bounds, and they realize that they must do something to try to stop the proclamation of the gospel of Christ.

The preaching of the gospel by the apostles centered on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, a teaching which the Sadducees did not believe. However, here are two of the apostles setting forth and confirming the historical facts and evidence of Jesus’ resurrection. Seeing this, they get together and say to each other that they are going to have to stop the apostles from proclaiming their message. The result was that

“They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening (evening time was 6:00, the time that the business day ended), they put them in jail until the next day” (Acts 4:3).

However, the effect of Peter and John’s message was dramatic. Acts 4:4 says, *“But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.”* We recall that on the day of Pentecost three thousand responded to the gospel, and here, just a short time after Pentecost, there were 5,000. The church was growing day by day and it was growing rapidly.

This fast growth, brought about by the gospel message, resulted in the first instances of persecution upon the church. The persecution began by way of coercion, or intimidation. There was mental pressure placed upon the two apostles. In Acts chapter 5 we will see that there is physical persecution placed upon the apostles for preaching Christ and Him crucified. This may have disappointed the apostles for a short period of time, but it did not discourage them, nor did it hinder in any way, the growth of the New Testament church.

We need to see and learn from this that God is with us in the matter of persecution, that He allows persecution to come in order to strengthen us, and He will use such opportunities and circumstances to promote the growth of His church and the preaching of His gospel.

The Apostles’ Defense Before the Council

Luke describes what takes place with the Sanhedrin beginning in Acts 4:5: *“The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem.”* These men are the ones who comprised the Jewish Sanhedrin Council, which would be very much like the Supreme Court of a nation today. They were, in essence, the Supreme Court among the Jews.

Paul writes in Colossians 2:14 and Ephesians 2:14 that when our Lord died on the cross, He fulfilled the demands of the law, nailing its ordinances, teachings and traditions to the cross. Jehovah no longer acknowledged the Sanhedrin council

as a ruling, governing body among His people. However, they still believed that they were the ones to make decisions for the unbelieving Jews, and since they had been accustomed to making similar decisions with regard to religious teaching and the activity of the people, the apostles are brought before them.

Luke states that the elders and scribes were the rulers of this body. There were seventy such rulers that comprised the Sanhedrin court. Luke also writes that "*Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family*" (Acts 4:6). Present here is the father, Annas, and his son-in-law, Caiaphas. Caiaphas should not have been a priest, but since the Roman authorities demanded it, the Jewish authorities went along with it. Luke describes the meeting place as a semi-circle area. They brought Peter, John and the man who had been healed through the power of our Lord and the Holy Spirit into the midst of where the Sanhedrin council was meeting. A question is then asked of Peter: "*By what power or what name did you do this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: 'Rulers and elders of the people!'*" (Acts 4:7b-8).

In Luke 21:14ff., as well as Matthew 10:19-20, Jesus had promised the apostles that when they were brought before such rulers like the Sanhedrin, they would not have to be anxious about what or how they should speak. The Holy Spirit would teach them what they were to say. Here, in Acts 4, is the fulfillment of that promise. The Spirit had been sent on the day of Pentecost and had empowered the apostles with these miraculous gifts. So Peter and John did not have to stay up all night working on their presentation delivery or defense. The Holy Spirit taught them in words (1 Corinthians 2:13) what they should say and how to say it. Jesus said, "Do not be anxious what or how you shall speak." When the record tells us that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, we need to know that the fulfillment of Jesus' promise is being demonstrated here.

Peter, by inspiration, then makes this statement,

If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed (Acts 4:9-10).

Luke wrote in Acts 3 that the man was made to be perfectly healthy.

Peter begins to preach again about Jesus Christ. “*He is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone’*” (Acts 4:11; cf. Psalm 118:22). Peter again goes back to the Old Testament, Psalm 118:22, reminding them of the Messianic promise, saying that the Lord is the chief cornerstone. Those men who made up the Sanhedrin had arrived at the point and time of their building and had rejected the chief cornerstone.

Peter continues, “*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12). Notice the courage and valor with which they were speaking. They were saying all that needed to be said, even in a brief period of time with regard to Christ being the Old Testament Messiah, the Savior, and the only One by which a person can be saved. It can only happen through the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter must have known that the members of the Sanhedrin council were sinners; he knew that they were in need of salvation, and he believed that they were worth saving. We need to have that same kind of confident faith in the gospel of Christ. We need to believe that the gospel is God’s saving power to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). Peter, knowing that to be the case, said that Jesus is the only One who can save. There is no other person. This means that He can save even the Sanhedrin.

The Effect of Bold Preaching

The reaction on the part of the Sanhedrin council is quite

noticeable. Acts 4:13 says,

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

The Sanhedrin knew that as far as professional training was concerned, Peter and John had not been to school and had not been equipped to so speak. What we know is that they had been taught and trained by the most perfect Teacher that the world has ever known, that being Jesus. Jesus had been with them for three years. He had equipped them well, and now the Holy Spirit had been sent by Jesus to teach them the words that they had just presented on this occasion.

A person cannot have a more perfect Teacher than the Holy Spirit and could not have a finer person to train and equip them than the Lord Jesus Christ. But the Sanhedrin did not know that. Here are two former fishermen, and as far as the Sanhedrin was concerned, these apostles were men without any technical training, or without any letters from their schools. How, then, was it possible for them to speak so well? They understood that Peter and John were uneducated and untrained men, and they were marveling at the ability that the Holy Spirit had given them, along with the training that Jesus had given them, to speak. The council then recognized the apostles as having been with Jesus. They just could not figure it out, since Peter and John had not received the professional training that they were able to give the Jews, such as Paul was able to receive under the tutelage and guidance of Gamaliel. But they did observe that they were like Jesus, they were like the other Teacher, the perfect Teacher. They slowly began to figure it out. These people have the ability to so speak because they had been with Jesus.

Acts 4:14 tells us, “*But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing*

they could say." They had to acknowledge that only God could work a miracle like this. This miracle had been performed through two of the apostles, Peter and John, and here is the man standing beside them in perfect health. There was absolutely nothing that they say in reply. As we said in our previous study of Acts 3:16, this shows that they could not deny that a noteworthy miracle had taken place. All they could do was order the apostles to leave, to go outside of the council. They then began to confer with one another. They did not want Peter and John to hear the conversation that is recorded here. They say in 4:16-17,

'What are we going to do with these men?' they asked. 'Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it. But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name.'

That was the decision that they arrived at, and so they brought Peter and John back into the Sanhedrin meeting place. "*Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus*" (Acts 4:18).

Peter and John have a ready response to this prohibition that has been placed upon them not to preach the gospel of Christ.

But Peter and John replied, 'Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking what we have seen and heard' (Acts 4:19-20).

The impact of this statement cannot be overemphasized. Here is a governing body of men, and Peter tells them that he wants them to judge whether they should listen to God or to men. If they were honest in their response, they would have

said, well you have to obey what God says. Peter would have said in reply, that is the very thing that we are going to do.

Notice though that Peter said all of this in a very kind and respectful way. He knew that they were to show deference and respect for every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake (1 Peter 2:13), and they would continue to do that. But here was the Sanhedrin trying to take the authority that only God can have. God is the One who had judged whether or not they should teach and preach the good news about His Son. They had a mandate from the Son of God to go preach the gospel and the Sanhedrin was hindering them from doing so. But Peter said, "We cannot stop speaking the things we have both seen and heard." In a very respectful way, Peter and John said, "We will continue to do what the Son of God, the One who is King of kings and Lord of lords, the One who has authority over all dominion in power and name of every person that exists here on the earth, has commissioned us to do."

The Release of Peter and John

Their Reunion With the Other Disciples

Luke then records what takes place after they return to their own companions.

After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old (Acts 4:21-22).

Now the Sanhedrin was showing respect to the people outside of their meeting place. There is a reason for this respect. They had found no basis for which they might punish Peter and John, and the people were all praising God. We have stressed this before, but we need to give emphasis to it again: miracles, those things that transcended God's law of nature,

were of such a nature that even the enemies of the cross could not deny that they were miracles. Here was a fellow standing among them, he was over forty years old, he had been a cripple his entire life, and he was now no longer in that condition. There was no way that they could deny that a great miracle from God had been accomplished in the name of Christ through Peter and John. All the people were outside the hall, honoring God with praise, and glorifying Him for what had been accomplished. The only thing the Sanhedrin could do was to threaten the apostles, as they did on this occasion.

A Prayer of Conviction

Luke tells us that when Peter, John, and this man had been released, they went back to their own companions (4:23). Upon their return they reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. The immediate response of the disciples was to pray. There is a lesson here for everyone. We have to admit shamefully that prayer is not as important to the church today as it was in the first century. It ought to be just as important; it ought to be a matter of priority that we think of prayer first in all that we do. In the early church the apostles devoted themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4). We have already seen that they were strong in their praying (Acts 2:42).

After they briefly explained what had taken place, Luke writes,

When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. ‘Sovereign Lord,’ they said, ‘you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One”’ (Acts 4:24-26; cf. Psalm 2:1-2).

First, they acknowledged the creative power of God. We know that God created everything, but we need to honor Him repeatedly for His creative power. He created all things and has given us life and breath in all things. He is the Lord of heaven and earth. Having acknowledged the creative nature of God, they refer to Psalm 2. It is not wrong to have scripture in mind when we pray. It does not mean that we just quote scripture when we pray, but it is not wrong to make reference to a scripture as they did.

In Psalm 2 we read of the sovereignty of Jesus, that He is the Lord over all of the rulers of the earth. He is the Prince over all the rulers of the earth (Revelation 1:5). This Psalm predicted that Jesus would have such authority and power. They are reflecting on that and they say, “Father we are aware of the fact that your rulers, Pilate and the other rulers, they were set against what you had in your foreknowledge to be accomplished in the death, burial, and resurrection of your Son.” These rulers had set themselves against God’s Son, the Anointed One, but despite that, His will was carried out (4:27-30).

Do we see the concept of this prayer? These disciples are saying, “Lord we want to praise you for all that you have done through the death and the sacrifice of your Son on the cross. Here were the rulers of the earth setting themselves against you in every way and yet your will, and your eternal purpose, was carried out.” They prayed for God to continue to accomplish His purpose through them as they taught and preached the good news of the Lord. They then made a request, as they continued this prayer, to be able to preach the gospel of Christ, which we will study in the next chapter.

DISCIPLINE + PERSECUTION = GROWTH

Introduction

From the prayer that is recorded in Acts chapter 4, we learned that the apostles had bold and strong convictions. They believed in God's power as the Creator and Sustainer and that without God, man's life is futile and rebellious. We also read that Christ was set upon the holy hill of Zion (Psalm 2:6), and now He's in spiritual Zion, which is heaven itself, sitting at the right-hand side of the Father.

They Prayed For Three Things

In Acts 4:29-30 the disciples requested three things from the Lord. Luke writes,

Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch our your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

Without any bitterness, or resentment, on the part of the apostles, they asked for the Lord to notice the threats that had been made by the Sanhedrin Council. They also prayed for courage to continue to speak the word with boldness. We learn from this statement that boldness is derived through prayer. We do not become bold just by wishing to be that way. If we want to have courage to say all that needs to be said about any topic,

then we need to pray for boldness. In Ephesians 6:18, and other passages of scripture, we read that Paul, the apostles, and others prayed for boldness and asked others to pray for their boldness. We need that kind of valor and bravery today in order to speak the word of God. The apostles were inspired in what they preached. The Spirit taught them what words to say, but they still had to have the bravery to speak those words.

It must also be remembered that just because the Spirit revealed what words for them to speak, He did not cause them to say it. They still had to have the Spirit of faith, along with the strength and bravery to stand up and speak. The apostles Peter and John were very bold as they appeared before the Sanhedrin Council. From that time forward, they would need that kind of bravery, so they are asking the Lord to continue to confirm His word through them. They also wanted everyone to know that the empowering of the Holy Spirit, as seen in the miraculous gifts that were granted to the apostles during this day and age, was accomplished through the Person, the Name and the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Answer To Their Prayer

Luke writes in Acts 4:31, "*After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.*" They had asked the Lord to give them all courage and that He would continue to confirm His word. They also prayed that He would look upon the threats that had been made against them and that He would continue to watch over them in providence and care for them, so that they could continue to teach and preach the gospel of Christ. They are not praying that the Lord would keep them from any kind of pressure or persecution. They were just asking that they could continue to have the opportunity, along with the physical and spiritual strength, to preach and teach the gospel of Christ.

Luke writes that after they prayed, the place where they were gathered was shaken as if an earthquake was happening.

There was a visible shaking of the building and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Just as they had been since the day of Pentecost, they were influenced and controlled in a miraculous way by the Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness. That was the way they had been speaking, and that is the way that they wanted to continue to speak, with all confidence.

The Unity and Generosity of the Early Church

The Unity and Liberality of the Early Church

Luke changes the subject here in order to tell us something about the unity of the church. The book of Acts tells us not only how the Lord built His church, through the teaching and the preaching of the gospel of Christ, he tells us how we can continue to spiritually build up the body of Christ. One thing that contributes to the unity, or to the building up of the body of Christ, is the ***practice and belief*** of New Testament unity. Luke writes in 4:32a, “*All the believers were one in heart and mind* (keep in mind that this is a large church with 4,000 to 5,000 men).”

This is the unity for which our Lord had prayed (John 17:21-23). Jesus had prayed that those in the church would be one, just as the Father and Son are one, and because of that unity, the world might believe that the Father really sent His Son, Jesus, into this world. This unity must be a unity that is visible to unbelieving people, so that it will make a strong impact on them when they see the lack of unity in the rest of the religious world. It will also make a strong impact, however, when they see disunity among God’s people in His church. Disunity hinders the teaching and preaching of the gospel of Christ, and so this unity that they had was decorating and making attractive the teaching of our Lord.

We are not talking here about compromise in any way; we are talking about being in perfect agreement, being of one heart and one soul, being of one mind and of one teaching. Ephesians

4:4-6 pleads for that kind of unity and tells us how it's possible, if we adhere to the absolutes of those verses.

But, along with all of this, our attitude must contribute to unity. We must bear with one another in love, we must endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit, and we must be bound together in peace. The early church had that kind of attitude, and that is one of the reasons that the Lord's church was able to grow so rapidly and in such huge numbers at this particular time. Luke writes about this attitude in Acts 4:32b: "*No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.*" They realized the responsible stewardship that they had to God, that whatever possessions they had, it was God who had given those things to them. All of these things were really His, and so, in whatever way God could be benefitted and blessed with their possessions, they were willing to share them with one another.

With this attitude in place, Luke writes in Acts 4:33, "*With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.*" Notice that what the apostles had done on the day of Pentecost, they continued to do. They were committed to the bold proclamation of the gospel of Christ. With tremendous power they set forth the testimony and the evidence that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and that truth confirms that Jesus is the Son of God with power (Romans 1:4).

God's immeasurable grace, His unmerited favor, was upon all of the people, because, as Luke writes,

There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet . . . (Acts 4:34).

The proceeds from these sales were placed into the treasury for distribution and would be distributed to anyone who had a need.

Luke then introduces another individual,

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles feet (Acts 4:36-37).

Barnabas had become a believer and he had a plot of ground on the Isle of Cyprus. He sold this tract and brought the money from the sale and laid it at the apostles' feet. This is our introduction to the great man of God, Barnabas. We will read more about him in Acts chapters 9 and 11. He became a co-laborer with Paul during Paul's first missionary tour (Acts 13 and 14). He was one of the great servants of the Lord in the early church.

It seems, though, without having a specific passage of scripture, that from the time of the death of Christ up until Pentecost, Jews like Joseph, or Barnabas as he was called, would come from other areas, or countries, to the annual feast in Jerusalem. It also appears that some of them had the financial strength to have bought property in and around Jerusalem. They had possessions there that belonged to them, and now that they are members of the body of Christ, belonging to the holy priesthood of God, they do not have to come to Jerusalem in order to worship. John chapter 4 had predicted that this would be the case; one did not have to be in Jerusalem, but rather, could worship in spirit and truth in some other place. These converts didn't have to come to Jerusalem, as they had been required to do when they were devoted Jews, so they began to dispense with some of their property and houses and lands. As they did so, they took the proceeds from that property and put it into the church treasury, and distribution was made to whoever was in need.

The word love is not found in the book of Acts, but the practice of love is there over and over again. This is a

demonstration of active goodwill toward others and unconquerable acts of benevolence. This is genuine, Christ-like love. These new Christians were willing to sell what they had, take the money from the sale, and give it to those who were in need. In 1 John 3, John writes that this is what it means to love in both deed and truth. So we see a demonstration of Christian love in Acts chapter 4, and we see the kind of unity that existed in the New Testament church.

Trouble from Within – the First Church Discipline

The Sin and Punishment of Ananias and Sapphira

In Acts 5 we are introduced to a sin that occurred in the early church, and we will see God's punishment of that sin. We will also see from the context why it was necessary that such a severe and swift punishment came upon the couple who sinned in the manner they did.

Luke has just illustrated the generous and gracious attitude and conduct of Barnabas and others like him. However, Luke now writes of a contrasting attitude.

Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira (which means beautiful), also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostle's feet (Acts 5:1-2).

What we see here is Ananias and Sapphira leaving the impression that they were bringing the full amount of money from the sale of their land and were giving it all to the apostles for those who were in need. They lied about the amount of money that they had secured from the selling of the property. If they had only been honest by saying that they had sold some property and were bringing half of it, or whatever amount it was, and that they wanted to make a gift to help those in need,

God would have been honored and glorified. Instead, they lied about the amount that they had received and the amount that they were giving.

The real sin, as we see in 5:9, was that they were tempting the Holy Spirit of God by thinking that they could get away with lying like this. They were questioning whether or not the apostles were empowered by the Holy Spirit of God and whether or not Peter and the other apostles had credentials as ambassadors for Christ. That is the reason why God deals with this sin in such a severe manner, as recorded in this chapter.

In 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 Paul lists all of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. One of those gifts that Paul mentions was the ability to discern spirits. How did Peter know that this man had lied? The only way he could have known was by the empowering he had received from the Holy Spirit, which gave him the ability to discern Ananias and Sapphira's spirit to see whether or not they were speaking the truth. With that information and knowledge, Luke writes of Peter,

Then Peter said, ‘Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?’ (Acts 5:3).

Peter goes to the very origin of sin. Jesus said in John 8:44 that Satan is the father of lies. He is the one who started speaking with the intent of deceiving another person. All liars, unless they repent, will go to the place of torment and be lost eternally (Revelation 21:8). Lying is one of the things, according to Colossians 3:8-11 and Ephesians 4:25, that we put to death when we became a Christian. We are to speak the truth as Jesus did since we are men and women of truth. God has never been pleased with those who are given to speaking lies. This is what led Peter to ask the question, “*Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit?*”

Satan has the ability and the power to tempt us with things that are evil, if we will allow him. He does have to have our mutual consent, along with our heart and will to cooperate with him. Peter recognized that Satan had exercised his power over Ananias and so Peter said, “Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?” Satan could not have done that without Ananias’ cooperation, and so Ananias was held responsible for having cooperated with Satan. To emphasize that Ananias was responsible for his actions, Peter asked him,

Didnt it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to me but to God (Acts 5:4).

We learn from this verse that Ananias and Sapphira were never commanded to sell their house, land or property. They were allowed to sell whatever they wanted, for whatever amount of money they wanted. God then permitted them to take whatever amount of money they wished and give it to the church for the proclamation of the gospel of Christ. But He never commanded them to do such a thing.

We also learn from this, as well as from other references in the book of Acts, that not everything that the apostles did is bound upon us. We can follow an apostolic example like this, but it is not commanded that we do so. We often follow the examples of the apostles because they are backed by a specific command (cf. Acts 20:7 with regard to the Lord’s Supper). Jesus commanded the Lord’s Supper in the gospels, but also in other New Testament scriptures such as 1 Corinthians chapter 11. We are permitted to meet at night and in an upper room on the Lord’s Day, as we will see in Acts 20, but we are not commanded to do so. These matters become matters of judgment. Apostolic examples that are bound upon us have to be backed by a specific command.

The point that Peter makes to Ananias is that it was left up to his control as to what he would do with the money. Instead,

he chose to lie about it. He had conceived this plan in his own heart, which is where sin originates. Knowing this, Peter said to him, “*You have not lied to men, but to God.*” The result of Peter speaking these words to him was, “*When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened*” (Acts 5:5).

The origin of sin, as we see here, was within the heart of this couple. We also see that the sin was publicly exposed immediately. The swiftness of punishment for that sin must also be noted. It was sudden, it was very severe, and it was justified.

Peter knew that Ananias and Sapphira had tried to discredit the apostles. The apostles were empowered by the Holy Spirit of God and were given credentials by the Spirit to serve as apostles. Ananias and Sapphira thought that they could get by undetected, that Peter, or any of the other apostles, would not know that they had lied. However, had they been able to get away with their actions, that would have reflected upon the apostles authority, and without apostolic authority, they would not be able to speak and teach. This is why God had to deal with this sin in such a swift and severe manner. There was no burial service, no funeral service. Some young men came in, took him out, and buried him.

In Acts 5:9, Luke records that the next person who Peter spoke to was Sapphira. Luke writes that there was an interval of about 3 hours between the time that Ananias died and when Sapphira came back. We do not know where she had been, but it is obvious that she was unaware of what had taken place. When Peter approached her, he gave her an opportunity to repent.

Peter asked her, ‘Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?’ ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘that is the price.’ Peter said to her, ‘How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will

carry you out also (Acts 5:8-9).

Ananias had told Peter that he and Sapphira had sold the land for a certain price and that what they were giving to the apostles was the total amount of the sale. That was a lie; they had sold the land for much more, so Peter asks Sapphira how much was received for the property. With her answer, it was obvious that they had conspired together to test the Spirit of the Lord. It was a willful, chosen, deliberate transgression.

There are times that we sin inadvertently through weakness and error, and many times out of ignorance, but we do not, or should not, sit down and calculate how we can sin. We do not plan for times that we can sin in our lives. Sin ought to be like an airplane accident, never planned. Ananias and Sapphira had planned on sinning. They had agreed together. This is a presumptuous or deliberate sin as we learn from our study of the Old Testament. It is a terrible thing to lie, but to believe that it can be gotten away with is quite another thing.

Ananias and Sapphira believed that they could test the Holy Spirit of God and get by undetected. That kind of thinking had to be dealt with. Apostolic authority was at stake. The continuation of the teaching and preaching of the gospel of Christ by the apostles was at stake.

The statement that Peter made to her about her husband was the first news that she had that he had died and been buried. Peter says that the same fate is about to come on her as well. Luke writes that, *“At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband”* (Acts 5:10).

The Effect of Holy Correction and Preaching

Luke records that the reaction of the entire church and everyone else was one of great fear. Acts 5:11 says, *“Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these event.”* News like this would have spread through the city

quickly. Everyone heard about this couple and what had taken place, but Luke tells us that, “*The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon’s Colonnade*” (Acts 5:12).

There was a large roofed area on the temple grounds that had huge columns that held up the roof. This area was Solomon’s porch. Thousands of people could congregate in the temple area and if it were raining they could meet under the large roofed area. This area is where these deeds of compassion and works from the Holy Spirit were being accomplished. However, as 5:13 says, “*No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people.*”

This response on the part of the people is understandable. After they had heard about what had happened to Ananias and Sapphira, and when they saw the apostles demonstrate the discerning of the spirits, the other people were hesitant to be near them. A person could be thinking, I have coveted lately, I have had evil in my heart, I wonder to what extent this punishment from the Spirit might be. So they kept their distance from the apostles for a period of time. They wanted to be sure that others would not be dealt with in the severe manner with which that Ananias and Sapphira had been dealt.

But the record tells us that they still held the apostles in high esteem, which is a result of God’s judgment upon this couple being accomplished. The Bible speaks of two different ways for a church to discipline its members. First, there is discipline that is instructive in nature. When we instruct each other in the gospel of Christ, when we warn one another as 1 Thessalonians 5 tells us to, when we admonish those who are disorderly, when we teach the word of God, that is instructive discipline. Second, there is corrective discipline (cf. 1 Corinthians 5). Here, in Acts 5, we find corrective discipline. The Lord corrected the situation involving Ananias and Sapphira by removing them by means of death. The effect of this discipline was that the church continued to grow. Acts 5:14

says, “*Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.*”

Many great things occurred in this chapter, but as we continue on, we will study another aspect of the life of the apostles: imprisonment and persecution for preaching the gospel. May God bless us as we attempt to learn the how and why of His methods of discipline, but also for His intervention when opponents try to thwart the progress of His word.

TROUBLE FROM WITHIN AND WITHOUT

In this chapter our study will cover Acts 5:17-42. We are going to read about the imprisonment of the apostles and see something about the nature of their faith: even though they were under intense tribulation and persecution, they stayed faithful to the preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God's Providential Protection

God's Sovereignty Over Ungodly Opposition

Luke writes in Acts 5:17-18,

"Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail."

In Acts 23 we will learn more about the unbelief of the Sadducees. They did not respect the power of God, they did not believe in the immortality of the soul, the resurrection, or the existence of spirits and angels. They were deeply committed to political activities and a relationship with the Roman government. Luke tells us that they were filled with jealousy toward the apostles. Here was a zeal inspired by hatred. From the context, it appears that as the apostles preached Christ, and as the Lord worked through them to build, establish and enlarge His church, the apostles were receiving greater enhancement,

credibility, and reputation with the people, while influence of the Sanhedrin Council and the Sadducees was decreasing among the people. This resulted in the sins of envy and jealousy.

Because of their jealous attitude toward the apostles Luke writes,

They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. ‘Go, stand in the temple courts,’ he said, ‘and tell the people the full message of this new life’ (Acts 5:18-20).

The apostles were told by an angel of the Lord to speak the entire counsel, the entire message of God. We will read about the ministry of angels in Acts 8:26, in regard to ministry of Philip, the evangelist, as he goes to preach Christ to the Ethiopian eunuch. We will also read about the ministry of angels in Acts 10, when Peter was told to go and appear before Cornelius, who obviously was praying for a greater understanding of Christ and the salvation that is found only in Him. In Acts 12 we read about the ministry of angels in the release of the apostle Peter from the hand of Herod. Later, we read that an angel appeared to Paul prior to the shipwreck he was involved in, as recorded in Acts 27. In that account, the angel was sent to encourage Paul and to reassure him that everyone would be safe through the shipwreck, and that he would eventually arrive in the imperial city of Rome. The writer of the book of Hebrews writes that angels are ministering servants for those who are heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1:14); however, we are reading in Acts 5, not only about the providential work of angels, which is still with us today, but also about the supernatural or miraculous aspect of the work of angels. Angels would appear to people and speak to them directly. Or they would work a supernatural event to bring about the release of the apostles, as is seen in this context.

The apostles had been told by the Lord what to do, which was their commission to begin with (cf. Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 1:8), and Luke states that is what they had been doing. They were continuing to do in the temple area what they had been doing from the day of Pentecost.

At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people. When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, ‘We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.’ On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this (Acts 5:21-24).

I suspect that they were thinking to themselves, if we cannot even keep the apostles in prison overnight, what can we do to prevent their ministry from enlarging and continuing here in the temple area and in the city? It is at this point that someone came and said to them, “*Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people*” (Acts 5:26a). Having been told this, the captain went with his officers and brought them back before the Sanhedrin. They were careful not to use violence against them because they were afraid that the people would stone them (Acts 5:26b).

This entire scenario fits the context of chapter 5. A great number of people had been healed. In fact, everyone who was brought to the apostles was healed, regardless of how they were afflicted, whether with an unclean spirit or disease or sickness. Think of the reaction on the part of the families who had loved ones and had been blessed through the ministry of the Spirit through the apostles. The Sanhedrin council, and their

ministers, had to be very careful, because the people in Jerusalem held the apostles in very high esteem. So in the most courteous way that they knew, they brought the apostles back into the temple area, where the Sanhedrin council met.

Luke writes in Acts 5:27-28,

Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ‘We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,’ he said. ‘Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.’

The word “filled” means to control or to influence. The entire city seemed to be controlled by the gospel of Christ. The phrase “*and are determined*” is a legal term that indicated that the apostles were implicating the Sanhedrin Council in the death of Jesus. But they were already implicated, as Luke recorded Peter saying in Acts 3:13-16 and Acts 4:10-11. The apostles reminded the people, but particularly the Sanhedrin and rulers, that they were the ones who had put pressure upon Pilate. They were the ones who wanted to release Barabbas instead of the Lord to bring about His death.

We know that the purpose of the Lord’s death was known through the foreknowledge of God, and that by the determined counsel of God, He became our sin offering. Those who initiated His death were held responsible for their deeds and crimes and needed to repent of those things. This is why they said that the apostles were trying to bring Jesus’ blood upon them.

Peter knows that their statement must be responded to. He said, “*We must obey God rather than men!*” (Acts 5:29). Peter did not say that they must obey God **instead of** men, he said **rather than** men. There are passages of scripture, such as Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2, that tell us that we are to obey all ordinances of man for the Lord's sake, but these are scriptures

which teach us to be obedient citizens regardless of the nation in which we live. When we do this, we honor and glorify God. However, if the ordinances of men, as the situation was here, tell us to do something that is contrary to the authority of Christ, or to the teachings of our Lord, then who are we to obey? As Peter stated, we must respect and obey God instead of men. God is the superior One who needs to be honored and respected. While the apostles are going to be courteous and respectful to this governing body, they have been told to stop doing what Jesus had commissioned them to do. Peter knew, and stated, that the apostles had a far greater authority and mandate from the King of kings and Lord of lords than they did from the Sanhedrin and other rulers. They must obey God rather than men. What a great concept and passage of scripture this is.

Peter continued to give emphasis as to why they were teaching and preaching as they were. He said,

The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel (Acts 5:30-31).

Once again, the emphasis is upon the historical testimony and proof of the bodily resurrection of our Lord. Peter said that because the Lord has been raised, He has ascended back to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He is there as Prince, and, of course, the concept here is that He is Leader and Savior. The word “prince” means the first of anything, the one who has the greatest authority. If we say a person is a prince, we mean that he is first in rank, or stature. The Lord is first and foremost in authority, nature and essence, which is verified by His being at the right hand of the Father. He is a Prince and a Savior, but His purpose in being there is to grant repentance and the forgiveness of sins to Israel.

The apostles are pleading with the Sanhedrin to seriously consider the nature of the Lord, the evidence of His resurrection, the truth of His being prince and Savior, and therefore, their need to submit to the Lord for salvation's sake. God grants all men the time to repent (cf. 2 Peter 3:9). He grants the motivation, and His goodness that will lead men to repentance. When we sin against God, we ought to be given to Godly grief and sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:10), because it is Godly sorrow that causes repentance to occur, which results in salvation. All men are commanded to repent, as we will see when we read Paul's sermon on Mar's Hill (Acts 17). Since we are all sinners we must change our thinking. Our mind must start thinking about the way that Christ's will controls us and instructs us to think. This is what the apostle Peter is stating to the Sanhedrin council. Peter concludes by saying, "*We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him*" (Acts 5:32).

The response of the Sanhedrin to Peter's words is predictable: "*When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death*" (Acts 5:33). It was obvious to the Sanhedrin that the apostles were not intimidated by them, and rather than yielding to what they suggested, the apostles had said that they have a risen Savior, they have a Prince on their side, one who is the King of kings and Lord of lords, and He wants them to preach redemption and salvation to everyone including those of the Sanhedrin. Because of these statements, the Sanhedrin was ready to have the apostles killed.

The Wise Advice of Gamaliel

Present in the Sanhedrin, however, was a Pharisee named Gamaliel. He was a teacher of the law, and as we read in the books of Philippians and Galatians, this important teacher instructed Paul himself. Since all the people respected him, he stood up in the council and gave orders to have the apostles taken outside for a short time. It was time for the Sanhedrin to have another private meeting, perhaps to prevent anything that

they may say from encouraging the apostles. After all, they are going to have to admit to some things, or the possibility of some things, having occurred with the assistance of the Lord.

Gamaliel's intention is to give the Sanhedrin some very wise and practical advice. He centered his advice on two things. He tells them to be very careful, because what they are doing is really needless and hopeless. If what the apostles are doing is based on the desires and deeds of men, then it will die in due time, but if it is from God, there is nothing that the Sanhedrin can do to prevent it.

Luke records Gamaliel's address to them:

Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing (Acts 5:35-36).

All of this occurred sometime earlier than this event. History tells us of another man named Theudas who arrived on the scene about A.D. 45. and tried to prove that he had miraculous power from God. He claimed that he could divide the Jordan River, along with other false claims and accusations. He claimed to be somebody important and powerful. A group of about 400 men joined up with him, but Theudas was killed, all of those who had chosen to follow him were scattered, and the whole thing came to nothing. Another person, by the name of Judas the Galilean, had arrived sometime after Theudas, making similar claims. Gamaliel reminds his listeners that the same fate came upon him as it had Theudas. Judas was killed and all of his followers were scattered as well (Acts 5:37). These were but two examples of men who had tried to deceive people by claiming that they were someone like the Messiah. With these two examples, Gamaliel went on to say,

Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God (Acts 5:38-39).

Gamaliel knows that if what the apostles are doing is from God, then it cannot be slowed down or prevented. The Sanhedrin cannot prevent this action, this teaching, this great ministry from being accomplished, so their response was to take the advice of Gamaliel. After calling the apostles back in, they had them flogged and ordered them not to speak anymore in the name of Jesus. Then they released them (Acts 5:40).

We need to see that there was no resentment or bitterness on the part of the apostles. Though hurting physically, they did not express any hatred, resentment or bitterness in any way toward the Sanhedrin council. Instead, Luke writes, “*The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name*” (Acts 5:41).

They thought that it was an honorable thing to be associated with the Lord, and in being identified with Him they would suffer as Christians. Peter would later write, “*If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name*” (1 Peter 4:16). In Colossians 1:24 Paul wrote,

Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.

The Lord had already suffered enough and we know the purpose of His suffering for us. But, we too must suffer if the gospel of Christ is going to be taught throughout the earth.

The apostles leave the Sanhedrin council hurting physically, and yet, rejoicing that they were identified with the Lord so that they could suffer shame for His name. Their commitment to their ministry remained intact. Acts 5:42 says, *“Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.”*

What a tremendous and victorious conclusion to this chapter. The apostles were teaching the unbelievers so that they could be saved by the gospel of Christ. They were building up and maturing the disciples, and when the great persecution came, as we will read in Acts 8, those who were scattered were mature enough, having been instructed thoroughly by the apostles, that they went everywhere preaching and teaching the word. In doing so, they were carrying out the last part of the great commission that was being conducted by the apostles. In Matthew 28:20, we read that after disciples are made by teaching and baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, they are to be taught all of the things that the Lord has commanded. While carrying out this commandment, the Lord has promised that His presence will be with us. The apostles were making disciples and teaching the saved disciples all of the things that the Lord has commanded. During all of this, the apostles had a very steadfast faith.

Problems Within and Progress Without

The First Problem of Disunity

In Acts chapter 6, Luke will write about one of the problems that the New Testament church faced in Jerusalem. In studying this chapter, we need to understand that there will always be problems in the body of Christ, but we should not despair, because we are working through a problem. One of the things to learn is that there is a right and a wrong way to work through these problems, and in this chapter, we are going to see that the apostles worked through this problem in the right way.

We have already read that the church numbers about 5,000 men (Acts 4:4), and now, the church is really going to start growing. Before we look at the growth that took place, let us look at the first account of disunity in the church and at John 17 for some background information.

In John chapter 17, it is important to note what Jesus prayed for fervently before He went to the cross. He prayed that His disciples would be one, just as the Father and Son are one, and through that unity, the world might believe that the Father sent Jesus. Since this was the desire of Jesus, then unity is required of us. In Ephesians 4 Paul lists the attitudes that promote unity and the seven absolutes of the unity of the spirit that bring it about. Paul then lists the agents that are involved in promoting this unity (Ephesians 4:11-16). The early church obviously had the spirit of unity, as seen in Acts 4:32. They were of one heart, one soul, and one mind, and because of this oneness, they were increasing more and more.

But then a complaint is voiced by the Hellenistic Jews. Luke writes,

In those days when the number of the disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food (Acts 6:1).

The Hellenistic Jews were those who, by way of their bloodline, were Jews, and yet their culture was non-Palestinian. In other words, they lived elsewhere, out of Jerusalem and out of the Palestinian area, and their language and culture were Greek, or as it was called in those days, Hellenistic. So, there were all of these people, at this point in time, who religiously were Jewish, but they either lived in or around the Jerusalem area or in other nations. In Acts 2 Luke provides a list of all of the nations that had come to Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.

Among these nations were those who were Hellenistic Jews, and there was a complaint on their part against the native

Hebrews, or Jews. The complaint centered on what they saw as the unfair distribution of food to their widows. In Acts chapter 4 we read about the administration of the possessions of the church to those who were in need. People like Barnabas had sold their homes and property and had taken the money and put it in the church treasury. They had laid the money at the apostles' feet so that distribution could be made to everyone who was in need. The record tells us that this was a daily administration. The church had the right to distribute money to people who were in need so that they could go secure food or other things that were necessities of life. It was not wrong to distribute food, but that which had been given to the church was money and so the church was probably distributing the money. However, during this distribution, some of the widows were being overlooked.

The Solution To the Disunity

Luke now tells how the apostles reacted. He writes,

So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables (Acts 6:2).

The apostles want all of the disciples to understand that it would be wrong for them to abandon their ministry of teaching, to leave the work they were doing in houses and in homes on a daily basis, in order to serve tables. There were others who were qualified to serve tables. The apostles acknowledge that there were some who were inadvertently being overlooked, and so a solution to the problem is needed. The solution to their problem was this:

Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our

attention to prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:3-4).

The apostles had the right to come together and say, here is what we can and cannot do. One of the things that we do learn in reading and studying the book of Acts is that the church existed for a time under the control of the apostles. The same thing applies today. The Lord's church can be established and built today and be under the control of the apostles' doctrine, even before there are spiritual shepherds to serve as overseers of the body of Christ. At this point in the New Testament, there were not elders in the body of Christ. We do not read about them until we get to Acts 11, 14, and 15. But, since there were not elders to oversee the church at this time, the apostles knew just exactly how many men were needed to be public servants to the church, men who were called deacons. In 1 Timothy 3 and Philippians 1, they are known as public servants. The word "deacon" means to carry out the execution of another, to serve and to be bound in that service. In order for service to be carried out in the church in Jerusalem, there needed to be seven public servants of the church. It needs to be noted that the apostles told the church to look from among their membership and to select such men. The apostles did not select the men, the church did. The church was being given the responsibility of solving this problem. The results of that selection will be seen in the next chapter.

STEPHEN'S DEFENSE AND MARTYRDOM

The Responsibility of the Church: Select Seven Men

In the last chapter we read where the church was given the opportunity to select seven men, men who were to be charged with the responsibility of insuring that the Hellenistic widows in the church were given their fair distribution of food. In order to select these seven men, however, the church needed to know what their qualifications would be. Luke notes those qualifications in Acts 6:3:

Brothers, choose from among you men who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.

The apostles knew exactly how many men were needed for the daily administration of food. They also gave the guidelines that assisted the church in choosing these seven men. These men were to be men of good character, or good reputation. They were to be men who were full of the Spirit. They would be filled with the Spirit's message, which would enable them to have the fruit of the spirit (cf. Galatians 5:22-23). They were also to be men of wisdom. That means that they had skill and good judgment based upon their experience in life. They knew how to expedite, or to carry out, the work of the Lord.

Once these men were selected, the apostles would put

them in charge of this task. But, just as important, the apostles said that they were going to continue to devote themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. Praying and preaching go hand in hand, so before the apostles would go out to teach and preach the gospel, they spent time with the Lord in prayer. That is where they gained their wisdom (James 1:5), along with their boldness, their strength, and their grace to carry out their ministry. This is a powerful lesson for us today. We need to devote ourselves to prayer, as well as to the ministry of the word.

Luke then records the reaction of the congregation. He writes,

This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them (Acts 6:5-6).

The purpose of the apostles laying their hands upon them was to appoint them to this task, and to command and commit them to God's grace for that ministry. The Spirit, through the laying on of the apostles' hands, empowered these seven servants with miraculous gifts (cf. Acts 2). The Spirit gave gifts as He willed, but in this case, He did it through the laying on of the apostles' hands. So, here were seven men who were filled with the Spirit before they were empowered by the Holy Spirit. As previously mentioned, it is important that this distinction is made and understood.

Luke makes it a point to insure it is known that not only did the brethren agree with what the apostles had done, but that the word of God kept on spreading, and the number of disciples continued to increase greatly (Acts 6:7a). Another version (the King James Version) says, ". . . the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem." There were already at least 5,000

men in the church (Acts 4:4), and when that number is multiplied, an even larger number results. Thousands upon thousands of people were becoming members of the New Testament church in the city of Jerusalem. Luke also states, “*...and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith*” (Acts 6:7b). The gospel was infiltrating into the ranks of the leaders of the Jewish religion.

There is something about the faith that has to be obeyed from the heart. The New Testament talks about this obedience of faith, the obedience to the gospel of Christ. People today talk about Christ and trusting in Him, and all of that is essential and necessary, but a trusting and assuring faith has to be joined with obedience before it is a saving faith. When the Bible is read from beginning to end, it is seen that no one was blessed by faith until that faith expressed itself in some bodily action. There has to be obedient faith if one is going to be saved by grace through faith, and Luke writes that some of the priests had become obedient to that faith.

Stephen Arrested and Falsely Accused

Stephen's Ministry and His Arrest

Beginning in Acts 6:8, and continuing through Acts chapter 7, Luke concentrates on Stephen, his ministry and manner of life. Stephen was full of grace and the empowering of the Spirit, which he had received through the laying on of the apostles' hands. Luke says that Stephen was performing great wonders and signs among the people. Among these people were some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen. These men were “*Jews from Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. . .*” (Acts 6:9). Luke records that they rose up and argued with Stephen, who was sharing the good news of the Lord, but they were not able to stand up against the wisdom and spirit with which he was speaking, since he had been empowered with the Spirit.

Accusations Against Stephen

Since these men were defeated in their debate with Stephen, they resorted to slander and violence. They persuaded in secret some men to say that Stephen had spoken blasphemous words against Moses and against God (6:11). We know from what we have read about Stephen that he was never given to blasphemy, but that is how they viewed it. He told them the truth, so they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, who then proceeded to seize him and drag him away. They brought him before the council, that is, the Sanhedrin (6:12), and then put forward the false witnesses who said that Stephen had constantly spoken out against the holy place (the temple) and against the Law of Moses. They went on to testify that Stephen had said that Jesus of Nazareth was going to destroy the temple and alter the customs that Moses had handed down.

It is true that Stephen could have made reference to the Lord's teaching about the destruction of Jerusalem, as it is recorded in Mark 13, Luke 21 and Matthew 24. And, of course, those things were true and did happen in AD 70. But these Jews said that what Stephen was saying was blasphemy, even though Stephen was not given to that kind of thought or speech at all.

Luke then says that when they fixed their gaze on him, all of them who were sitting in the council saw his face like the face of an angel. It is not for certain just what all is involved in that statement, but it can be gathered from what Luke has said that there was absolutely no bitterness, no hatred, nor harboring of resentment on the part of Stephen toward his accusers. As we will read in the chapter 7, he even prays for his enemies. He had the same spirit that Jesus had when He was on the cross, a forbearing and forgiving nature and spirit.

Stephen's Defense Before the Sanhedrin

Stephen's Line of Defense

Acts chapter 7 records Stephen's great sermon before the Sanhedrin. However, instead of reading and studying the entire chapter, an outline of the chapter is presented. We want to see what the Spirit led Stephen to present in this great message, because there are tremendously important lessons to be learned in this chapter.

Stephen begins by recapping the history of the Jews, showing how time and again Israel had rejected God's faithful servants, and in so doing had rejected God Himself. He points out the presence of God with Moses and with the people during the time of the tabernacle. Obviously the Jews, at the time when Stephen was speaking, could not understand how the presence of God could be with people if He were away from the temple area. To show how God could be with people, even though there was no temple, Stephen reminds them that God was with His servant Abraham when God called him in Chaldea, and God was with their ancestors back when they had the portable tabernacle in the Old Testament. God can be with His people regardless of where they are.

Stephen then talks about Joseph and the patriarchs (his brothers), how they reacted with jealousy toward Joseph (7:9), and how, because of their jealousy, they sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt. We know that the providence of God was involved in all this, as Genesis chapters 37 through 50 point out. God was with his servant Joseph, and made it possible for him to become a ruler, second only to Pharaoh, and to eventually bring all of his brethren down to Egypt. God blessed all of them during the period of time that they lived in Egypt.

In 7:14 we read that 75 people came to Egypt to join Joseph upon the invitation of Pharaoh himself. They were all allowed to live in the land of Goshen in Egypt. Stephen says that 75 persons came to Egypt, but in Genesis 46:27, it says that 70 people came to Egypt. However, the Septuagint (LXX),

which is the Greek language translation of the Old Testament, also says that 75 people came to Egypt, so there is no contradiction. Stephen includes the five wives of Jacob, whereas in the Genesis account, they are excluded, and this makes up the difference in the two accounts.

Jacob went to Egypt and the Lord was there with His people. That is a strong point in Stephen's sermon; God was in Egypt with His people. We are going to see the application of this point a little later. Stephen then begins talking about Moses, the great lawgiver. He speaks about his birth and how God preserved him so that he could be raised by Pharaoh's daughter and brought up in an Egyptian household. Moses was educated in the Egyptian system. He had all of the learning of the Egyptians. He was a man of power, of words, and of deeds (7:22). But, at the age of 40, he thought that it was the time for him to become a mediator among God's people. The Lord had not informed him of this, but perhaps his mother, who had reared him, had informed him that God had a special ministry for him. Moses tried to mediate a dispute between two of his Hebrew brethren. These two men did not know Moses and how God was going to use him later on in the great service of deliverance, but he still took it upon himself to mediate between these two men. However, they rejected his intervention and his serving as a mediator. One of them asked Moses if he was going to kill him just as He had killed an Egyptian the day before (cf. Exodus 2:11-14). When Moses heard this, he fled Egypt, because he knew that Pharaoh would have him killed for killing an Egyptian (Exodus 2:15a). Acts 7:29 tells us that Moses fled to the land of Midian, where he became an alien in the land and the father of two sons (cf. Exodus 2:15b-25).

Moses had been in the land of Midian for 40 years, during which time the Lord was equipping Moses for his great ministry. God knew that Moses needed equipping, maturing, and the humbling experience that 40 years would give him so that he could become the great law giver that he would be when

he was 80 years old. The record tells us that in time an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mt. Sinai in the flame of a burning thorn bush, and when Moses saw it, he began to marvel at the sight. When he approached it to look more closely, the voice of the Lord came out of it and God spoke to Moses about who He was. He told Moses that He was the God of his fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses shook with fear and could no longer look. The Lord told him to remove the sandals from his feet, because the place on which he was standing was holy ground. It was holy ground because God's presence was there (cf. Exodus 3).

The point that Stephen wants his audience to understand, however, is that God was in Midian with Moses. In other words, God can be in places other than the Jewish temple. This is a strong point to make, especially since Stephen is speaking to the Jewish religious leaders who put great faith in the temple and believed that it was still the only place where God maintained His presence.

Stephen then begins to discuss Moses' ministry. Acts 7:35 says that Moses, whom the people had disowned earlier by asking "Who made you a ruler and a judge?" is the one whom God had sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer, with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush. Moses would lead them out of Egyptian captivity by performing wonders and signs both in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea, which was followed by the 40-year wandering in the wilderness.

Stephen then begins to strike at the heart of the matter. He says, our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to Moses and rejected him. This is a key concept in this sermon. He said, "Let us go back and look at our ancestors. They rejected God's faithful servants, such as Moses. They even rejected him to the point that their hearts turned back to Egypt. We know that they became idolatrous when they desired to return to Egypt. At one point, they even said to Aaron,

Make for us gods who will go before us, for this

Moses who led us out of the land of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.

Stephen is telling them to look back on their own history and see what happened to their forefathers after God had delivered them and blessed them in every way, shortly after their being delivered from Egyptian captivity through Moses. And Stephen continues to talk about the nature of their idolatry (7:43).

In 7:44 Stephen states that the presence of God is not limited to temples made by hands. That was one of the accusations made against Stephen; he had spoken out against the temple, when the Jewish leadership believed that the temple was inhabited, and had been inhabited, by God's presence. Stephen said to them that God's presence could be wherever His people are. He went on to say,

Our forefathers had the tabernacle of the Testimony with them in the desert. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. Having received the tabernacle, our forefathers under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David (Acts 7:44-45).

Stephen has now gone from Moses to David. He has reminded them of the idolatrous ways of their ancestors and of their disobedient nature. David found favor in God's sight and asked that he might find the dwelling place for the God of Jacob. He was talking, of course, about the erection of the temple in the Old Testament, although it was Solomon who built a house for God. However, the key verse is when Stephen says that the most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands (7:48), and he states why that is true. Stephen quotes, in 7:49, from Isaiah 66:1-2:

Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?

If a man were to build a house for the Lord, it would have to be a huge house since the footstool of the Lord is the entire earth and Heaven is His throne. An edifice cannot possibly be built that will house the Lord. The Lord can indwell in us, through His Holy Spirit, and be wherever His people are, but a physical building can never be built that will be large enough to hold the presence of God.

With these points being made, Stephen arrives at the point of applying the sermon. These men who were stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears were always resisting the Holy Spirit, resisting the Holy Spirit's teaching and message. They were continuing to do the thing that their fathers did. Which one of the prophets did their fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the righteous One. The audience believed in the Messianic hope, but now they are being asked to consider which one of their forefathers did not mistreat those who had spoken of the coming of the righteous One. They have become betrayers and murderers. They have received the law as ordained by angels, but have not kept it. The only way that the law could justify a person was for them to keep it perfectly. Of course, no one was able to do that and so the law became an instrument of condemnation. By using the law, Stephen has just convicted them of the need for the Messiah and Savior.

The Opposition—Stephen Stoned To Death

When they heard this, Luke says, they were cut to the quick and began gnashing their teeth at him. They had become like wild beasts and did not wait for any formal judgment. Being full of the Holy Spirit, Stephen gazed intently into Heaven, and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the

right hand of God.

'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God' (Acts 7:56).

The response was predictable. *At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.* (Acts 7:57-58a)

Luke then writes, "*Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul*" (Acts 7:58b). Here we are introduced for the first time to Saul of Tarsus, the man who will become the apostle Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. As they continued to stone Stephen, he called on the Lord and said, "*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit*" (Acts 7:59b). This is not a normal prayer. When we pray, we pray to the Father in the name of, or on the basis of, Jesus being our Advocate and High Priest. However, it was very appropriate for Stephen, who had a vision of the Lord, and who knew that his spirit was about to go and be with the Lord, to say, as he did, "*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*" Death, physical death, is when the spirit leaves the body (James 2:26). The spirit that we have is imperishable and incorruptible. It will last as long as God lives, which is for eternity. Our spirit leaves the outer man which is our physical body (2 Corinthians 4:7-15), and when this happens, Paul said that it is something that is much better (Philippians 1:23).

When Stephen made this request to God, Luke says that he fell on his knees and cried out with a loud voice, "*Lord, do not hold this sin against them.* 'When he had said this, he fell asleep'" (Acts 7:60). Stephen is the first person who lost his life due to his testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ. Stephen's ministry was brief, but very powerful and meaningful. It is more than certain that this great sermon had its impact upon the conscience and heart of Saul of Tarsus, particularly as we read about his conversion in Acts chapter 9. Paul will reflect on the

things that Stephen preached. Perhaps others in the audience finally became obedient to the faith of the gospel.

Luke writes in Acts 8:1 that Saul was in full agreement with putting Stephen to death. We will study this further in a later chapter when dealing with the nature of Saul's persecution. On the day Stephen was killed, Luke states that a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem. While there had been persecution against the apostles, now there is great pressure and persecution against the church as a whole. They will eventually scatter throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, with the result that only the apostles will be left in Jerusalem.

Luke writes that some devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him. They were grieved that their faithful co-worker, Stephen, could no longer be with them. They were not grieving because of the condition of his spirit, which was with Jesus, but they were without their co-laborer. Physical death is an enemy (1 Corinthians 15). We have a right to hate the enemy, which is death, because of the grief and sorrow that it brings. Yet, we can have great joy in knowing the victory over death that comes through the sacrifice of Jesus and the power of His resurrection. Because of what Jesus has done, we are grateful for the hope we can have, even at the point of death, as we have already referred to Philippians in 1:21, where Paul says, "*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*"

It is a tremendous advantage when a person who has lived for Christ is able to depart from this life, and from his body, to be with the Lord. We will not appear in a bodily fashion until His second coming, but our spirits are with Christ, and according to Paul in Philippians 3:20-21, we know that our spirits will come with our Lord to be joined to our resurrected body. Stephen's spirit was with Jesus, and it was there that he was comforted; it was there that he was able to enjoy the blessings of being with the Lord. Our connection with the Lord is indirect, but it is still a meaningful and real fellowship and communion. But, one day, our spirits will have a direct

presence with the Lord, which is what happened to Stephen.

In Acts chapter 8, we read about Saul as he began ravaging the church. He entered house after house, dragging off men and women and putting them in prison. In Acts 9:1 Luke writes that Saul was still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, going so far as to go to the high priest in order to secure permission to go to Damascus, a journey of 130 miles away from Jerusalem. With the assistance of the Jews in Damascus, he would be able to find disciples of the Lord, arrest them, and bring them back to Jerusalem so they could be persecuted as well. Saul, as we will read, had a good conscience about what he was doing (Acts 23:1). He did not know, or believe yet, that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. The word “conscience” means the mind considers and passes judgment upon what we think, say, and do. Based upon a Pharisaic interpretation of the law, Saul was rejecting the Lord. He was doing what he thought was right, as he stated in Acts 26:9, *“I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth.”* Paul was being honest with himself, but he was honestly wrong. He was misguided, and in Acts chapter 9, we will read about the Lord appearing to him and teaching him about who Jesus was, and Saul will become a believer. Praise be to God for the way He can transform the lives of men, even those who have been the worst of sinners.

THE CHURCH SPREADS TO SAMARIA

In Acts 8 we learn about the extension of the Lord's church throughout two of the three provinces of Palestine, Judea and Samaria, which we will consider in this chapter. **First**, we will see the effect of what Luke calls the great persecution against the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:2). **Second**, we will read about Philip's work in the city of Samaria. Samaria is also a province, but there was a city in that province that was called Samaria. This Philip that we will be reading about in Acts 8 is the same Philip that was selected in Acts 6 to be a public servant of the church. He is now an evangelist. Later, in Acts 21, Luke will remind us of this when he describes Philip as one of the seven who was selected and will call him an evangelist, one who is a proclaimer of the good news of Christ to those who are lost.

The Jerusalem Church Scattered

Saul Leads the Jews in Persecution

To begin this study, we want to look at the fact that Saul becomes the leader of the third Jewish persecution against the church. In Acts 8:3 we read that Saul gave his full approval in putting Stephen to death, and that on that same day, a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem. This was the beginning of violent opposition to the gospel of Christ and to the church, which Paul would say is the pillar and support of the truth (cf. 1 Timothy 3:15). Luke says that when this persecution began, the members of the church scattered themselves throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, that

is, everyone except the apostles. The apostles stayed for a period of time in Jerusalem with those who had responded to the good news of our Lord.

Luke has introduced Saul, but it is important at this point to notice some things about Saul of Tarsus. In the next chapter we will make special mention of this man and his conversion to Christ, but in Acts 26, Paul, who changed his name from Saul, is now a faithful servant of the Lord and a Roman prisoner. Luke records Paul describing some of the things that he was doing at the time of this great persecution, which we read about in Acts 8, and what sort of a leader he was in that time of persecution against the Lord. He is explaining his actions to King Agrippa and Felix, who is the governor of the region. There are other notable people of the city of Caesarea present as well. Paul begins by stating why he became a servant of the Lord, why he was converted from Judaism to Christianity. In Acts 26:9-10 Paul says,

I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.

There is no denying the hostility of Saul toward the Christians, not only in Jerusalem, but in the surrounding areas as well. And he had the encouraging, the endorsement, and the supervision of the chief priests in carrying out his persecution against the church. That expression would suggest that Paul was possibly one of the leaders of the synagogue in the city of Jerusalem, and as a leader of the synagogue, he would be able to cast his vote against those people.

Paul goes further by saying,

Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to

have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them (Acts 26:11).

There were many synagogues in the city of Jerusalem in the first century, and Saul was going from one synagogue to the next to find those who were saints, those who were the holy ones who belonged to Christ, those who were members of the church of our Lord.

Paul then describes his trip to Damascus and how he was converted there, but notice the nature of Saul of Tarsus. He is a violent, outrageous and ungovernable sort of an individual, and he is very intense. He is fanatical in his opposition to the work of Christ, against the teaching and preaching of the gospel, and he was doing everything within his physical and emotional strength to destroy Christianity. He truly was a leader of this great persecution.

Luke then writes in Acts 8:2, as a final thought about Stephen, that some devout men buried Stephen and mourned for him. It is interesting that Luke provides this small, and yet very significant detail, because while it is certainly not wrong to grieve over the loss of loved ones, Paul will write in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 that excessive grief is not right if one has died having lived a faithful life in Christ, just as Stephen had. Paul states that we should not weep for those who have died in Christ like we would for those who had died with no hope of salvation. Stephen died with the greatest hope of going to be with the Lord, as we studied in the final verses of Acts chapter 7.

Persecution Results In Scattered Seed

Luke writes in Acts 8:3 that Saul began ravaging the church. He treated those who belonged to Christ in a very rough manner. He entered houses, dragging off men and women and putting them in prison. This resulted in a scattering of the Christians in the regions of Judea and Samaria. This

scattering did not cause the Christians to stop their work, however. Luke writes, “*Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went*” (Acts 8:4). They continued to preach the word just as they had been doing in Jerusalem. The expression “preaching the word,” tells us something about how the gospel of Christ was taken from one region to the next in the first century, just as faithful men in our day and age.

These people were the holy ones, the saints, and the disciples of our Lord. No name is given to these people. Luke does, however, mention them again in Acts 11:19 where he writes,

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution connected with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews.

They were persecuted, but they went as far as Syria teaching and preaching the gospel of Christ.

In Romans 16 Paul makes reference to some of his own kinsman (Romans 16:7). He calls them by name and says that these people were in Christ, even before he was. They are now in the city of Rome, and we could infer that those people, along with some of the other early disciples, were those who were dispersed from the city of Jerusalem, and as they went into other areas of the world, they took the message of Christ with them. The Lord referred to the gospel as the seed of the Kingdom in one of his parables (Luke 8:11-15). These people, having to flee from Jerusalem, were taking the seed of the kingdom, the Word of God, and planting it into the hearts of people who were honest and good. Acts 8:4 indicates that the apostles had done their work well in the city of Jerusalem. They not only had made disciples, but they had also taught them to observe all that Jesus had commanded them to do (Matthew 28:18). The apostles stayed in Jerusalem, carrying out the second part of the Great Commission. They were

involved in the teaching, instructing and building up of the church of the Lord.

There are passages of scripture, such as 2 Timothy 2:1-2 and Ephesians 4:11-16, which teach us that the church should be equipping faithful men and women in the word so that they might be able to teach others. That is the very thing the apostles had done. In an earlier chapter, specifically Acts 5:40 and following verses, the apostles were in the temple and in homes every day teaching Jesus as the Christ. They were maturing, equipping and training these disciples, and as they were scattered, or dispersed, and went into others areas, the record tells us that they went everywhere preaching the word. That is what the Lord intends for us to do when we move from place to place. Christ indwells in our heart by faith, as Paul prayed in Ephesians 3:17. Christ is in us, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27), and, therefore, if Christ is in us, and we have the true message of Christ within our hearts and lives, then we will take that message with us wherever we go and share it with others. That is the very thing that these disciples did.

The Lord Builds His Church in Samaria

The Evangelist and the Crowd

In Acts 8:5 Luke discusses an instance of the proclaiming of the word. He writes, “*Philip went down to a city of Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there.*” The word “proclaimed” carries with it the thought that he *presented* Christ to them, and that he *continually presented* Christ to them. He did not just have one lesson, but he repeatedly presented Christ and Him crucified to the people in Samaria.

We have to go back to the Old Testament to get the first look at the people who were called the Samaritans. When God’s people became idolatrous and unfaithful, He caused the northern tribes to be taken into captivity by the Assyrians. They were followed some years later by the tribe of Judah, who were taken into captivity by the Babylonians. While the Jews were

being held captive in these nations, they married the citizens of the nations, and this is how the Samaritan race came into existence. Years later, when God's people were allowed to return to their homeland, some of the Samaritans wanted to assist in the rebuilding of Jerusalem. When Cyrus came on the scene, as we read in the Old Testament, men like Nehemiah were able to go back to the city of Jerusalem and begin rebuilding it. They were also told by Cyrus to restore the practice of following God's law. Some of the Samaritans wanted to have fellowship with the Jews in the work, but were not given the opportunity. It is believed that this point in time was the beginning of the hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Samaritans were removed from fellowship with the Jews because they were a mixed race.

There were, however, many things that the Samaritans and Jews held in common in regard to their beliefs and practices. For example, the Samaritans and the Jews both accepted the first few books of the Old Testament, known as the Pentateuch. Both of them practiced circumcision, and they each had a temple of worship, the Samaritans having built their temple on a mountain, Mount Gerizim (cf. John 4:20-25). Both groups were looking for the Messiah. The Samaritan woman, in John 4, made specific reference to the coming of the Messiah and how He would guide them into a full understanding of what was right (John 4:25).

We need to see that the Jews and the Samaritans held common beliefs and understanding in many things, and yet there was a distinction between the two due to the mixed bloodline of the Samaritans. So, a great hostility existed between the two in the first century, and it was that which we read about during the ministry of the Lord. But here, we find Philip, perhaps because of his own love for these people, choosing to go to a city in Samaria. He went there with the intent and purpose of proclaiming Christ to them.

In Acts 8:6 Luke's record makes it obvious that it did not take Philip long to have an audience of anxious and amazed

listeners. “*When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said.*” They were keeping their minds focused on the message that was being presented to them. A person has to have that kind of devotion for the truth before he will hear the message and respond to it. They listened with close attention to what Philip had to say concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, and Luke writes that they also heard and saw the signs that he was performing. Philip received the empowering necessary to do these miraculous signs in Acts 6 when the apostles’ laid their hands upon him and the other six chosen men. Acts 6 mentions Stephen in particular, who was filled with power from the Spirit, but we learn from this chapter that Philip received the same miraculous empowering from the Holy Spirit. In Acts 8 he is using these gifts, as 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 outlines them, to reveal and confirm the word of God.

Luke described the miraculous signs that Philip was performing in Acts 8:7: “*With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed.*” We learn from this that Satan was permitted to have unusual strength and force in the first century. Since Jesus had come to prove His superior nature, and to show His power and authority over Satan and all of his efforts, it seems that God permitted Satan to have unusual powers of demons and the empowering that came from these demons. What we see as a result of the superior nature of Christ’s authority, and the authority of Christ in the apostles, was that the apostles were able to overcome anything that Satan was able to render against the truth, as it is in Christ. Here were people who were possessed by demons and were physically paralyzed and ill, but Luke tells us that they were healed and that there was much rejoicing in that city (Acts 8:8).

Earlier, we discussed the nature, design, purpose and ending of miraculous gifts (cf. Acts 3). We know, through Luke’s account, that these were miracles that were being accomplished through the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit,

in the name of Jesus, and that great rejoicing was taking place when the people were healed and recovered from the influence of Satan's power in their lives.

The Evangelist and the False Teacher

Luke then writes of an encounter between Philip and a false teacher.

Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, 'This man is the divine power known as the Great Power' (Acts 8:9-10).

Simon was using the power of the occult, which was used in the first century, just as it is today, in order to deceive the hearts and minds of the people. He had absolutely no miraculous power, no power of any kind from God, although he had deceived people into thinking that he had. He had deceived them into thinking that this was real power, but the power that he truly possessed was the work of the flesh. In Galatians 5:19-21 Paul teaches that a Christian should not have anything to do with any of the powers of the occult, with fortune telling, with the worship of astrology, and with delving into the spirits who have departed from the lives of people. We are to refrain from all of that. God was very specific in the Old Testament in commanding His people not to participate in such things.

God had absolutely nothing to do with Simon's work. Simon had been beguiling and deceiving people into believing that he did have powers of divinity until Philip came upon the scene, and since Philip has the true power from the Holy Spirit of God, and began to demonstrate that which is genuine and true, against that which is false, notice what takes place.

They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus, they were baptized, both men and women (Acts 8:11-12).

In 8:5 Philip was preaching Christ to the people in Samaria, and now Luke tells us more specifically what is involved in preaching Christ. We are to preach the name that stands for all that Christ is: all that He possesses, all of His power, and all of His greatness. The name means the entire Person, the divine nature, the divine characteristics of Christ, as well as what the Lord accomplished in His death on the cross. The name **and** the person of Jesus were preached, as was the kingdom of the Lord. The redemptive spiritual kingdom was set up, or built, by the Lord in the city of Jerusalem, as was seen in Acts 2. With Philip, we have a different preacher preaching the same redemptive message that was presented by the apostles on the day of Pentecost, and the record says that the people gave Philip their attention. They were hearing with all of their heart and soul and mind what Philip had to say. The record says that when they believed the good news that Philip was preaching, the good news about the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were immersed, both men and women.

In the book of Acts (the book of conversions), we see that salvation is by grace through faith. But we have to notice very specifically at what point we are saved by grace through faith. It is not a matter of whether or not we are saved by faith, because there are many passages that teach that we are saved by faith in Jesus, and that we are also justified by faith in Him. But, at what point does our faith save us? When did the faith of those in Samaria save them? They were saved at the point when they believed and were baptized.

Luke then records Simon's response to the message that Philip spoke: "*Simon himself believed and was baptized. And*

he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw" (Acts 8:13). This scripture tells us that Simon was intellectually honest. He had been deceiving people in Samaria for years, but now he sees genuine power from God, and he is impressed. He knew that Philip was not practicing some magical art or trick. He knew that what Philip was doing was genuine. People who were ill were miraculously healed, and he was impressed with that. Luke says that he was so impressed that he turned away from all his iniquities and sins, and having become a believer, he was baptized into Christ.

We need to see that the Bible made no distinction between Simon's faith and the faith of the rest of the Samaritans. If anyone in Samaria was genuine in his faith, Simon was, but the same expression is used here to describe the people in verse twelve. Luke writes that Simon himself believed and his faith led him to be immersed into Christ. After he was a saved disciple, he began to follow Philip. Simon was then living in faithfulness to Jesus, observing Philip the evangelist, and constantly amazed at the genuine power of the Spirit as it worked through Philip.

But, we next read about Simon being overcome by temptation, how he is going to allow sin to enter into his life, and how Simon was impacted by something known as the second law of pardon.

The Second Law of Pardon

If, as a Christian, we sin in the same way that Simon did, what do we have to do in order to be forgiven? First, we will not go through the new birth process again. We have already been born of the water and the Spirit and have come into Christ. When we come into that saving relationship with God through Christ, we have access to Jesus, our great High Priest and our Advocate, and because of that access, we can approach our Father through Him, confess our sins and be forgiven. The apostle John deals with this concept in 1 John 1:7 through 2:2. John explains what a person must do after he has sinned and is

no longer in fellowship with the Lord in order to be restored to that fellowship. Simon will have his relationship reestablished, and it is with him that we will begin our next chapter. May God be praised for the blessing of a second chance.

CONVERSIONS: SIMON AND THE NOBLEMAN FROM ETHIOPIA

Introduction

In the last chapter, we discussed the persecution again the church in Jerusalem and Philip's work in the city of Samaria, which included confrontation with a false teacher and a discussion of the Second Law of Pardon. Continuing with Acts 8, we will again consider, from the work that was accomplished in the city of Samaria, the difference between the indwelling Spirit, which every believer receives when he is baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, and the receiving of the Spirit to empower a person with miraculous gifts. There is a very good section in Acts 8, beginning with verse 14, that deals with that distinction. Also, we will read about the conversion of an outstanding man who was the secretary/treasurer for Ethiopia's government. He would be better known today as the Minister of Finance. He was a deeply religious man who went all the way to Jerusalem for the purpose of worship and was returning to his homeland when Philip had the opportunity to explain to him Isaiah 53. Thus, the man was converted to Jesus Christ. With his story we have a marvelous example of what New Testament conversion really consists.

The Spread of the Church in Samaria

This chapter begins with Luke telling the reader how the church in Jerusalem, which is where the apostles are still located, reacted when they heard about the reception of Christ in the city located in Samaria. Luke writes that when the

apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent two of the apostles, Peter and John, to them. This introduces the first example of cooperation between two churches. This concept of cooperation will be studied in more depth when we get to Acts 11, with regard to the church in Jerusalem sending Barnabas to the church in Antioch, and in return, Antioch sending a contribution to the elders of the church in Jerusalem. However, it must be noticed and understood, that while one church can decide what it will do in the work of the Lord, it cannot have any influence or power over another congregation. Each church is self-ruled and autonomous, under the authority of Christ.

The Purpose of the Apostles Going to Samaria

The apostles in Jerusalem decided that they would send two of their servants to strengthen and encourage the new disciples in the city of Samaria. The context tells us that the two apostles were sent to Samaria so that they could pray that the Samaritan Christians might receive the Holy Spirit, “*. . . because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus*” (Acts 8:16).

At this point, we need to go back to Acts 2, which is where we studied the nature of the Holy Spirit, the baptism with the Spirit, the miraculous gifts from the Spirit, and the indwelling of the Spirit. It is important to remember all of these distinctions between the workings of the Holy Spirit, because when the Samaritans heard the gospel, received the message, and by faith were baptized into Christ, they received the promise of the Holy Spirit as a gift. The Spirit does not indwell separate and apart from the word, but in conjunction with the word He dwells in the heart and soul of the Christian. Luke tells us that the apostles went to the city in Samaria in order that these new disciples might receive the Spirit, not that He would dwell inside of them, but rather, that He would empower them. Luke makes this very obvious when he wrote, “. . .

because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them.”

When a person becomes a Christian, the Holy Spirit does not come upon them when they are baptized. Instead, God gives them the Spirit to dwell within their heart as a seal and earnest proof of his sonship. But every time that Luke uses the expression that the Spirit “came upon,” or “fell upon” them, he always, without exception, is describing the miraculous empowering with miraculous gifts from the Spirit. None of the saints in the city of Samaria had received the Holy Spirit to empower them with miraculous gifts until Peter and John came and prayed and laid their hands on them.

When Luke tells us that the apostles came down to Samaria in order that they might receive the Spirit, do not stop reading there, as some people have, and misapply this passage of scripture. There are those who have said that until now the Samaritans had not received the Spirit. However, Luke states in 8:16 that the Spirit had not fallen upon them to empower them with miraculous gifts, but they had been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. In Acts 2 we read what happens when people are baptized for the remission of sins in the name of Jesus Christ. They receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (2:38). All of those in Samaria, who by faith were baptized, received the Holy Spirit to indwell in them. But now, something different is about to occur, and the record tells us that when the apostles, Peter and John, began laying their hands on them, they were receiving the Holy Spirit (8:17). From the context we learn that it was miraculous power from the Holy Spirit to perform miraculous deeds that was received at this particular time.

We noticed in the previous chapter that the Holy Spirit gave such miraculous gifts in the first century according to his own will (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:11; Hebrews 2:4). It was not the decision of the apostles to give gifts. The apostles were the instruments through whom the Spirit gave miraculous gifts. It was the will of the Spirit that determined whether or not a person in the first century church would receive a gift and what gift he would receive. The apostles were the servants through

whom the Spirit gave His gifts, and that is what is happening in Acts 8.

Simon's Response to What Was Occurring

Luke writes of Simon's response to all of this in Acts 8:18-19:

When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, 'Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.'

Simon could see that when the apostles laid their hands upon the Samaritans that the Spirit at that point gave miraculous gifts to them. This was something that was discernable to the physical eye, which made it obvious that something different was happening among the disciples. Simon saw this and immediately said, "I will pay a great sum of money in order that I might do what the apostles are able to do." First, he did not understand that it was the Spirit giving gifts through the apostles, and second, he thought that the apostles could somehow enable him to receive such power. So, he approached them, trying to tempt them to give him this power. However, Peter, understanding his motives, said to him, "*May your silver perish with you because you have thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!*" (Acts 8:20). It is interesting that the word simony is still used in some places in the world today to describe the buying of religious positions and offices, as the term is taken from this reference. Peter then told him, "*You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God*" (Acts 8:21).

They wanted Simon to understand that this power was not in them through natural means, but rather, it was from the Holy Spirit of God, who gives gifts according to His own will. The Holy Spirit had not chosen Simon to have this same power, so he did not have a part in the matter of the Holy Spirit's work.

Simon thought that he could acquire power from the Holy Spirit with money. This was a terrible and wicked sin, so the apostle Peter told him in the very next verse to repent and renovate his mind and thinking. Repentance is what leads a person to change their thinking, which in turn will lead to a change of conduct. Peter told him, “*Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart*” (Acts 8:22).

This verse would suggest that Simon had an evil intention in mind. The old manner of sin had been buried with Christ when he was converted, but now Satan is able to tempt him again by means of his old manner of deceiving people and receiving money, since he had money available to give to the apostles. He was thinking, if I had real power from the Holy Spirit of God, just think what I would be able to do. He had evil intent in his heart and that was what Peter was exposing. He was not suggesting that God is lacking in power to forgive Simon when he eventually did repent, but he did suggest that Simon might not have the ability to repent at this point.

A person must be given to Godly sorrow that “*worketh repentance unto salvation,*” as Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 7:10. We must see sin the way God sees it. We have to see that an insult and injury has been done against God in order to repent. Peter was concerned that this man could repent again. He had repented in becoming a Christian, or a disciple, of the Lord and he is going to have to repent again. With this in mind, Peter said, “You need to repent. The intention of your heart is wrong. Repent of this wickedness of yours and pray to the Lord to forgive the evil intention of your heart.”

As a point of reference, here is an example of what happens when we are baptized into Christ. We become a disciple of the Lord and are added to His church. But, what happens when we sin as Simon sinned? What must we do? The apostle John wrote, “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:9).

We have access to God when we enter into a believing relationship with Christ and become a part of the house of God. We also have access to the great High Priest, Jesus, who is over the house of God (Hebrews 10:19-22). We have the Lord as our mediator and Advocate that can come and plead on our behalf (1 John 2:1-2). He is able to save, and since we have access to prayer, when we sin, as a follower of Christ, we pray to Him to forgive. However, as Peter said, a person must repent first, and then they need to pray. They must pray that the Lord will forgive even the most evil intent of their heart. Sin originates in the heart, and in Simon's case it led to the statement that he made to Peter and John.

Simon's Response to Peter's Rebuke

When Simon realized that his request would result in his own destruction, he assumes a completely new attitude. He pleads with the apostles to pray to the Lord for him. He wants the apostles to be the ones who pray for him. His desire is that nothing that Peter has said could happen to him will indeed happen. From all that we can learn, and this is the only reference we have for Simon, he was genuine in his response. He wanted Peter to pray with him and for him. He did not want any of these wicked things to come upon him, but we do see that he was, as Peter stated it, "*...full of bitterness and captive to sin*" (8:23).

Sin had gotten a firm hold on Simon, and extreme wickedness had come into his heart at this particular point in his life. He was going to be bound up in this iniquity unless he repented, and did it quickly and completely. We would like to believe that he repented genuinely and earnestly, that Peter prayed with and for him, and that he was restored to the Lord.

The Conversion of the Ethiopian Nobleman

The Preacher—Philip

In 8:26 Luke begins the story of the conversion of the

eunuch from Ethiopia. He introduces his account of the eunuch's conversion by finishing his recording of the account of Peter and John's activities in Samaria. "*When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages*" (Acts 8:25).

Acts 8:14-24 is just one of the references made to the apostles preaching and teaching the gospel of Christ in a place other than the city of Jerusalem, and 8:25 states that they spent time encouraging, strengthening, maturing and edifying the disciples of the Lord in the city of Samaria. This is important because of what has been occurring in Jerusalem in regard to persecution and the scattering of the disciples into various regions.

It is also important to remember that the Spirit gave miraculous gifts to the Samaritans, such as the gift of prophecy (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:14), when men such as Peter, John, and Philip were about to leave the city. They were not leaving the Samaritan Christians without sufficient guidance and instruction. There would have been men in place who could also teach and preach Christ through the power of the Spirit. If the Spirit gave the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, and other miraculous gifts to these saints, they would be able to strengthen and build up the church, even though Peter, John, and Philip had left the city.

Luke records that the Lord had a place for Philip to go and serve other than in the city of Samaria. Luke writes, "*Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, 'Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza'*" (Acts 8:26). This is another reference from the book of Acts that shows that God has other servants at His disposal, in this case, an angel. Luke is now introducing us to miraculous providence. Angels minister to those who are heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1:14), but they also minister in areas of providence. Providence simply means that God is working indirectly in a non-miraculous way for the accomplishment of His will in the lives

of His people.

The Earnest Inquirer

We have here an example of the Lord using an angel and the angel speaking directly to a servant of the Lord. When Philip, who was the servant in this case, heard the angel's instructions as they were sent to him from God, Luke describes his response:

So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship (Acts 8:27).

What a marvelous example this is for us. When Philip heard what the will of the Lord was, he immediately responded to it. He did not wait for days; he got up and went, just as the Lord had instructed him.

The word Ethiopian means, "burnt face." This implies that this man was a colored person by race. Even though he was from an area outside of Israel, he had learned something about the religion of Moses, the Law of Moses, and had responded to it as much as he possibly could. Luke also says that he had gone up to Jerusalem for the purpose of worship. The record tells us that he was a eunuch. The Old Testament tells us that people could be made eunuchs, and Jesus also talked about people who become eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake, in that they would discipline themselves to such an extent that they would not engage in any sexual immorality in any sense (Matthew 19:12).

Luke provides more details about this man. He was a court official of Candace, who was the queen of the Ethiopians. He was the Treasury Secretary, or the Minister of Finance, for the nation of Ethiopia. Today, he would be considered a member of the Cabinet of that nation. Officially he was a man of great position in his country, but the main thing that Luke draws our

attention to is his devotion to God and his interest in the word of God. Luke tells us that although he was in charge of the queen's treasure, he had come to Jerusalem, not to attend some economic council, but to worship.

Luke then writes, "*... and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet*" (Acts 8:28). This man was making good use of his time as he traveled. There is a great distance between his nation in northern Africa and the city of Jerusalem, so as he was returning back to his homeland in his chariot, he was spending time reading from the Old Testament. Being a man of position, authority, and financial strength, he was able to acquire some of the Old Testament manuscripts. He had the scrolls of Isaiah with him and it happened that at this particular time he was reading from what is called the Servant section. This section is found in Isaiah 53.

A Lowly Learner

As he was reading Isaiah, Luke states that the Spirit told Philip to go down this same road, the road that ran from Jerusalem to Gaza. Notice, however, that the Spirit did not say anything to the man from Ethiopia and He did not tell Philip why he was to go down the road. He simply told Philip, "*Go to that chariot and stay near it*" (Acts 8:29).

Luke then writes that Philip did exactly what he was told, even though, up to this point, he may have been wondering just why it was that he had been sent south of the city, traveling this road so that he could come in contact with this man seeking to know the will of the Lord. The record says,

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. 'Do you understand what you are reading?' Philip asked. 'How can I,' he said, 'unless someone explains it to me?' So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him (Acts 8:30-31).

This official was a very humble man. He was not embarrassed at all by Philip the evangelist, but he also did not intimidate Philip in any way because of his position. He said, “If you can help me understand what I am reading, that is exactly what I want.” He invited Philip to come up into the chariot with him and they rode together, listening to the word of God. Luke writes in 8:32 that the scripture he was reading said,

He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak for his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth (cf. Isaiah 53:7-8).

In Isaiah 53, it was predicted that Jesus would become our sin offering and God would be satisfied with the sacrifice of His Son on the cross. Isaiah 53 is the great Messianic chapter and we learn from it that the Lord was going to be someone who was meek and humble. He was led like a sheep to His death and as a lamb He was silent. In reading the gospels, it is seen that the Lord reacted and responded in just that fashion before His accusers. He did not open His mouth, and He did not try to justify Himself in everything that He said and did. In humiliation, His judgment, a righteous judgment, was taken away from Him. In a study of the gospels, it is seen that the Lord was not given a decent or just hearing. Isaiah asks, “Who that shall relate or describe His generation, because His life was removed from the earth.” This scripture is, of course, in reference to the time that the Lord suffered and died on the cross, and His spirit departed from His body and went into Hades for a period of time (cf. Acts 2). This passage from Isaiah was read, and the Ethiopian said to Philip, “*Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?*” (Acts 8:34) The Ethiopian had read these words of Isaiah and could not understand whom it was that Isaiah was

talking about.

The Sermon

While the reading of God's word was occurring, Philip had been listening, and now that a question has been asked, he is ready to respond. Luke writes, "*Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus* (Acts 8:35).

The gospel of Christ is simply beautiful and beautifully simple. Philip simply started with the passage from Isaiah and pointed out to the Ethiopian that the Lord had to come in order that the justice and righteousness of God could be satisfied. God could not pardon and take away the sins of man unless there was a perfect sacrifice made for those sins. He described how the sacrifice was that Jesus would come and fulfill all of these prophecies that were recorded by Isaiah. Since Philip started at the beginning, he in all likelihood told the eunuch about the birth of Jesus. He may have mentioned Jesus' early ministry, His baptism by John, His entering into His ministry, and His receiving the Spirit at His baptism. The most important parts of his teaching, however, were probably those things that related to Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross and His resurrection.

Philip presented the entire gospel message about Jesus to this man. He told him how to appreciate the benefits of the cross and how he must respond by faith to this redemptive message. As Philip was telling him about Jesus, they came to some water. The word desert in this context means "uninhabited place," but people have traveled in that part of the world and have found artificial pools and bodies of water. Luke writes that as they came to one of these bodies of water, the eunuch said, "*Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?*" (Acts 8:36).

It is obvious that the eunuch understood that it was essential that he be baptized in water for the remission of his sins. Today, we know that the blood of Christ saves us (Acts

22:16; Revelation 1:5-6). But at what point does the blood of Christ wash away our sins? We are studying and seeing in the book of Acts that a person is justified and saved by grace through faith at the moment of baptism. We are not to glory in baptism; we are to glory in the cross. We are not to trust in our response to the good news of the Lord; we are to trust in Jesus' sacrifice for us. But even though salvation is a gift, that does not eliminate conditions being attached to it. The condition is that one must have faith. We learn here of an obedient faith, the kind of faith that one must have in order to be saved. If we are preaching Christ, the same Christ that Philip preached to this man from Ethiopia, we will tell people at what point they can be saved by the death of Christ.

It is obvious that he had heard from Philip that baptism has something to do with a person's justification by grace through faith because he wanted to respond to what he had heard when Jesus was preached to him. This shows, from the study of the passage, that we must always relate baptism to the death of Christ. We must relate baptism as an act of faith in Jesus. Baptism is not just an isolated commandment tied only to the authority of Christ but also to the death of Christ. Our response by faith leads us to be immersed into the Lord, trusting that the blood of Christ will save us at that point.

In some manuscripts Philip's response is not found. In some other manuscripts it is found in the footnote. This just shows that some of the ancient manuscripts did not have verse 37 as many of the modern day Bibles do.¹

¹Editor's note: One modern day version which has omitted verse 37 is the New International Version, which is the translation that all of the textual quotes are taken from for use in this course. However, many readers of this commentary are using other versions of the text in which verse 37 is included. So in order to avoid confusion among those who are using translations other than the New International Version, verse 37 is inserted and quoted from the New American Standard Bible. For those using the New International Version, this is why verse 37 is in the commentary.

For those versions that have verse 37, Philip said, “*If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’*” Philip did not waste any time once the eunuch made his confession. Luke writes, “*And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him*” (Acts 8:38). This illustrates what it means to be buried with Christ in baptism (cf. Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12). They both went into the water and Philip immersed him into the Lord.

After Philip baptized the eunuch there were two interesting things that happened. Luke writes,

When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

The eunuch was able to rejoice because, at the point of his expression of faith that the blood of Christ would save him, he obtained salvation. Praise God for this beautiful story of a New Testament conversion.

GROWTH AND CONVERSION: CHURCHES PLANTED AND SAUL OF TARSUS CONVERTED

Introduction

Acts chapter 2 through Acts chapter 28 covers a 30 year period of church history. In this history is the description of what the church of Christ really is and how the Lord builds His church. After He built His church He said, “Do not change what I have built.” Therefore, the first half of this chapter discusses the growth of the Church from the book of Acts. This is an important study because it contains a lesson that is very significant. As a matter of truth, if a person does not understand what is about to be discussed regarding the foundation of the church, then they will not understand what the church of Christ really is.

After a look at the beginning of the church throughout the book of Acts, we will address the conversion of Saul found in chapter 9. When studying his conversion, it is also important to read Acts 22 where Paul, years later, as an apostle to the Gentiles, was given the opportunity to teach and preach to a vast audience in the temple. Following the reading of Acts 22, Acts 26 should be read. In this chapter Luke wrote that Paul was given the opportunity to speak in Caesarea to all the notable and important people of that city. In looking at Acts 22 and 26, in conjunction with the study of Acts 9, it is seen that Luke has recorded all of the events with regard to the conversion of the apostle Paul in a truthful manner.

An Overview of the Growth in Acts

The Promise to Build the Church (Matthew 16:18)

In Matthew 16:13-20 Jesus said that He was going to build His church, using Peter and the other apostles to preach Christ. Christ is the rock described in Matthew 16:18. The apostles would preach Jesus Christ crucified (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:23; 2:2), laying the foundation in the hearts and lives of people through their preaching of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, who would then build His church.

The Church Built in Jerusalem

The Lord did not build His church while he was on the earth. He was establishing and confirming the truth that would be believed and taught by His church. The Lord did not build His church until Acts 2 in Jerusalem, which was after He had become the atoning sacrifice on the cross, spent a 40-day ministry with the apostles after His resurrection, and ascended back to the Father in heaven.

We have already seen that the Lord kept His word and built the church the way that He wanted it to be built. Going back to Acts 2, the Lord built the church through the preaching of the gospel of Christ. Whenever, and wherever, the gospel is preached, people believe and respond to the good news, which is the joy of Christ as we have already seen in Acts 2:36-47. After people have firmly believed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, they respond to the good news of the Lord through repentance and immersion in the name of Jesus Christ in order to obtain the forgiveness of their sins.

When it is seen in Acts 2 how the Lord built His church initially through the preaching of the gospel of Christ, and through the people's response to that gospel, then there can be a continuation of the study of the book of Acts, and a confirmation of how the Lord built His church in places all over the world.

The Church in Samaria (Acts 8)

From the study that was conducted in Acts 8, we learned of another preacher, Philip, who is also called an evangelist in Acts 21:7. Philip goes to the city of Samaria and preaches Christ (Acts 8:5), and Luke records the response of the Samaritans in 8:12. When they believed what Philip had preached concerning the name of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of the Lord, they were immersed, both men and women. The Lord had now built His church through His servant Philip in a new city. The original structure of the church is the same, however. It is not a different, or denominational church of any fashion. It is the church that the Lord promised to build, the one that He had first built in the city of Jerusalem and has now built in the city of Samaria through his servant Philip.

The Church in Damascus (Acts 9)

In Acts 9, the Lord's church had already been established in Damascus, as will be seen later. We know this to be true because a man named Ananias and other brothers are there (Acts 9:10-18). Paul had traveled 140 miles from Jerusalem to Damascus in order to find those who were the holy ones, the saints, the members of the church, and persecute them. The same church that was built in Jerusalem had also been built in the city of Damascus.

The Church Among the Gentiles in Caesarea (Acts 10)

In Acts 10 we encounter the conversion of the first uncircumcised Gentile. A man named Cornelius and his entire household are baptized. The Lord uses Peter by giving him the keys of the kingdom, as He had promised that he would in Matthew 16:18-19. Peter used these keys to the kingdom to build the church among the Gentiles. When Cornelius responds to the gospel message that Peter preaches, repentance is granted to the Gentiles (Acts 11:18) when they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 10:48). We see from a study of Acts 10 that in the city of Caesarea the Lord built

another church, in a new location, that is, the same as the original church that was built in Jerusalem, in Samaria, and in Damascus.

The Church Built in Antioch (Acts 11)

In Acts 11:19-30 Luke does not identify any of the faithful servants who went as far as Antioch preaching about Jesus. Luke does write, however, that the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. Turning to the Lord is another way of saying that they repented of their sins, and by their faith, they were immersed into Christ. This was the establishment of the church in Antioch of Syria. It is not a new church, it is the old, original church that the Lord built as recorded in Acts 2, but which has now come to a new city. The apostle Paul will start all of his missionary tours from this congregation, so it had to be a tremendous church of the Lord in order to be used by Paul in this way.

The Church is the Same Church Wherever Paul Preached (Acts 13)

In Acts 13 and 14 Luke records Paul's first missionary tour. He took this tour for a period of time with a man named John Mark and then with Barnabas. They went to the Isle of Cyprus preaching Christ, and the Lord, through these servants, built the original church in the cities that are mentioned in Acts 13. They then traveled northward, arriving in the region of Pamphylia. Luke then writes about the cities in the region of Lycaonia: Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. It was in these places that they preached about Christ, and people responded to their message. The Lord used Paul, who was the apostle to the Gentiles, and Barnabas, his co-worker, to build the original church in all of these cities that are mentioned in Acts 13 and 14, which is the same church that He had built through the apostles in Acts 2. During that same period of time, elders were selected by the church and appointed by the apostle Paul (Acts 14:23). This concept of the same church being built in every

place must be understood in order to understand what the church of Christ is.

The Lord built the church through the preaching of the gospel of Christ. He used His faithful servants to preach the gospel, and when people responded to the cross of Christ through their obedient faith, the Lord built His church. He built it just the way He wanted it to be built, and after He built the church, the Lord made it clear that He did not want it changed. He did not say changed in the sense of adapting to cultural changes, but rather, changing the message itself. We are not to change one concept of the gospel of Christ. There is a warning in the New Testament that says if an angel from heaven, or we, were to preach any other gospel, that we would be accursed of God (Galatians 1:8-9). The apostle John said, "*Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God*" (2 John 9). We must respect these warnings not to change the teaching or the doctrine of Christ in any way. When this respect is given to the Scriptures, the result is that whenever and wherever the gospel was preached, people believed it and responded to it. This is the way in which the Lord built His church in these cities.

The Church Built in Philippi (Acts 16)

In Acts 16 Paul, along with Silas, Timothy, and Luke, who were Paul's co-workers, went into the area that is known today as Europe, and entered the city of Philippi. It was here that a woman named Lydia and her household heard the gospel, obediently responded to it, and the Lord, through the apostle Paul and his co-laborers, built His church in the city of Philippi. The book of Philippians is sent to this church later, at which time there will be elders and deacons, along with the other saints, who had been added to this congregation. But, in Acts 16, it is seen what the church of Christ really is: it is the church that Jesus built through the preaching of Christ by the apostles, and through the response to the cross of Christ. It is also the original church, the same one that was built in the

other cities that we have studied up to this point. It was not a different church. It was not a new church. It was the old church that the Lord had built initially in Acts 2, and it has now come to the city of Philippi.

The Church Built in Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 17)

In Acts 17 and 18 Luke writes about Paul's ministry in Thessalonica and Berea, cities that are still in the area called Macedonia, in the upper province of the nation of Greece. In Acts 18 Paul arrived in the capital city of Corinth, which was located in the southern province called Achaia, but in Acts 17, Luke states that the people of Berea investigated the Old Testament teaching in regard to Christ (17:11). The Bereans had heard the good news of the Lord, and they responded in obedience to the message. Luke describes these believers as outstanding and noble men and women. The point to emphasize here is that the Lord, through Paul and his co-workers, built the original church in both of these cities. The church consists of those who are the "called out." It is made up of those who belong to Jesus by having responded to the good news of the Lord. The church that Jesus Christ said He would establish has now been built in cities far from Jerusalem, in the Mediterranean region.

The Church is Built in Corinth (Acts 18)

It was mentioned above that Paul, as Luke recorded in Acts 18, arrived in the great city of Corinth, a city of over half a million people, and that he preached about Christ. The results of his preaching are noted by Luke in Acts 18:8:

Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.

Paul would later comment on their being baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus, as he wrote to them in 1 Corinthians

1:10-17, in regard to their having become divided over the matter of baptism. However, in Acts 18, the Lord has once again used Paul to build His church, the original church, the church of the Lord, the church of God, as it is referred to (1 Corinthians 1:2; 10:32), and the church of the saints, in a new city.

The Church is Built in Ephesus (Acts 19)

In Acts 19 Paul is in the important city of Ephesus, one of the most significant cities in all of Asia, and where he spent the next three years preaching Christ. We will see in our study of Acts 19 the tremendous response that was given to the preaching of Christ, as multitudes of people responded. So many people responded to the gospel message that those who opposed Christianity organized themselves into a mob and demonstrated against Paul and his ministry. People had been converted from paganism into Christ, with the result that many of the men were losing business due to lost sales of the idols that they manufactured, most notably, images of the goddess Artemis (Acts 19:23-41). Paul will later write a letter to the church at Ephesus, which is called the book of Ephesians, a letter that spells out in detail how great the church at Ephesus is, along with the other churches in the surrounding areas of Asia.

Once again, the question is asked, what church was it that the Lord built through Paul in the city of Ephesus? It was the original church, the same church that the Lord had built through Peter and the other apostles in the city of Jerusalem in Acts 2. And now, in a new city, the same message is preached and responded to in the same way, with the new birth process that occurs through the water and the spirit. The Lord, through His faithful servant Paul, along with his co-workers Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18 and 19), had built the original church in the great city of Ephesus.

The Church is Built in Rome (Acts 28)

In Acts chapter 21 Luke records the events that led to the apostle Paul becoming a Roman prisoner. The chronology of those events take up the rest of the book of Acts, and in Acts 28 we read that Paul has arrived in the imperial city of Rome. Luke writes that Paul is under house arrest, but people are permitted to come and see him as he is teaching and preaching Christ and the things concerning the kingdom of God: the redemptive kingdom, the spiritual kingdom of God, and the church. Paul preaches that message from morning until evening without any interruption (Acts 28:30-31), and the church that came into existence in Rome was the same church that had been established in other cities: the original church. This is remarkable in that the church had now been established in the capital city of the Roman Empire, Rome itself. Paul preached Christ, people were being converted, and the Lord continued to build His church.

Building The Church Today

In our day and age, there are faithful servants of Christ going into new cities preaching Christ and Him crucified. Many of those who listen to the message of Christ are convicted of their unrighteousness, unbelief, and of the judgment that is coming. When they state that they believe the message, they inquire what it is that they must do. The answer that is given to them is exactly the same answer that is recorded in Acts chapter 2. They are told that by faith they are to repent and be immersed in the name of Christ, or on the basis of their faith in Christ, in order to receive the remission of their sins. This is the birth process, and in their being born of the water and the spirit, the Lord will continue building the original church in whatever city that message is preached.

When we see that concept in the book of Acts, we can see that the church of the New Testament is not a denomination. It preceded all denominational religious groups that are claiming Christianity today. We are endeavoring in our day and time to

be used by the Lord to build the original church, through the preaching and teaching of the same message. People respond to that message in exactly the same way as they did in the days of the apostles, and when that occurs, the Lord adds those who are being saved to the church (Acts 2:41-47).

It is exciting to know that the Lord can use us today to build the original church. There is nothing denominational, or new, in the church. It is still the church that is based on the original pattern of how the Lord built the church the way He wanted it built, with Him as the head. We need to keep all of this in mind as we enter into the study of Acts 9.

Saul, the Persecutor and His Trip to Damascus

The Persecuting Saul

We already know from our study in Acts 8 some things about Saul's fanatical manner of life as an ignorant, untaught, violent, outrageous, ungovernable sort of person. Paul will make reference to that part of his life before he was converted. In 1 Timothy 1:13 Paul recalls some of his traits and characteristics before he became a follower of Christ. One of the unusual things about Acts 9, and as recorded later on by Luke in Acts 22 and 26, is that as Paul presents some things about his conversion, we discover that it is Jesus who is the One who preached to Saul. Faith comes by hearing the word of Christ (Romans 10:17), and we see a demonstration of that over and over again in our study of the Scriptures. Jesus is going to do the preaching, but it is the message that Saul will hear which will convict him of his unrighteousness and unbelief. He is going to turn from being a fanatical unbeliever to a believer of Jesus. The conversion of Saul, which took place through some unusual events, involved his hearing the gospel message of God's saving grace and his response to the cross, just like everyone else who has responded to the cross of Christ. There are no exceptions to the new birth process. Everyone who is a citizen in the kingdom of God has to be

born of the water and of the spirit (John 3:5) .

In Titus 3:5 the apostle Paul talks about the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. He is alluding to the act of faith when people were baptized into Christ. It is the washing that brings the regeneration and the renewing. It is at the point of baptism that the justifying work is done by the Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 6:11 Paul reminded the Christians at Corinth of what they once were, and as a way of reminding them, he lists the classification of their sins and the nature of their sinfulness before they were converted. After listing those sins, he said,

And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Paul has just reminded them of the new birth process. They were justified in the Spirit when they were born of the water and the Spirit, and then they became citizens of the spiritual kingdom, which is the church of those who are redeemed. Saul had to hear and obey the gospel, just like all other men. God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34; 1 Peter 1:17).

We see how obedient faith brings one into a state of peace by entering into a right relationship with God. In Romans 5 Paul, in writing to the church at Rome, talks about our being justified by faith in Christ and that faith-bringing peace with God. Paul is going to have peace in his life for the first time, and he is going to stay in a right relationship with the Lord through his obedient faith. He is going to be saved by grace through faith like everyone else has to be saved by grace through faith. In Acts chapter 9 Luke records how Saul became obedient to Christ for the first time.

Authority and Commission From the Chief Priests

Luke begins by telling about the activities of Saul in Acts

9:1-2:

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take as prisoners to Jerusalem.

Saul had a definite purpose in going to this city, which was 140 miles away from Jerusalem. He wanted to find those who belonged to Christ by enlisting the aid and assistance of the unbelieving Jews in that area. When he found the followers of Christ, he would bind them and bring them back to Jerusalem in order to persecute them further because of their faith in Christ.

However, as he was approaching the city of Damascus, there suddenly appeared a light from heaven that flashed around him. In Acts chapter 22 Paul will state that this occurred about noon, and that the appearance of the glorified Jesus was brighter than the noonday sun. It is very important to understand the verification of the reality of what took place here, and how it could be confirmed. The events that are recorded here confirm the genuineness and confirmation of the beauty of Christ, proving that Jesus is the Son of the living God, and that He was glorified at the right hand of God.

A Life-Changing Confrontation

The confrontation between Jesus and Saul is both sudden and brilliant:

As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' (Acts 9:3-4).

Saul, as well as the other men who were traveling with him, heard this voice. Those who were with Saul heard only the sound, but did not comprehend what the voice said. However, Saul heard the voice very clearly.

Luke then writes, “*Who are you, Lord?*” *Saul asked*” (Acts 9:5a). Saul knew that whoever was speaking had to be some heavenly being, because of this tremendous light that had come upon him and because of the message that had come to him in his own language. By using the title Lord, Paul was admitting that whoever was talking to him was a master and ruler.

Luke then records that the voice responded to Saul,

I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. ‘Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’ The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone (Acts 9:5b-7).

The men with Saul could not understand anything that was being said. They had seen this great light flashing about them, and they fell to the ground. But, Paul was able to gaze into the very character and Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it will leave him blind for a number of days.

There are passages of Scripture, such as 1 Timothy 6:15-16, that state that the Lord dwells in an area of heaven that is called “unapproachable light.” When Paul gazed upon the brilliance that was brighter than the noonday sun, the brilliance that was the glorified Lord, it left him blind. But he had heard what Jesus had to say and it convicted him of his unbelief. He then became a believer in Jesus Christ. He knew that it was Jesus, who is at the right hand of the Father, whom he has really been persecuting. Saul is then told what he must do now that he is a believer.

In Acts 9:7-9 Saul is in Damascus waiting for what the Lord is going to do next. For three days and nights Saul is in

the midst of Godly grief and sorrow. It is the sorrow that was brought about when he realized that he had offended a holy God and that he had been insulting and injuring God. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 7:8-10 that it is Godly grief and sorrow that causes a person to repent and to obtain a salvation that brings with it no regrets. Saul is given over to this Godly grief and sorrow, because he had been sinning so horribly against the Lord. Praise God that there is the chance for us to experience Godly sorrow so that we may repent and maintain our relationship with Him.

THE PREACHING OF PAUL AND PETER

Introduction

It may be impossible to grasp the emotional and psychological response of Saul of Tarsus when he found out that during the time he had been persecuting the church, and therefore, the Lord Himself, he had been doing many things contrary to the name of Jesus and that he was wrong for doing them. Saul thought that he was being a dedicated defender of God and His law when he was an offensive persecutor of the Lord and His church. He thought that he was doing exactly what God wanted him to do. He was being as genuine and sincere as possible (cf. Acts 26:4-11).

Saul soon discovered, however, that the Law of Moses, which he had followed as a dedicated Pharisee, had been fulfilled and nailed to the cross of Christ (Colossians 2:14; Ephesians 2:14-16). The Lord had established and made a new covenant for those who would be His people, a covenant sealed and ratified by the blood of Christ. Saul had believed that Jesus was an imposter, and he became so fervent in that belief, that he was willing to travel many miles to find those who belonged to Christ and persecute them because of their faith in Jesus.

Another point to observe is that Saul of Tarsus had a good conscience about what he was doing. In Acts 23:1, as a faithful servant of the Lord, he told the Sanhedrin council, “*My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.*” It would be fair to ask how Paul could have had a good conscience, and yet was the chief of sinners (cf. 1

Timothy 1:15). The word conscience literally means “joint knowledge.” The conscience that we have as individuals made in the image of God, individuals who have an eternal and imperishable spirit from God, is the mind that we have which passes knowledge upon what we think, see and do, according to a set standard of judgment.

Saul was using as the base of his conscience the Pharisaical view or interpretation of the Law of Moses, and since that was his standard of judgment, he had looked upon Jesus as an imposter. But then he saw that Jesus really is the Old Testament Messiah, He is the One who has fulfilled all of the predictions stated in the Old Testament with regard to the Messiah, the One who would come, suffer and die, be raised again, and be glorified at the right hand of God. He is our sin barrier. When Saul could see, understand and believe that, he then changed his standard of authority and judgment. He began to make some decisions about his life. Those decisions were made based upon his conscience. This is the “joint knowledge,” and it led Saul to pass judgment upon his thoughts, words and deeds according to the authority of Christ.

There are many people today who are not yet in Christ. They are very genuine in their faith and their acceptance of the Lord, but they have accepted a denominational interpretation of the teachings of Christ, or they have just accepted the traditions of the church. They believe that these teachings and traditions are right, and as long as they accept those things as their standard of judgment, then they say and do the things that they do with a clear conscience. However, this does not mean that they are right in their relationship to God.

We must understand what the authority of Christ includes and what His teachings require of us. We must also understand what our response of faith requires of us in order to have a conscience that is approved by the Lord. Paul will state in Acts 24:16 that he strove daily to have a clear conscience before God and men. If we know what the teachings of Christ include and that we now live under the new covenant, we will have

arrived at the cross understanding the new birth process and knowing what we must do in order to be saved by grace through faith. Studying these cases of conversion, such as Saul's conversion in Acts 9, allows us to arrive at the point that we can have a conscience approved by the Lord, a conscience that will pass judgment upon what we think, what we say, and what we do.

Luke provides a few details of the days following Saul's encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. Saul is now a believer in Christ. He is experiencing grief, sorrow and repentance. Luke writes in Acts 9:9, that for three days and three nights, Saul did not eat or drink anything. It is easy to understand the nature of his grief at this particular time. Imagine all of the things that went through his heart and mind as he thought about what he had done against Jesus and the church. He had persecuted the Lord as he made havoc and tried to destroy the New Testament church, and now he said, "I am the greatest of sinners, look how I have sinned against the Lord."

However, the Lord gave him some hope during this period of time. Luke records that a vision was given to Saul, and in this vision he saw a man by the name of Ananias (Acts 9:12). Saul had been told that Ananias would come to him, and through Ananias' gift of healing he would receive back his sight. He would also receive the Spirit when he was baptized and his sins would be forgiven (Acts 22:11-16). That had to be an encouraging and hopeful message to Saul of Tarsus.

The Commission of Ananias to Saul

The Message To Ananias Given In A Vision

In Acts 9:10-15 the Lord appeared to Ananias and told him that he wanted him to go to Saul. He said in 9:11-12,

Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.

In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.

The Lord gave Ananias detailed instructions and abilities for what he was about to go and do. Verse twelve is a key verse, because when it is coupled with statements in Acts 6, Acts 8, Acts 19 and 2 Timothy 1, it is seen that Ananias received a special gift from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gave miraculous gifts in the first century as He desired, and He gave them through the laying on of the apostles' hands. In the case of Ananias, he had received the miraculous gift of healing from the Spirit. Through this gift of healing he would be able to give back to Saul his eyesight. Saul had been completely blind for three days and nights, since he had gazed upon the brilliance of the glory of the Lord. Imagine how encouraged Saul was to find out that he was about to receive his eyesight back.

However, Ananias is not so enthusiastic about what the Lord has just told him to do. "*'Lord,' Ananias answered, 'I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem'*" (Acts 9:13). Word had reached Ananias that the brethren in Jerusalem, even the apostles themselves, were involved in Saul's persecution. Ananias had probably heard about these events from those who had been scattered around the various regions following their escape from Jerusalem. The seriousness of these reports was not lost on Ananias. He said to the Lord, "*And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name*" (Acts 9:14). There is no doubt that Ananias wanted to be reassured that Saul of Tarsus had repented and that he was not the same ungovernable persecutor that he had been up to this point. The Lord, recognizing Ananias' anxiety, tells him,

Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before

the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name (Acts 9:15-16).

Paul, being an Israelite himself, will preach to the Israelites as he is given the opportunity, but he will also be the one who will go to the Gentiles. The uncircumcised Gentiles have not been taught about Christ, but now, the Lord is preparing an apostle to go to the Gentiles, and the best equipped, most qualified, most skilled and talented man that the Lord could find was Saul of Tarsus. The wisdom of the Lord is seen in how He gets everything ready so that multitudes of Gentiles will be converted to Christ.

The Visit From Ananias

When Ananias heard what the Lord intended to do with Saul, he immediately went to Judas' home and found Saul. He entered the house and laid his hands on Saul so that he might receive his eyesight. Ananias said,

Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17).

The Lord Jesus Christ was the One who appeared to Paul and spoke to him outside the city of Damascus, and one purpose for which the Lord appeared to him was to equip him to be an apostle. Paul was someone who had to see the risen Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 9) in order to prove that he was an authentic apostle of Christ. Paul had not seen the Lord while He was on the earth, but he did see Him glorified in heaven, and he heard the message from Him (Acts 26:17-18).

Saul is now a chosen vessel of the Lord's, and because he is a chosen vessel, Ananias comes to him, lays his hands on him, and Saul regains his sight. Luke writes in Acts 9:18, "*Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and*

he could see again. He got up and was baptized." Ananias laid his hands on Saul for the purpose of him regaining his sight. It was essential for Ananias to come, because he will baptize Saul of Tarsus into Christ, and when by faith one is baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, one is promised the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; Acts 5:32). Saul is about to obey the Lord by his act of faith, and he will be given the indwelling Spirit that will come into his heart, in conjunction with the word of God, as a seal and earnest of his sonship.

In Acts 22, Paul is recounting this event for Felix and Festus, and he said that Ananias said to him, "*And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name*" (Acts 22:16). There was no objection or hesitation on the part of Saul of Tarsus. He was told by the Lord that he would be told what to do when he arrived in the city of Damascus. When Ananias told him what to do, immediately he responded to it by faith. We know that the blood of Christ is the element that God uses; it is His agency and the powerful sacrifice that atones for our sins. The blood of Christ is what we glory in and boast about. We know that the blood of Christ washes away our sins (Revelation 1:5-6), but when does it do that exactly? Ananias told Saul in Acts 22:16, that it is when by faith, we are baptized into Christ. Paul uses that expression in Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27. He states that they are sons of God by faith in Christ, telling them that this is how he knows that they are sons of God: "*For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Him.*" (Galatians 3:27).

Saul of Tarsus responded immediately. He then had a good conscience and wanted to respond to the Lord. Whatever the acts of faith were, he was ready to submit to them. He, as well as the others that we have studied about, experienced the new birth and was in Christ. Luke tells us that he took food and was strengthened physically. He was rejoicing in Christ, having been saved from his sins. He has been justified by faith, and therefore, is no longer praying and given over to grief and

sorrow.

The Preaching of Saul in Damascus

The Depth of Saul's Conversion

Saul's conversion quite understandably had the disciples of the Lord asking a number of questions. Was Saul genuine in his belief? Luke describes the feelings among the disciples in Acts 9:19b-22:

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, 'Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?' Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

This is the perfect illustration of spiritual enrichment. This is edification in the spirit. Saul is now increasing not just physically, but also spiritually, in the Lord.

In Galatians 1 Paul describes how it was possible for him to immediately begin teaching and preaching Christ as he did in the city of Damascus. He states in Galatians 1:11-12 that what he preached was not received from any man; neither did any man teach him. Rather, he received it by revelation from God. Paul was an apostle of Christ. He had been called and sent out on his commission by the Lord, having been given the credentials of an apostle (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:12). This means that the Holy Spirit had directly empowered Saul of Tarsus during his conversion to preach and teach as Luke recorded in Acts 9. The apostles had received the Holy Spirit to empower them (Acts 2), and in Acts 10, Cornelius received from the

Holy Spirit the gift of tongues. That is the only gift that Cornelius received according to Acts 10 and Acts 11, but there was a design and purpose for him receiving that confirming gift. Saul, being an apostle of Christ, received the Spirit so it would dwell in him when he was baptized, just as every Christian does, but he also received the gift of empowerment from the Holy Spirit. Paul said that the empowering enabled him to teach and preach the message of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit taught Saul the words that he would present to those to whom he was sent. In 1 Corinthians 2:13 Paul said,

This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

This is the reason why Saul was able to preach and amaze the people in the city of Damascus.

Saul's Escape From Damascus

Luke records that after listening to Saul for a few days, the Jews, who were unable to respond to his teaching, conspired among themselves to do away with him. Luke records that Saul learned of this conspiracy against him and was able to escape from Damascus (Acts 9:23-25). In Galatians 1 Paul tells what took place after his escape. He went into Arabia and spent a number of years there teaching and preaching Christ. Three years later he went back to Jerusalem, the time frame not being mentioned by Luke in Acts 9:26. He comes to the city of Damascus, and in 2 Corinthians 11, he writes that during this period of time there was a certain governor, whom Paul mentions. He also mentions that there were people in Damascus plotting against his life. They were watching the gates to see whether or not he might try to escape, so some of the disciples lowered him down out of the window of one of the apartments in a huge basket, and Saul made good his

escape.

Saul's Ministry in Jerusalem

Saul's Relationship to the Church in Jerusalem

After a period of three years Saul returned to Jerusalem. The reaction toward him by the disciples is quite understandable. Saul tries to associate with the disciples, but the brethren there were still afraid of him. They thought he had just claimed to be an apostle, appearing to be one in order that he might gain entrance into the church and further persecute them. But, there is a man who steps forward named Barnabas. He took Saul and showed great interest in him. They eventually became co-workers (Acts 11) for an entire year in the city of Antioch, and later, during the first missionary tour. Barnabas took it upon himself to bring Saul to the apostles and describe to them how he had seen the Lord on the road and had talked to Him. Barnabas described how Saul had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus while still in Damascus. That was all the confirmation the brethren needed.

Is that not an interesting lesson? It shows the significance of a trustworthy and reliable witness, a reliable brother who boldly stepped forward to tell those who were afraid and doubting, "Look! This man is genuine. He saw the Lord, and here is the evidence. He has been converted to Christ. Immediately following his conversion he preached boldly and confounded the unbelieving Jews in the synagogues." Praise God for individuals who have the straightforward spirit that Barnabas had.

Saul's Ministry In Jerusalem

When the apostles and other brethren heard all of this from Barnabas, they received Saul into their fellowship. Here was Saul, trying to join the church and be identified with them, and then they receive him. Luke records that after this acceptance, Saul moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in

the name of the Lord Jesus.

Before we leave the events of Acts 9, as recorded in the other chapters that have been alluded to, we need to look at the historical evidence that Saul really was blind for 3 days and 3 nights, and that he really did hear this voice from Jesus. When we prove the genuineness and the reality of these events, it proves the greater concept that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and that He was raised from the dead, glorified at the right side of God, and really did speak to the apostle Paul and equip him to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. We need to see that witnesses, who could testify as to whether or not Saul was really blind, could verify all of these things. There were witnesses traveling with Saul who saw the light and heard the sound. All of that confirms the genuineness of what we are reading about and, of course, Saul's conversion proves the genuineness of what took place. The empowering from the Spirit proves that he had the credentials of an apostle of Christ.

Peace and Prosperity for the Church

In the latter part of Acts 9, Saul is told that it is time for him to leave on a mission of ministry that the Lord has chosen for him. Saul will be going back to the city of his birth, Tarsus. We will not hear anything further about Saul until Acts 11 when he becomes a co-worker with Barnabas in the city of Antioch. In 9:32-43 we read about the ministry of the apostle Peter and some of the actions he carried out, but in between the time that Saul is sent to Tarsus and Peter's travels, it is interesting to read about the church in 9:31. Luke writes,

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

This is a great scripture, which tells us that despite all of the persecution, the church continued in its numerical and spiritual

growth

Peter's Ministry in Western Judea

Peter's Ministry At Lydda

In Acts 9:32-34 Luke writes,

As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the saints in Lydda. There he found a man named Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years. ‘Aeneas,’ Peter said to him, ‘Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat.’ Immediately Aeneas got up.

The reaction to Peter's action is predictable. Acts 9:35 says, “*All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.*” This was not some normal event that had just occurred and could be questioned by anyone who doubted that it had happened. It was also an event that could be verified by individuals who were living in the first century. A person could go to a city and say that there was a man named Aeneas who had been paralyzed 8 years and had been healed. The reliability of the man's testimony could be checked out for truthfulness. Yes, the man was immediately healed, and the effect that it had was that when people saw him in Lydda and Sharon, they turned to the Lord. Here was a confirmation of the gospel of Christ. Peter confirmed the message of Christ with signs and miracles (cf. Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:4), and in turn, those who heard the message confirmed it.

Peter's Ministry At Joppa

In Acts 9:36-43 Luke records one of the actions of Peter while he was in the city of Joppa. His action centered on a godly sister in Christ by the name of Dorcas. Luke writes, “*In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping*

the poor." Luke goes on to write that she became ill and died. At the time of her death Peter was approximately 12 miles from Joppa, so the other disciples dispatched some servants to go and secure the services of the apostle Peter (9:37-38). Peter came to Joppa, and Luke records that through the empowering of the Spirit that the apostle Peter possessed, he raised her from the dead. Here is a woman who had become ill and died, and by the time that Peter arrived, she had been dead for a number of hours.

This entire episode could be verified for truthfulness, and due to the number of witnesses who saw it happen, it can be verified historically. The result was, as Luke writes, "*This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord*" (Acts 9:42). Once again, there was confirmation of what the apostles preached. They preached a message from God, a message that spoke of the redemption that is found in Christ Jesus. Peter must have decided that the work in Joppa was important enough to merit his further attention, because Luke writes, "*Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon*" (Acts 9:43).

The Conversion of Cornelius

All of these events lead up to the conversion of the first uncircumcised Gentile. We are told the name of this great servant who will become the first fruits of the gospel among the Gentiles. In Acts 10:1-2 Luke writes,

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.

Cornelius was a great man, and yet he knew he was a sinner. He was doing the best that he could, but in his realization that he was a sinner, he did not know enough of the

truth, as it is found in Jesus, to save him. He needed someone to come and tell him about the Lord, and again, the apostle Peter is the one who will be used by the Lord to convert Cornelius and his household to Christ. Praise God for the way that He uses people to further His kingdom by bringing them to His Son, Jesus Christ.

THE CONVERSION OF CORNELIUS

Universal Christianity— The Gentiles Are Called of God

Introduction

We have arrived at a very exciting study in our quest for truth as seen in the book of Acts. Acts chapter 10 tells about the conversion of the first uncircumcised Gentile. There were devout Gentiles present on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2), and one of the seven men selected as a public servant of the church in Acts 6 was a proselyte. This means that he was a Gentile who had been converted to the Jewish religion. But it is in Acts 10 that we learn of the nature of universal Christianity. The Lord died for all men and He wanted all men to have access to the good news of the gospel. He wanted them to be justified by faith and be brought into His church. This is the reason behind the commission to go to all of the nations and preach the gospel to every creature (cf. Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 1:8). It is here that the first reference is made to the Lord, a number of years after Pentecost, sending the apostle Peter with the keys of the kingdom to open the door to the redemptive spiritual kingdom for Cornelius and his household, Gentiles who were not Jewish-converts first.

Cornelius, The Man

The first few verses of Acts 10 tell us that Cornelius was Roman and a centurion. He was part of the Italian cohort, as we

noticed in chapter 16, and in his relationship to God, he was a most devout man. In his relationship to his fellow man, he was very generous. Luke states that Cornelius was a devout man who feared, and had deep reverence, awe, and respect for God. The same thing is said about his entire household, whom Cornelius had apparently taught. We could infer that Cornelius had learned about the traits and characteristics of Jehovah because of his association with his Jewish friends. He was well known, the record tells us. He gave alms to the Jewish people, which means that he had association with them.

Cornelius was very benevolent and compassionate toward those who were in need. After he became a Christian, he did not have to be convinced about the necessity of giving. He was already doing so, and Luke writes that he also “*prayed to God continually*” (Acts 10:2). It is a marvelous trait that he had such respect for God that he wanted to spend time praying to Him, as perhaps the Jews had three designated times each day for hours of prayer. It is this dedication to prayer that leads to the next event in Cornelius’ life. Luke writes in Acts 10:3,

On day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, ‘Cornelius!’

A vision is where God made known to the mind, or to the understanding of a person, a truth that became obviously known, as though the person could see it with their physical eye. Cornelius was awake and was praying. He had all of his senses about him, and yet here is something that the Lord instructed him about through his heart, to his mind, and to his intellect.

Luke records Cornelius’ reaction and the angel’s response:

Cornelius stared at him in fear. ‘What is it Lord?’ he asked. The angel answered, ‘Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before

God' (Acts 10:4).

What Cornelius had offered up to God reminded God of the covenant that He had made with Abraham many years before as recorded in Genesis 12. In that great promise, the Messianic promise, God told Abraham that it was in his seed that all of the nations of the earth would be blessed. This promise would find its fulfillment in Christ, and now, God is about to carry out through Cornelius what he had promised and known in His foreknowledge and foreordination many years before. In order for this promise to reach its completion, the angel said to Cornelius, "*Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea*" (Acts 10:5-6; cf. Acts 9:43).

When the angel finished speaking, Cornelius immediately made preparations to have some men go and get Peter. Luke writes, "*Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa*" (Acts 10:7-8).

The Spirit's Instructions For Peter

Luke records that on the following day, as Cornelius' men were traveling to Joppa, that Peter went up on the roof of Simon's house to pray. This was all occurring around noon, and as Peter was on the roof, Luke writes, "*He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance*" (Acts 10:10). Peter is about to receive a vision just as Cornelius had the day before. In this vision, Peter saw a sheet coming down to earth, and the sheet contained various kinds of animals, both clean and unclean (Acts 10:11-12). As Peter watched the sheet coming down, a voice said to him, "*Get up, Peter. Kill and eat*" (Acts 10:13).

Peter had always been very devoted to his understanding of what the Old Testament taught, and one of those teachings was the legal observance of eating only animals that were classified as clean animals. But here were animals of all

different kinds and the instruction was for him to kill and eat any of them or all of them. Peter was being told that he was allowed to eat any of them. This perplexed Peter. He had not yet grasped that the Law of Moses had been fulfilled in Christ, and that all of the legal ordinances, restrictions and commandments of the Law had been done away with. Peter, along with everyone else, was now living under the new covenant with new privileges and freedoms that we have in Christ. In Christ, nothing that is outside of a man is considered to be unclean, but rather what comes out of a man is what is unclean (cf. Mark 7:14-23). The New Testament, the law of Christ, does not make a distinction between clean and unclean. Peter, however, was trying to consider the meaning of this great vision that had been sent to him, even though the voice told him three times to kill and eat, and that there was nothing that should be called unclean (Acts 10:14-16). It is while Peter was wondering what this was all about and what it meant that the servants from Cornelius approached his home and inquired if Peter was there (Acts 10:17-18).

Peter's Journey to Caesarea

Luke writes about Peter's mind-set and the encouragement that he received from the Holy Spirit to go with these men to Cornelius.

While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there. While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them' (Acts 10:17-20).

Peter went downstairs as he had been instructed to do and

received those who had been sent by Cornelius. They spent the night there, departing the next day for Caesarea, where Cornelius and his family were waiting. When they arrived in Caesarea, they discovered that Cornelius had called together his relatives and his close friends. This is a marvelous example for us today, that when we know that the Good News is going to be presented, along with the opportunity offered for salvation, we should invite our friends, our relatives, and our close associates to come and hear the message. Cornelius was not commanded to do this; he just knew that this was an opportunity for his entire family to hear the message that the apostle Peter had. In Acts 11 Peter recounts to the apostles in Jerusalem the events that took place as we read here in Acts 10. He explained it in chronological order as the apostles remained quiet, holding their peace, until they understood that God's intent was that the gospel be preached to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. This means that those of us today who are not Jews, can be fellow heirs of the great promise that is found in Christ, and can become fellow members of the body of Christ, which is the church (cf. Ephesians 3:3-6). In Acts 11 Luke records that the angel told Cornelius to send for Peter, who would speak the words to them so that his household could be saved. Cornelius had to hear the message regarding Christ and Him crucified before he could be saved.

We need to see, once again, that Cornelius was a man who possessed outstanding traits and was of tremendous moral character. But despite these attributes, he was still a sinner, and he knew that he was a sinner. He obviously was praying, "Lord I would like to know more about salvation. I have heard about Jesus, but I need to know more." We gather from the context that the Lord said, "*Your prayer is heard Cornelius. Therefore, send for Peter.*"

Here is an example of a man who was not in a saved relationship with Christ, and yet his prayer was heard. He was not praying as a child of God, he was praying for salvation in Christ. If a man is earnestly seeking for the truth, as it relates

to Christ, God will hear his prayer and will enable, by His providence, for someone to come and present the message of truth. This is the lesson that we learn in Acts 10.

When Peter came into his home, Cornelius realized how great a servant the apostle Peter was, and so he fell at Peter's feet and worshiped him (Acts 10:25). It would have been acceptable to show respect for one in authority, as Peter certainly was, but Cornelius did not have any right at all to worship him. Worship that is done in reverence and praise belongs only to God.

The Providential Opportunity of Teaching and Learning, Peter and Cornelius

Peter's response to Cornelius was quick and to the point. "*But Peter made him get up. 'Stand up,' he said, 'I am only a man myself'*" (Acts 10:26). Peter was kind in what he said, but wanted Cornelius to understand that the kind of worship that he had just offered to Peter should only be offered to the Lord. Peter was just a man, one of the ambassadors for Christ (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:20).

Peter began talking with Cornelius, and when they went inside, Peter saw that many people were there. Peter began by saying that what he was doing would, by his own estimation a few days previously, have been unlawful. To come into a home like he had, to eat and drink and have the kind of association and fellowship they were having, all of this would have been considered beyond the realm of possibility for Peter and those of Cornelius' house.

But Peter went on to say to them that the Lord had shown him this vision and the Spirit had told him to come. He had been told that he should not regard any man as unclean. This statement by Peter helps us understand the purpose for which the vision had been sent to him. He told Cornelius that he had been sent by command of the angel and came immediately. He then asks Cornelius why he had called him to his house. Peter already knew why he was to come (10:21-22), but he wanted

to hear Cornelius make that statement. Cornelius recounted for Peter the events of the previous days, the praying that he had been doing, and the vision he had received. Now that Peter had arrived, they were all here in the presence of God to hear the things that had been commanded from the Lord (Acts 10:30-33). One cannot help but notice the attitude of Cornelius. He wants to hear the message of salvation and redemption, the joyful and glad news that believers have in Christ.

The Conversion of the Gentiles

After Cornelius made his statement, Peter began speaking. He said,

I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him (Acts 10:34-38).

The Lord was anointed with the Spirit at His baptism (Matthew 4:16-17; Luke 4:21-22). The Holy Spirit anointed our Lord with His power, which allowed Jesus, during his ministry, to cast out demons and do all of His works to the glory of the Lord. Peter was a selected apostle of the Lord, and so he was one who had first hand information about these things. He said,

We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by

hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen (Acts 10:39-40).

Peter was quick to point out to Cornelius the purpose of Jesus' death. The Lord had to become the sin bearer for mankind. He was the one who satisfied God's righteousness and justice by taking care of mankind's sins. There had to be a perfect and adequate sacrifice offered up before God could grant to man the gift of life. Jesus paid for every one of the sins of man when He took upon Himself the shame and humiliation of the cross. Because He did this, all of us are cleansed by His stripes, and by His sacrifice we are redeemed.

Peter also does not hesitate to speak about the resurrection of Jesus, and how He appeared before many people. We have already studied from Acts 1 and other references how Jesus repeatedly appeared before the apostles, proving that He was alive after His death and that they ate and drank with Him. The Lord did not appear to everyone after His resurrection (Acts 10:41). But to those to whom He did appear, He gave specific instructions: "*He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead*" (Acts 10:42).

When the Lord comes again one day, He will judge those who will be alive at His coming, and he will also judge all of the people who have died. In other words, He will be the judge of all mankind, the living and the dead. In order to be prepared for that day, a person must be in the proper relationship with God. The right way to get into that relationship is what Peter states next: "*All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name*" (Acts 10:43).

Peter's words place the emphasis upon faith, trust, confidence, and assurance in Jesus and confidence in the fact that He is the Lord God, the Son of God. All who would be believers must have confidence in His deity. They must have

assurance, belief and trust in His atoning death and sacrifice. There must be belief in His glorious resurrection for our justification (cf. Romans 4:25). The Lord made this clear on one occasion when He said, "*I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins*" (John 8:24).

John wrote that we have a record of many of the things that the Lord taught and performed, even miraculous deeds, so that we might believe, and by believing, we might have life in His name (John 20:30-31). Peter places emphasis on the fact that even the Old Testament said that only those who have faith in Jesus, who trust in Him, who have confidence and assurance in Him, all combined with obedience to Him, can be saved.

There are scriptures, such as John 1:12-13, which teach that those who received the Lord, and believed in Him, were given the right, or power, to become sons of God. It is obvious, then, that a person cannot become what they already are. Faith does not make us a son of God. Faith gives us the power and the right to become sons of God. When by faith we change our thinking through repentance, confess our trust and faith in Christ, and are then immersed into the death of the Lord, we are promised in that act of faith that we have received the forgiveness of sins. Faith is mentioned as the necessity of believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. Again, everyone who believes in Him will receive, as an obedient believer, the forgiveness of sins.

At this point in Peter's lesson something amazing happens. "*While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message*" (Acts 10:44). In our study of Acts 2 and Acts 8, whenever the expression "came on them," or "fell upon them," is used about the Holy Spirit, it always denotes the miraculous empowering from the Spirit, not the indwelling of the Spirit. Every person who by faith is immersed into Christ's death becomes a saved Christian and receives the Spirit, in conjunction with the words of the Spirit, to indwell in them as a seal and earnest proof of sonship. At

this point, however, before Cornelius and his household are baptized, the Holy Spirit falls upon them.

In Acts 11 Luke records Peter's conversation with the apostles in Jerusalem. They were wanting to know why Peter had gone to Cornelius, a Gentile, entered Cornelius' house, associated and fellowshiped with him and his household, and preached Christ to him. Peter tells the apostles that Cornelius had reported how the angel had appeared and told him to send two men to Joppa. Acts 11:14-15 says,

He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved. As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning.

Acts 10:43 records that as Peter began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as he did upon the apostles at the beginning. Peter takes the apostles back to the beginning (Acts 2), in the city of Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost. This is the beginning of the New Testament church. We have to understand this, because if a person does not understand where the beginning is, and what caused it to happen, then they cannot understand the rest of the New Testament.

Peter said, I want you apostles to go back to the very beginning. He said, "Remember when we were assembled in one place and there was this huge sound like a mighty rushing wind, and when the Spirit filled us we began to speak in foreign languages." The Spirit came directly upon the apostles without the laying on of hands. That is what Peter is saying happened at Cornelius' house. At this particular point in the sermon, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He had upon us, without prayer and the laying on of hands. Another similarity is that the Holy Spirit gave those in Cornelius' house the gift of tongues.

The reaction to this on the part of the Jews who had accompanied Peter to Cornelius' house is similar to the

response that Peter had earlier and the apostles in Jerusalem would have later. Acts 10:45 says,

The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

In our study of Acts 2 there was a reference made to Acts 10:45. We pointed out in that study that the expression “poured forth” is in the Greek perfect tense, which means a process that has been completed but is still having results. Peter remembered that on the day of Pentecost he had preached that in the last days the Spirit would be poured out upon all flesh. He said that it was something that happened one time, for all time. Peter went back to the beginning and said that the Spirit was poured out, it was sent, or given, on that occasion, and it is still having results.

Since the Spirit had been poured forth, or sent, the Spirit was able to **empower** Cornelius with the gift of tongues, and the Spirit was waiting to **indwell** in him after he was baptized. It is at this point that Peter understood completely what had happened on the day of Pentecost.

Obviously, the gift of tongues that was given to Cornelius from the Spirit enabled him to speak in the dialect and language of Peter and the other Jewish brethren. These men knew that they were glorifying God, because they heard them in their own dialect, in their own language. The purpose for which the Spirit had come upon Cornelius (cf. Acts 15:5-11) was to convince the apostles and the Jews that God has made absolutely no distinction between people, and that all people are to be justified and saved by grace through faith. They do not have to become a proselyte (a convert) of the Jewish religion in order to be saved.

Having seen all of this happen, Peter said,

Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have. So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days (Acts 10:47-48).

Peter is now convinced. He has heard them magnify and praise God in his own dialect, his own language. We know that when the Spirit came upon Cornelius, it gave him the miraculous gift of tongues. In 1 Corinthians 14:22-25 Paul said that the purpose of the gift of tongues was to convince the unbelievers, being a sign to them. Peter was a believer, but he did not fully understand or believe that uncircumcised Gentiles were to become fellow members and fellow heirs in the body of Christ, having the same spiritual benefits and blessings just as the Jewish people possessed. Peter was now convinced that there was no distinction between Jew and Gentile. God wants to save all people, by grace, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is interesting that Peter said to them that since they wanted to hear the words by which they could be saved, they had to experience the new birth. They had to be born of water and of the Spirit. The final act of faith that would put Cornelius into Christ was his being immersed in the name of Jesus, by His authority, and into the possession of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We have seen the nature of universal Christianity. It is for all men. The Lord has used Peter to open the door to the kingdom of heaven to the Gentiles. Let us praise God for His wisdom in opening the minds of men to His desire for all men to be saved, and for then using those same men to spread the wonderful life saving message to all mankind.

PETER'S DEFENSE AND THE CHURCH BUILT IN ANTIOCH

The Endorsement of Peter's Ministry by the Jerusalem Leadership

Peter Explains and Justifies His Visit to the Gentiles

In chapter 17 we began a discussion of Acts 11. In beginning this part of our study, we need to have verses one through eighteen explained as extensively and clearly as possible so that we can understand what occurred with regard to the redemption of the Gentiles, and the role that the apostle Peter, along with the six witnesses who were with him in Caesarea, played in preaching the gospel to Cornelius and his entire household.

These men have come to Jerusalem as witnesses to testify before the other apostles as to the events as they occurred chronologically (Acts 11:14). Peter reminds them of the fact that Cornelius had been praying and the Lord sent an angel in answer to his prayer. The angel had also told Cornelius to send some of his servants to Joppa to get the apostle Peter who would speak the gospel so that he and his household could be saved. It took the message of the cross, and the teaching about the death, burial and the resurrection of the Lord, in order for Cornelius to be saved (Acts 11:14).

Peter also told them that a vision had been given to him, and that the Spirit had explained what it meant. Peter was also told to go without any hesitation, preconceived ideas, or misconceptions. Peter said, "That is what I did, and as I was preaching Christ, the Spirit fell upon Cornelius *to empower him*

with the gift of tongues, but *not to indwell in him* as a saved son of God" (Acts 10:43-44). Cornelius had to hear, believe, and respond to the gospel like every one else. He had to experience the new birth, to be born of water and the Spirit (cf. John 3:5). In Titus 3:5 Paul said that there has to be the washing of regeneration, a regeneration that is brought about through washing and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. That is what the new birth process of being born consists of.

Cornelius had to experience the new birth process before he could be saved. Part of that process in the case of Cornelius was the Spirit coming upon him with the gift of tongues. When the Spirit came upon Cornelius, it reminded Peter of what had taken place in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. That was when the Spirit was poured out upon all flesh (Acts 2). The Spirit was "poured forth" (Acts 10:45), which is, as we studied in the last chapter, in the Greek perfect tense, which means a process completed in the past, having present results. Since the Spirit was sent by Jesus on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit was available to empower Cornelius directly with the gift of tongues, and then, after he was baptized in water (Acts 10:47-48), he received the Spirit to indwell him as a seal, as an earnest, or proof of his having become a son of God.

Peter is going to a great deal of effort to make all of this clear to the other apostles. The result of his explanation is recorded by Luke in Acts 11:18: "*When they heard this, they had no further objection and praised God, saying, 'So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.'*"

The Lord Builds His Church in Antioch

Beginning in verse nineteen and continuing through the end of the chapter, we read about the establishment of the church in the city of Antioch in Syria. The establishment of this great congregation was a very important event. This church was one of the strongest and most spiritual churches in the first century. Paul will start all of his missionary trips from this congregation.

Luke states in 11:19 that the church was begun in Antioch following the persecution of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8) and the scattering of some of the disciples following the death of Stephen. Some of those who were scattered traveled to Phoenicia, a narrow area of land 120 miles long, and also to Cyprus and Antioch, where the gospel was preached. Later in the book of Acts Luke records that in the major cities of Phoenicia the church had been established. Paul will visit with some of the brethren as he travels in that area.

Some of the men who were from Cyprus and Cyrene came to Antioch, that is Antioch in Syria, and began speaking to the Greeks about the Lord Jesus. Their message was, as we have seen since Acts 2, all about the Lord Jesus and the truth as it is found in Him. This message is consistent throughout the New Testament. In Ephesians 4:21 Paul said, "*Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.*" That means absolute truth and the completion of truth. When we read these passages we see what all is involved in speaking the truth as it is seen in Jesus.

The response is that the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. John states that those who believed in Jesus were given the power, or the right, to become sons of God (John 1:12-13). Obviously you cannot become what you already are. One does not become a son of God at the moment of trusting faith. Certainly, becoming a child of Gods involves trusting faith, conviction and assurance, but it has to be joined with obedience. When that obedience occurs, a person is given the power, or right, to become a son of God by faith.

In Acts 3:19 Peter told those who had gathered around him at the Temple that they were commanded to repent and to turn to the Lord. In Antioch, those who believed turned to the Lord. In the book of Acts, when by faith people repent and turn to the Lord, they are immersed into Christ because that is the point at which they are saved by the grace of God. We know we are saved by God's grace and favor. The question we have to

consider in our study is when does faith save us and what kind of faith saves us? The Bible, from Genesis through Revelation, emphasizes the fact that no one was ever blessed by faith, or received salvation by faith, unless their faith expressed itself in some act of obedience. Ours must be an obedient faith.

Paul discusses what obedient faith is in Romans 1 and Romans 16. We know the kind of faith that these people at Antioch had. It was a faith that caused them to turn to the Lord and respond to the gospel just like everyone else up to this time had responded. The Lord had said, “Go and make disciples by teaching and baptizing them” (Matthew 28:18-19). The gospel has been taught to the people here in Antioch, and they are made saved disciples by turning to the Lord, by being baptized into the possession of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. This having happened, the church at Antioch was established.

The Church in Jerusalem Dispatches Barnabas

In Acts 19:22 Luke writes that the news about the beginning of the church in Antioch reached Jerusalem, so the church there sent Barnabas to Antioch. The word “sent” as it is used here means “officially sent,” that is, sent with the endorsement and decision of the apostles and brethren in Jerusalem. Barnabas was sent with a commission, and Luke writes that when he arrived in Antioch and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced.

We will not spend much time here looking at the profile of this strong and spiritual congregation of the New Testament, but one of the things that made Antioch such a strong congregation is the fact that they had great teachers who were faithful men of God. In Acts 13 Luke writes for the first time that there were teachers in the church. This is seen in other churches as well. 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and 2 Timothy 2 give great emphasis to those who teach the word of God. They had great teachers as well as prophets in the church at Antioch.

Luke first mentions Barnabas in Luke chapter 4, and we also saw how he stepped forward to receive Saul and take him to the apostles in Acts. He commended Saul to the apostles and because of that commendation the brethren in Jerusalem accepted Saul as a co-worker with them. Barnabas is a great spiritual servant who has come to be a co-worker with the church in Antioch. Luke writes of his arrival: "*When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts*" (Acts 11:23).

One version (the King James Version) says, "*cleave to the Lord.*" That literally means that we should be glued to the Lord, to stick close to Christ. That was Barnabas' message: Do this with deliberate intent and purpose of heart. Decide now that if you are going to be a follower of Christ, then you are going to stick close to Christ regardless of the circumstances and discouragements that will come. Be faithful to Jesus, He will never fail us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5a-6). We know from our own experiences that this is true, so regardless of what people might do to disappoint us, or whatever circumstances confront us, we have already made up our mind to stick close to Christ.

Offering encouragement like this was part of Barnabas' character. Luke describes the nature and attitude of this man of God when he writes, "*He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord*" (Acts 11:24). This verse is saying that the goodness that Barnabas had was not just surface goodness. He was good from the heart, and it was something that could be seen because he was "*full of the Holy Spirit.*" He was influenced by the Spirit's message. He obviously had the fruit of the Spirit in his life (cf. Galatians 5:22-23). He was filled with great confidence, conviction, and trust in the Lord. Because of his character, he had great influence among the people and considerable numbers were converted to the Lord.

However, Barnabas could not do this work alone. He

needed a co-worker. Antioch was one of the great cities of the first century world and had a great number of people. It was one of the most significant cities in the Roman Empire in the first century and the opportunities were there. It was time for Barnabas to get some help.

Barnabas Secures A Co-worker

Barnabas needed someone to help him while he worked in Antioch, so he went to Tarsus and located Saul (cf. Acts 9:30). Luke writes, “*Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch*” (Acts 11:25-26a). Luke then writes about their return to, and work in, Antioch: “*So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people*” (Acts 11:26b). Then, a very important statement by Luke: “*The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch*” (Acts 11:26c).

The expression “were called” is used repeatedly in the New Testament (cf. Matthew 2; Hebrews 11:7; Acts 10:22). In Acts 10:22 Luke writes that Cornelius was divinely directed. The word “directed” in the original text (Greek) is translated “were called.” The Lord gave them the name Christian. They were divinely called Christians, but notice that the Lord waited until the Gentiles were brought into the church before He allows them to be called Christians. The word “Christian” means “one belonging to Christ.” In 1 Peter 4:11 Peter writes that we glorify God in the name Christian, so obviously, God would not use a name selected by the enemies of the cross to honor and glorify Him.

We read about people who were encouraged to become Christians. In Acts 26:28-29 Luke records the words of Agrippa:

Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?’ Paul replied, ‘Short time or long—I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may

become what I am, except for these chains. '

Paul was simply a Christian; not a certain kind of Christian, just simply a Christian, a New Testament Christian. That is what God wants us all to be. We can unite together simply on the fact of being a Christian. Peter said that we glorify God when we live the Christian life, even when we suffer because we are Christians (1 Peter 4:16).

In Acts 11:27 is found the first reference to prophets in the New Testament church. In Ephesians 3:3 and the verses following, we read that God made His will known through His holy apostles and prophets, that is, New Testament prophets. Apostles and prophets wrote the New Testament. There were four New Testament prophets, Mark, Luke, James and Jude, who the Lord used to reveal and record His word. A prophet is "one who speaks the will of God with divine guidance." In other words, prophets spoke by inspiration from the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:21 says, "*For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*"

There are no living prophets today; there have been none since the first century. We have their written documents in the New Testament, but here, in Acts 11:28, was an inspired man who spoke the mind of God with divine speech. Paul, who listed the miraculous gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12, lists prophecy as one of those miraculous gifts. An inspired prophet named Agabus, who, along with some other prophets, had come to Antioch from Jerusalem, stood up and prophesied by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He said that there was going to be a severe famine that was going to spread throughout the Roman Empire.

Luke, who is writing in the early 60's A.D., well after the time that Agabus prophesied, said that this famine occurred during the reign of Claudius, who, until c. 54 A.D., was the Roman emperor. Historians have verified that this famine occurred in A.D. 45, which conforms to the time context that

Luke records in Acts 11.

Church Cooperation

When those in the church at Antioch saw the opportunity that now presented itself for them to show their love, care, and concern for the brethren in Judea, notice how they responded. Luke writes,

The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:29).

The Christians in Antioch sent their contribution, one church to another, through the elders. This is the first reference we have to elders in the New Testament church. In Acts 20:17-18 we will read more about the elders being the overseers and the bishops of the church. The word “overseer” means “one charged with the duty of seeing that the things which are done to others are done in the right way.”

The elders do not make laws for the church to follow; the church and its elders already have commands from Christ. However, elders do have the responsibility and oversight of delegating authority and work to other brethren. They have the administrative responsibility to see that the things that are done in the local church are done biblically and scripturally, and that they are done to the glory and praise of God.

Here is a great example of one church doing the work of the Lord in deciding to send a contribution to another church. This is what we call church cooperation. Each church is autonomous and self-ruled. The church does not have any super-organization or higher organization above the elders. Elders serve and oversee only one particular local congregation. Each congregation is permitted to decide whether or not to send a contribution to another church, and the church receiving that contribution decides how it will spend that

contribution. The word “send,” or “sent,” means that no one coerced or put pressure on the church in Antioch. They alone decided whether or not they would have a part in this work.

The Persecution of the Church by Herod Agrippa I

Herod, The Persecutor, Afflicts the Church

In Acts 12 Luke records another persecution that came upon the church. This persecution involved the death of one of the apostles of the Lord, when James was put to death with the sword (Acts 12:2). This is the second death that occurs in the New Testament church. First, there was Stephen (Acts 7), and now James. Luke writes that Herod did not stop with the killing of James: *“When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread”* (Acts 12:3).

It is a key point that Luke makes, that this occurred during the time of the Passover, the week of Unleavened Bread, because, not wanting to upset the Jews during this week, he put Peter in prison, keeping him on hold until after the Feast. Luke writes,

After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover (Acts 12:4).

Here you have sixteen soldiers, four being on duty at one time, with two more chained to the apostle Peter and two guarding the outside of the prison.

But the church was not staying idle during this time. Luke writes in Acts 12:5, *“So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.”* Frequent praying, into the night, by the church, for Peter, the great servant of the Lord. They obviously were praying to God for

His will to be done, with the hope that it was His will that the apostle Peter continue his ministry.

God's Protective Care Over Peter

The great news is that the Lord did intervene and sent a special angel. Luke writes that this angel suddenly appeared to Peter, who had been asleep. That tells us something about his tranquility and joy in the Lord. Even in the middle of all this pressure and intimidation, he was still able to sleep. But time was of the essence, and so the angel woke him up and told him to put on his outer tunic. Then, “*. . . the chains fell off Peter's wrists*” (Acts 12:7).

This was obviously a miraculous event that included the coming of the angel, and the chains falling off of Peter's hands. He was chained to two soldiers who were guarding him, and yet, the angel told him what to do, and Peter followed the angel. He must have thought, “I must be dreaming my release.” When he finally came to his full senses, and realized that the Lord had sent one of His angels, he said,

Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating (Acts 12:11).

Peter went straight to the house of Mary, who was the mother of John, also known as Mark (Acts 12:12a).

We will read more about John Mark when we get to Acts 13. He was one of the prophets used by the Holy Spirit in writing the book of Mark and was a great New Testament servant of the Lord. Luke records that at Mary's house, “*. . . many people had gathered and were praying*” (Acts 12:12b). This tells us how passionate they were in their prayer life. They were praying for the welfare of the apostle Peter and for the Lord's will to be done.

Arriving at the house,

Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, 'Peter is at the door!' (Acts 12:13-14).

Rhoda was so excited about hearing Peter's voice that she left him standing outside. As can be expected, some of them were hesitant to believe this.

'You're out of your mind,' they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, 'It must be his angel.' But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.

Peter motioned for them to be silent and to go and report to James (Acts 12:17). This is the first reference to one of the elders in the church in Jerusalem and tell this to the rest of the brothren. Verses eighteen and nineteen tell what took place the next day. It is easy to imagine the perplexity and doubt as to what had taken place. The Lord had intervened and the guards who were responsible for watching Peter were causing a commotion as they tried to explain what had happened to him (Acts 12:18). Luke then writes, *"After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed"* (Acts 12:19).

This entire episode was a cover-up on Herod's part. He could not accept the fact that God had intervened and miraculously brought about Peter's release, so he convinced himself that the guards were lying. He had them executed and attempted to cover up what has taken place. But we know what the truth is, because Luke recorded the events. He also recorded that at this time, Herod thought that it was necessary to leave town, so he went to Caesarea and stayed there for some time.

God Visits Herod

Acts 11:20 tells us that the purpose of Herod's trip may have had something to do with political damage control and rebuilding relationships. Luke writes, "*He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him.*" They obviously had bribed Blastus, the king's trusted personal servant, to be their representative, and he was interceding for the people of these cities for peace. The reason that this was so important is because Herod was the source of these countries' food supply.

Luke then records what happened on the day of the meeting. "*On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people*" (Acts 12:21). The historian Josephus wrote that on a certain appointed day Herod put on a large garment made of silver threads, and when he appeared in the sunlight there was a glistening appearance that radiated out from the garment. When the people saw Herod's garment radiating, "*They shouted, 'This is the voice of a god, not of a man'*" (Acts 12:22). Herod should have restrained them and told them, "No, this is not the voice of a god; I am simply a man." But he did not restrain them, and so, "*Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms*" (Acts 12:23).²

In Psalm 2:12 we read that the kings and rulers of the earth had better kiss the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, or else He will destroy them. Jesus Christ rules in sovereign power. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the prince over all of the rulers of the earth (Revelation 1:5-6). The Lord was over Herod, and Herod made the fatal mistake of not giving God the

² For a detailed account of Herod's journey to Caesarea, his political troubles there, along with his speech, dress, the people's response to him, and his subsequent death, read *The Works of Josephus: Antiquities of the Jews, Book 19, Chapter 8, Verse 2*, trans. William Whitson (Peabody MA: Henderickson Publishers, Inc., 1987), 523.

glory, and so the Lord executed judgment upon him. Josephus writes that Herod suffered for five agonizing days before he died. What a powerful lesson we learn about God's judgment on wicked men.

THE GREAT THRUST TO EVANGELIZE THE GENTILE WORLD

The First Missionary Journey

The Great Thrust To the Gentiles

In Acts 13 we will be reading about the beginning and continuing ministry of Paul, in what is called the first missionary tour of Paul, his co-laborer, Barnabas, and for a period of time, John Mark.

Before we study about Paul and his first missionary journey, however, it would be good to look at some of the events that were taking place in the church at Antioch and some of the people involved in those activities. There were prophets and teachers in the church, with the names of some of the prophets and teachers being listed (Acts 13:1-2). These individuals are ministering for the Lord on behalf of the people. Luke writes that they are fasting and worshiping. This is the first reference we have about the church fasting. The Lord said that there would be occasions when we would need to fast, and so He permits us to do so if we do it individually, according to the guidelines that the Lord established in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, 6 and 7). We are instructed to fast in a way that will not let people know that we are fasting. There is a spiritual purpose in fasting, and the church in Antioch decided upon this means to aid them in the ministries that were being done, with the help of the Holy Spirit. Luke then writes, *“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’”* (Acts 13:2).

The Spirit was calling Barnabas and Saul for the beginning of their work in evangelizing other areas in the world. The Lord is going to use them to build the church in all the cities that are listed in Acts 13 and 14. Close attention needs to be given to how the church separates these faithful servants for the work to which they had been called. Luke writes, "*So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off*" (Acts 13:3). They prayed through the time that they would have eaten, not fasting just for the sake of fasting, but in order that they could devote their time to prayer. They were praying with, and for, these brethren, and then they laid their hands upon them.

The laying on of the hands by these members of the church upon Paul, Barnabas and John Mark was not to be used by the Spirit to impart miraculous gifts. Saul (who will soon have his name changed to Paul in verse nine) was already an apostle of Christ. He had been empowered by the Spirit and, therefore, had all the credentials of an apostle. The purpose of laying hands on them was to commit them to the grace of God.

In Acts 14:21-28 Luke describes their return after the first missionary tour, which perhaps lasted 3 to 5 years. They finally returned to the church in Antioch and when they arrived there, they called the church together to recount for them everything that God had accomplished through them. Acts 14:27-28 says,

On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

It would be right and proper for us today to fast, to pray, and to lay our hands upon brethren who are going forth into the mission field to preach Christ and to commit them in a public way to God's grace so that they will be able to accomplish the work that He has outlined for them.

Saul is already an apostle of Christ, but in Acts 14 we read about certain messengers who came from other churches, who

were also called apostles. In Philippians 2:25 and 2 Corinthians 8:16-24 Paul talks about certain messengers, and the word apostle is used to describe those messenger. Apostles of churches were those sent forth with a commission. Saul is an apostle of Christ, but he is going to become someone who was sent forth by the church at Antioch, and Barnabas, of course, will be an apostle as well. It is important to keep in mind how the word apostle is used throughout the New Testament. Some were apostles empowered by the Holy Spirit to do miraculous deeds; others were assigned to special missions. Knowing this will aid the reader when they read Acts 14.

The Missionary Message in Seleucia and Paphos

We will now look at this journey in more detail. Luke records that Saul and Barnabas went from Antioch to Seleucia where they boarded a ship and sailed to the port city of Salamis in Cyprus. Once there, they began proclaiming the word of God in the synagogues (Acts 13:5). It was Saul's custom to go to the synagogues. Being a former Pharisee, he would go to the synagogues, not to practice the law of Moses as a law of faith, but because it would put him in contact with devoted Jews who could be taught about the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what occurred every time he went to a synagogue.

Accompanying Saul and Barnabas on this trip was a man named John Mark who was a co-worker. These three traveled through the whole island of Cyprus, eventually arriving at the city of Paphos, which was a 100-mile journey from Salamis. This city is where the Roman government was located, and they had stationed there a man who was known as the proconsul, a post that is confirmed by historians. Luke writes that this man, named Sergius Paulus, was a man of intelligence (Acts 13:7). He wanted to hear the word of God from Saul and Barnabas, "*But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith*" (Acts 13:8).

Historians have written that it was not unusual for proconsuls

to have an advisor who claimed to have mystical insight into the future, and could impart some wisdom to the ruler. Elymas was serving in that capacity. Obviously, the proconsul supported him financially, and he was discerning enough to see that the proconsul was hearing the truth as it is found in Christ and would discover that he should have nothing to do with sorcery and the works of the flesh. In the Old Testament, and New Testament, God spoke out against sorcerers and all those who practiced such things. Elymas knew that his position and financial resources would be eliminated, so he began opposing the word of God.

In Acts 13:9 we have the first mention of Saul's name, which was Hebrew, being changed to Paul, a Roman name. Paul, in Latin means "little." Whether or not this had anything to do with Paul's physical stature is not known, but from this point on in the New Testament, he will be known as Paul.

Luke records Paul's reaction to Elymas. He writes,

Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, 'You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?' (Acts 13:9-10).

In this particular context the word "filled" means "to be influenced by," or "to be controlled by." The context will determine whether it is a miraculous empowering, or just the influence through the Spirit's message of the word of God. The context here shows it was a miraculous influence of the Spirit. Paul was full of, or influenced by, the Holy Spirit of the Lord, and he knew the heart of Elymas. The ways of the Lord are straight, they do not deviate in any direction, but Elymas was trying to take the straight ways of the Lord and make them crooked. He was an enemy of the truth as it is found in Christ. Because of his wickedness, the Spirit, through an apostle, caused an injury to occur to him, the only miracle in the book of Acts

where this type of punishment happens.

In 1 Corinthians 12:10 Paul talks about miraculous powers, powers that are from the Holy Spirit. In Acts 5 we saw a demonstration of that power with the death of Ananias and Sapphira, but in the case of Elymas, bodily injury comes upon him for only a period of time.

It might be interesting today to ask people who claim to have such gifts from the Spirit when was the last time they took an enemy of the gospel and struck them blind. This is what happened to Elymas and it confirmed the word of God. Paul said to him,

'Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun.' Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand (Acts 13:11).

Elymas was totally blind for a period of time, which proves what we have mentioned in regard to the design and purpose of miraculous gifts in the first century. The apostles had certain credentials as apostles of Christ (2 Corinthians 12:12), as was demonstrated on this occasion.

The reaction on the part of the proconsul is predictable, and yet, is still amazing. Luke writes, "*When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord*" (Acts 13:12). Sergius Paulus believed. He had been searching in order to hear the word of God. Now he had heard it, believed it, and is astonished at the effect of the teaching of the Lord, particularly as it had affected Elymas.

Paul and his companions then left Paphos and traveled to Perga, in the region of Pamphylia (Acts 13:13). It is at this point in the journey that John Mark went back to Jerusalem (Acts 13:14). We do not know why he left Paul and Barnabas, but we read in Acts 15 that John, after going from Jerusalem to Antioch, wanted to resume his association with them in the ministry, and

Paul did not think it wise to take him. Paul thought that John Mark needed to stay with the church in Antioch, but his relative, Barnabas, said, “*No I believe I ought to take him.*” So Paul said for Barnabas to take him and go the southern route, while he and Silas went along the northern route, teaching and preaching the gospel. It needs to be pointed out that the two men did not mark one another; they did not create any kind of disunity in the church. They differed in areas of judgment, which they had a right to do, but not to the point of disunity.

The Missionary Message in Antioch of Pisidia

Luke records next that Paul and Barnabas traveled to Pisidia Antioch, located in the Galatian region. When they arrived there, Luke writes,

On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, ‘Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak’ (Acts 13:14b-15).

Worship in the synagogue involved the reading of a portion from the Law and then a reading from the Prophets. Following these readings a person would stand up and present some message of encouragement based on these readings. It is obvious that Paul and Barnabas had introduced themselves to these officials of the synagogue and had given a background description of their life. After the readings on this day, they were then asked if they would like to speak. It is here that we have the first recorded sermon of the apostle Paul. In this sermon that Luke records, Paul rehearses some of the exciting aspects and events of Jewish history. These men in the synagogue were Jewish believers along with those who were Gentiles that were proselytes of the Jewish religion.

Paul goes back in time and reminds them of what God had done in Old Testament times. When he arrives at the life of

David, he has arrived at the key point in his lesson. In Acts 13:32-33 Luke records Paul as saying,

We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father.’

Paul wants to make sure that his listeners tie the prophecy of David in the Old Testament (Psalm 2:7) to the events surrounding Jesus in the New Testament.

Paul was, of course, referring to the fact that God raised Jesus up from the grave. He goes on to say,

The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words: I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.’ So it is stated elsewhere: ‘You will not let your Holy One see decay’ (Acts 13:34-35).

Paul has just referred to prophecies in Psalm 16:10 and Isaiah 55:3 and has shown how, through Jesus, they have been fulfilled. The holy and sure blessings of David have to do with the everlasting covenant, the new covenant, of Christ and the blessings of justification and forgiveness of sins through Jesus, the son of David. God was not going to allow His Holy One to undergo decay. In Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost, Peter also quoted from Psalm 16:10, explaining how it was fulfilled in Jesus and His resurrection.

Paul explains to those in attendance in the synagogue the difference in David’s death and Jesus’.

For when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed. But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay. Therefore, my

brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses (Acts 13:36-39).

The key passage of scripture is verse 39. A person cannot be freed from the bondage of sin, the guilt of sin, through the Law of Moses. If a person could have perfectly obeyed the Law, the Law would not have condemned him. But the Law accomplished its purpose by convicting people of the sinfulness of sin (Romans 7:7-12). A person could not be justified by sacrifices (Hebrews 9-10). The Law had predicted that the perfect sacrifice would come (Jeremiah 36:2; Psalm 40:6-8), that sacrifice being the hope of Israel, the Messiah. This is the word of encouragement that Paul has to offer. Through faith, an obedient faith, in Christ, a person can be freed from sin, from its guilt and consequences.

Paul then warns them all to pay attention to those prophecies.

Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: ‘Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you’ (Acts 13:40-41; cf. Habakkuk 1:5).

Luke records the response of those who had heard Paul speak: “*As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath*” (Acts 13:42). They wanted to hear additional teaching about the Messiah and the salvation that could be found only in Him, but already, the teaching of Paul and Barnabas had produced results. Luke writes,

When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to

continue in the grace of God (Acts 13:43).

When Paul and Barnabas had been speaking, those who were practicing Judaism had not yet entered into the saving grace of God. However, they were in the process of converting, so God was pleased with their honesty, with their good heart. Jesus Himself had said that the word of God, which is the seed of the kingdom, would come into the hearts of those who were good and honest (Luke 8:15). Because they had made the decision to convert, they were told to continue in the grace of God as they continued to learn about the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Missionary Results in Antioch

True to their desire to hear more about the Messiah, Luke records what happened the next Sabbath day: “*On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord*” (Acts 13:44). They may have had to leave the confines of the building and meet outside in order to accommodate the huge crowd that had come together. This in turn provoked a response with the Jews: “*When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying*” (Acts 13:45). The Jews had never had a crowd like that in the synagogue to hear what they had to say. They were speaking irreverently against God, but that did not deter Paul. Luke writes,

So Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: ‘We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles’ (Acts 13:46).

To those who were Jews, God had given the first opportunity to know of the Messiah and be brought into His redemptive kingdom, the church. Since they rejected that opportunity Paul told them that the opportunity was now being offered to the Gentiles.

We learn here at what point we should shake the dust off our feet and go to another group of people. That point is reached when people start contradicting the word of God and judge themselves by their dishonest attitude toward the word of God. That is the time to leave and go to someone else. Paul said that was what he and Barnabas were going to do. They were going to turn to the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas were accomplishing what the prophet Isaiah had predicted would happen in Isaiah 42 and Isaiah 49. God said,

I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and light for the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6b), and “I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth (Isaiah 49:6b).

God had those of us who are Gentiles in mind when He thought about salvation through His Son. But in His scheme of redemption, He said, “I will equip the Jews first, preparing them in the gospel, and they will take the message of redemption and salvation, which is the good news of My Son, to the rest of the world.”

The effect of this opportunity was not lost on the Gentiles. Luke records, *“When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed”* (Acts 13:48). The word “appointed” in this verse was a military term in the first century and literally meant “to be placed in proper order, or arrangement.” In this context, the Gentiles wanted to hear the word of God and were glorifying His word. When a person has that attitude and places himself in proper order, that person will become a saved disciple. These Gentiles are the ones who believed with this result,

The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred

uppersecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from their region. So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:49-52).

The Jewish leaders did their dirty work through other individuals. Here was a persecution instigated by the Jewish leaders, but accomplished through others. The result was that Paul and Barnabas went to another city, a city about 60 miles southeast of Antioch and Pisidia, but the disciples that were left in Antioch and Pisidia were continually filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

The Effect of the Gospel in Iconium and Lystra

The Progress of the Gospel

Acts 14 continues to describe the events during the first missionary journey of the apostle Paul. When Paul and Barnabas came to the city of Iconium, as was Paul's custom, he entered the synagogue. Luke records,

There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers (Acts 14:1b-2).

It appears that their lives were not threatened since Luke writes,

So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders (Acts 14:3).

We know that Paul was empowered in a miraculous way by

the Spirit. Being an apostle of Christ, he had those credentials. But we learn from this passage that Barnabas also had the miraculous gift of the Spirit to perform these deeds. As we have studied in previous lessons, the purpose of miraculous gifts was to reveal and confirm the word (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3). It is important to notice that the word was not in the *process* of being confirmed; it was *already* confirmed. All of the truth was revealed and confirmed in the time of the apostles with the result that we now have a confirmed book. God was giving His endorsement and commendation to their ministry and work.

At the same time, however, the situation was far from stable. Luke's record tells us,

The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, where they continued to preach the good news (Acts 14:4-7).

Notice the emphasis upon the teaching and preaching of the good news of Christ. That is the only way people can be saved. The gospel is God's only saving power (Romans 1:16-17) to those who believe. Paul and Barnabas went to these cities and did what they had been doing from the very beginning: teaching and preaching Christ and Him crucified.

Success and Failure at Lystra

"In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked" (Acts 14:8). This man who had been lame, who had been in his unfortunate physical condition from birth, was listening very intently to Paul. As he fixed his gaze upon Paul, Paul observed that this man had faith to be made well. Faith was not necessarily required of people in order for the Spirit to perform a miraculous deed in the name of Christ, but this

person believed that God had power through the Spirit. So Paul called out, “*Stand up on your feet! At that, the man jumped up and began to walk*” (Acts 14:10). Miracles were always immediately and completely accomplished, and in this case, “*When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, ‘The gods have come down to us in human form!’*” (Acts 14:11).

The Lycaonians had a misconception as to the nature of deity, thinking that false gods existed, so they thought that the gods, somewhere out there in the universe, had come down in the form of these two men. Luke writes that they began making preparations:

Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them (Acts 14:12-13).

Is that not interesting? Paul is now the chief speaker, he is gaining in prominence as a leader to the Gentiles. So they made preparation to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas. When they understood what was taking place, Paul and Barnabas rushed into the crowd and tore their robes to prove physically their displeasure with what they were doing.

Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their season; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy (Acts

14:14-17).

Our God is still demonstrating His presence day after day, season after season, by doing good to mankind, by giving rains from heaven and fruitful seasons. In the Old Testament, the Bible has quite a bit to say about the rain cycle, how the winds bring the clouds with all of the potential rains to an area. This is a beautiful thing, and God in His wisdom set it up that way. It is from God that we receive all of these gracious benefits.

Luke writes that even after Paul and Barnabas said these things that they still had difficulty restraining the crowds from offering sacrifice to them. This is what Paul's ministry consisted of in the city of Lystra. Keep in mind that Timothy will be contacted in this city and converted by Paul. We will read about the faithfulness of Timothy as a believer in Acts 16. Until that time may God bless us in our study of God's marvelous workings through His servants, resulting in the conversion of many to Him and the building up of His church.

THE GREAT THRUST TO THE GENTILE WORLD (2)

Lystra, Derbe and Return to Antioch

Introduction

Jesus said that if we hunger and thirst after righteousness we will be filled (Matthew 5:6). I want to commend those of you who are interested in eating and drinking the word of God, receiving it into your heart with gladness and humility.

In this chapter in our study of the book of Acts, we will continue our study from Acts 14. In Acts 14 we have learned about Paul coming to the great city of Lystra. While he was there we believe that one of the men converted in his hearing and responding to the gospel was a young man by the name of Timothy (cf. 1 and 2 Timothy; 1 Corinthians 4:17; Philippians 2:19-24). We will read more about Timothy in Acts 16, how he became a co-laborer with Paul on his second missionary journey.

But here in Acts 14, Paul was trying to remind the pagans, those who were unbelievers, about the essence and nature of Jehovah God. They had to see something about the nature and consequences of sin in their lives before they would acknowledge their need for a Savior. Paul reminded them of the fact that God had never left Himself without witness. He did good things in that He gave rains from heaven, and fruitful seasons, which satisfied their hearts with food, gladness, joy and comfort (Acts 14:17).

It is interesting that in going back to the Old Testament, in particular Job 37, as well as the book of Ecclesiastes, we read that God is the source of the rain cycle. It would be interesting to

study the great weight of water and how much weight is involved in these rain clouds; how God made them to take the rain vapor and transport it over the earth and then at the appropriate time, to release that huge amount of weight. Is it not amazing? Only God can make clouds that would carry such an amount of water to the needed areas to water the earth so that we might have life. God is the source of that. We honor Him, we praise Him for His witness to us, for His presence and His goodness towards us.

The Stoning of Paul

After Paul and Barnabas had restrained the pagan crowd in Lystra from honoring them as gods and worshiping them, some of the unbelievers from Antioch and Iconium, where Paul and Barnabas had previously been preaching and working, came to the people and convinced the multitudes that Paul was a false teacher. Based upon that information, Luke writes, “*They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead*” (Acts 14:19b).

You can imagine Paul having been struck with stones and left unconscious to die. The crowd thought that he was dead. Pulling his body and dragging it over the dirty street and the stones, they dragged him outside of the city like he was some kind of animal and left him there, thinking him to be dead. However, Luke tells us, “*But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe*” (Acts 14:20).

Perhaps Timothy, along with his mother and grandmother, was present. Paul said on one occasion, “*Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy*” (2 Timothy 1:4). Perhaps it was at that time that they first shed some tears thinking that Paul’s life had been taken. But he was not dead, as the record tells us. The disciples nursed his body and cared for it tenderly through the day and through the night. After proper care throughout the night, Paul and Barnabas left for the city of Derbe. On a map you will be able to see that Derbe was a city next to Lystra, not many miles away.

More Conversions and Strengthening the Converts

After their arrival in Derbe Luke writes,

They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith (Acts 14:21-22a).

It is very important for us to be reminded over and over again of the charge that the Lord gave, according to Matthew 28:18-20, to go and make disciples of people in all the nations. This is accomplished by teaching them about Christ, His way, His death and resurrection, His name, everything that is involved with Him. Those you have taught, you continue to teach, and then, you baptize them into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in order to make them saved disciples. The same message, when it is responded to in exactly the same way as they responded to it, will make saved disciples today. Everywhere they went, they preached the message of Christ. When people responded to the cross, they were saved disciples.

It also took a great deal of courage to return to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch (Antioch in Pisidia). Unbelievers in these cities had mistreated them, and yet, they were going to go back to these cities with great conviction and confidence. Their purpose in returning was not to make new disciples, but to strengthen the hearts and souls of those who were already members of the body of Christ. Notice the message with which they encouraged the disciples in their faith. We need to encourage one another daily (Hebrews 3:12-13), continue in the substance of Christian doctrine, and continue in the message that God has given us. That is where Christianity demands faith, conviction, confidence, and joyful trust conjoined with obedience on our part. Brethren need to be encouraged. They need to be told that one ought to cling to the Lord, as we have already studied from Acts 11.

However, it must also be remembered that when living by faith, a person will encounter persecution. The Lord is up front with us. He is very honest in telling us that if we live Godly lives, we will suffer persecution. Paul reminded Timothy of that truth (2 Timothy 3:12). We must be willing, by His grace, by His presence, and by His strength, to remain in the faith. Even then, we are going to encounter pressure, tribulation, and trials because the Lord said that if we trust Him and are faithful to Him, he will help us successfully endure these trials. The message that was given to these young disciples was that through many tribulations they would enter into the kingdom of God. Paul said that the Lord delivered him from all of his trials and tribulations (2 Timothy 4:18), and delivered him into the eternal kingdom.

When we are born of the Spirit and of the water (John 3:3-5), we become citizens of the kingdom. That is the redemptive kingdom, the church of our Lord. But one day, we will receive at the end of our faith the ultimate and final salvation (1 Peter 1:9), and we will have an abundant entrance into the eternal everlasting kingdom. If we are faithful to the very end, then in our devotion to the Lord and our faithfulness, one day we will enter into that eternal heavenly kingdom. That was the message that Paul gave to these young disciples.

Luke also records that they appointed elders for these churches. When they returned to these three cities, in every church, they found some brethren who had a measure of spirituality. These were men who met the spiritual qualities that are listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. We learn from these scriptures that a man must possess each quality to some degree. It is a matter of judgment as to the degree of possessing each of these qualities, but when a man has these spiritual traits, he can be selected by the church to serve as a bishop, overseer, or elder in the body of Christ.

In Acts 6 we learned that the apostles told the church to select seven men from among their number. After they had chosen the men, the apostles appointed them to the work that needed to be done. Paul and Barnabas did not *select* the men for

these churches in Acts 14; they *appointed* these men to serve as elders. The church obviously was involved in the selection process, because only the church would know whether or not these men met the spiritual traits to serve as elders. Luke writes about the part that Paul and Barnabas played in the process in Acts 14:23: “*Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.*”

Notice the plurality of elders in every church and the praying that was accompanied with fasting. Once again we see that God permits us to spend time praying, even through a meal, so that the selection and appointment of men who serve as shepherds is carried out in a biblical and appropriate manner.

After they left these cities, they found their way back to the church in Antioch in Syria. When they arrived in Antioch, Luke writes that they assembled the church together. They did not wait until the church met on the first day of the week. Luke writes,

... they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles (Acts 14:27).

Paul and Barnabas had returned from the work for which they had been turned over to the grace of God to accomplish. They had accomplished many great things, but would now stay in Antioch for a lengthy period of time (14:28).

Discussion Among Brethren About Gentile Freedom

The Battle For Gentile Christians

In Acts 15 we read about another problem that existed in the church. This problem was created by some Jewish Pharisees who had become members of the New Testament church, but did not understand the nature of the Law of Moses. They tried to bind that law upon the Gentile believers, which created disunity in the body of Christ. Luke records that while Paul and Barnabas were in the city of Antioch, some men from Judea, which is where Jerusalem was located, began teaching the brethren. Luke writes that their teaching consisted of the following: “... ‘Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15:1b).

It is important to notice whose custom they were saying must be followed; not the custom of Abraham, which in the book of Genesis is found the origin of circumcision, but rather, after the custom of Moses. They are trying to bind the Law of Moses upon these young Gentile disciples.

We will learn later in our study of Acts 16 that when Timothy became a co-worker with Paul in his ministry, Paul, knowing that there were Jews in the area where they were working, and because Timothy was a half Jew (his mother was a Jewish believer as we read in Acts 16), had Timothy circumcised. Paul did not have him circumcised in order to be saved, but in order that he might have an open door with Paul into the hearts and minds of the Jews. Paul’s custom was to go into the synagogue and teach the people. Paul lived by the principle that we become all things to all men that we might reach them with the gospel of Christ so we might win as many as we can (1 Corinthians 9:22).

It was not wrong for Timothy to be circumcised as a custom, but it was not necessary for him to be saved. The issue here is that the men from Judea were teaching that the Gentiles were not saved because their salvation through Christ and His death also

had to be joined with the Law of Moses. This was heresy. It was false teaching. The books of Galatians, Hebrews, and Romans make it very clear that we are saved by our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, not by works.

Luke writes that when Paul and Barnabas encountered this false teaching, they presented the truth about it and there was a great dissension (Acts 15:2). There was a great uprising and division because of this teaching. Because of the amount of problems that this teaching caused, Luke records that the brethren in Antioch decided that there ought to be some representatives of the church in Antioch sent to Jerusalem, which is where these teachers had come from. The purpose of these representatives going to Jerusalem was to confer with the other apostles and elders about this matter.

Luke has given us a very distinct picture here, a picture not of a big church conference or council, as the religious people of our day like to make of this meeting. All that was happening here was that there were brethren from one congregation (Antioch) going to another congregation (Jerusalem), where you have inspired apostles of Christ and elders overseeing the local church. Two congregations get together because the apostles were making known the will of the Lord, being inspired by the Holy Spirit, and presenting the gospel in all of its fullness. In Galatians 2 Paul will tell us about this meeting, disclosing that it was a private meeting where they had an in-depth discussion.

There is a lesson in all of this that we need to learn today. We should not have the whole church present when we are going to have an in-depth study, or discussion, and a lot of debate where one person speaks and then the other one. The weak Christian, the babe in Christ, will be discouraged in a meeting like that. Paul states that it was a private meeting in which they had an in-depth discussion and had come to be of one heart and soul after the meeting. The whole church finally came together in 15:22, but the whole church was not involved in this particular meeting. Luke writes that as they traveled along the way, they told other churches the good news regarding the Gentiles and their coming

to Christ. Arriving in Jerusalem they received an enthusiastic reception (15:3-4).

The People Involved and the Problem Considered

Once Paul, Barnabas and some of the other brethren from Antioch arrived in Jerusalem, it was time for the main issue to be discussed. With that in mind Luke writes,

Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, ‘The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses’ (Acts 15:5).

The practice the Pharisees were demanding of the Gentile disciples needs to be looked at closely. It had to do with keeping the Law and, of course, if they were circumcised, that would commit them to keeping the Law of Moses in order to obtain salvation. But we need to see what was the real issue at stake, which is the sufficiency of the cross. Could men be saved by faith in Christ and by assurance in His blood, or did it take the sacrifice of Christ plus the Law to save people? That was the real issue at stake. So it had to be discussed and a settlement reached, or else Christianity would have been destroyed at this point. So one can see that these faithful brethren are getting together to settle the issue once and for all.

An apostolic decree was written and circulated among the other churches. We know what was contained in the decree because Luke records it in Acts 15. This was a very significant meeting. It helps us understand how to obtain unity among brethren. Our Lord prayed in John 17:22-23 that we would be perfected together in unity. The word “perfected” was used to describe a medical doctor setting a broken bone or fishermen mending their nets. We have got to have patience, kindness and commitment, to the point that we are willing to spend all of the necessary time to be perfected together in unity. They did that in

the city of Jerusalem when dealing with this difficult problem.

The first one to speak in this private meeting was the apostle Peter. In Acts 15:7-8 Luke describes Peter standing up and saying,

Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.

Peter is referring back to the events of Cornelius as recorded in Acts 10, and there are two points that we can derive from that statement. **First**, when Cornelius was baptized into the name of the Lord (Acts 10:48), he received the Holy Spirit to indwell in him as a seal, earnest, and proof of his sonship just like everyone else. **Second**, we know that Cornelius received the Spirit to empower him with the gift of tongues, which confirmed the fact that God wanted the Gentiles to be saved by grace, through faith, in the Lord Jesus Christ, and not be circumcised. That gave further endorsement to the Lord's presence and to the commendation of the Holy Spirit with regard to Cornelius' conversion. So Peter says to them, now you remember what God had already done in the household of Cornelius.

With that statement having been made Peter then said,

He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? (Acts 15:9-10).

This is a very strong statement made by Peter. In effect, he is saying, "Do you believe that God made a mistake in this matter? You are calling God in question. Here is what God has already done. So why are you testing Him?"

Peter wanted them all to notice the inconsistency of trying to demand that the Gentiles practice or do something that neither they, nor their fathers, could do. They could not keep the Law perfectly in order to be justified, and yet, they were trying to place the same yoke of bondage and oppression upon the Gentile disciples. So he said, “*No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus, that we are saved, just as they are*” (Acts 15:11).

Do you see the arrangement of the words? He said, we believe that we are going to be saved as Jewish believers in the same way that these Gentile believers are going to be saved: by grace through faith, which can be received and found only in the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice the response to these few words that Peter spoke:

The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them (Acts 15:12).

What could they say? Peter had just said that God had already accepted the uncircumcised Gentiles. The Spirit had appeared to him and he had experienced a vision. An angel was sent to Cornelius and the gift of tongues came upon Cornelius. He responded to the good news, was baptized into Christ, and received the indwelling Spirit. God had already saved them. He had already given His endorsement and did not inspire any of those present to demand circumcision of the Gentiles. Therefore, they were not bound to keep the Law of Moses in order to obtain salvation. So they all became quiet.

The second point in proving the all sufficiency of the cross was not only Peter’s apostolic statement, but also the fact that God gave His endorsement to the ministry of Paul and Barnabas. Luke records that Barnabas spoke, recalling “*... the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them*” (Acts 15:12). Barnabas took them back to the first missionary tour of Paul and himself (Acts 13 and 14). God had

confirmed their ministry and message with signs, miracles and wonders. Nowhere during that period of time did the Spirit inspire Paul or Barnabas to demand circumcision and the keeping of the Law upon the Gentiles.

The third point in proving the sufficiency of the cross was given by one of the elders of the church, James. Luke records for us that when James started speaking, he directed his words to what Peter had just said. James said,

Brothers, listen to me. Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: ‘After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things that have been known for ages’ (Acts 15:13b-18; cf. Amos 9:11-12; Isaiah 45:21).

The rebuilding of the tabernacle of David, which in this context is the church of the Lord, would include the Gentiles, as Isaiah 9:1 also predicted. James is emphasizing to all of those present that the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church is what the Old Testament predicted would happen. He did not predict that they would be saved provided that they kept the Law. They would be saved by faith in Christ just as everyone else had been.

Then there is the endorsement of the Holy Spirit. James went on to add,

It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest

times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath
(Acts 15:19-21).

Communication from the Jerusalem Meeting To the Gentile Churches

The Gentiles were not to have any fellowship, or joint participation, in idolatrous worship in any way (cf. 1 Corinthians 8; 1 Corinthians 10; Romans 14). They could not have fellowship with idols in any way, so they were to abstain from any contamination through idolatrous worship, nor could they eat certain meat that had been offered in sacrifice. Notice that sexual immorality was mentioned. This is due to the fact that it was also a part of the ritual of idolatrous worship (cf. 1 Corinthians 6 where Paul talks about being joined to a harlot. That is the kind of fornication being alluded to.).

In Genesis 9 we see that God gave instructions to Noah and his family that they were not to eat or drink blood, and that they were not to eat animals that had been strangled. The blood was to be drained from the animal before it could be eaten. Here was a prohibition that had remained consistent from Noah's time through the days of Moses. Therefore, there was nothing that needed to be written to the Jewish brethren. They had been taught from the background of the Jewish synagogues that it was wrong to participate in idolatrous worship and to eat animals that had been strangled or to drink blood. Instead, a decree was written to the Gentiles.

Once this agreement was reached, it was decided by the apostles and elders for the whole church to choose men from Jerusalem to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. Luke records that the Holy Spirit inspired the writing of this apostolic letter to the Gentile churches, a fact that was noted in the letter (15:28). The church in Jerusalem sent these brethren back to Antioch, two of whom, Judas and Silas, are mentioned as prophets. They were also coming along to encourage the brethren. Inexpressible joy was the response on the part of these Gentile brethren in Antioch and in the other churches. We have

studied in this chapter about a problem that existed, the solution to the problem, and how they came to be united. What a marvelous example that is for us today.

THE GOSPEL SPREADS TO MACEDONIA (1)

Introduction

In Acts 15 we read that the Holy Spirit inspired the writing of an apostolic decree that was sent to the brethren in Antioch of Syria (15:28-29). The decree covered the essential things that would not lay a great burden upon the Gentile brethren. To begin with, we need to be reminded that nearly all of the Gentiles in the first century had a background of paganism and idolatry, so they had to be taught that they must make a full break with idol worship. Since they were coming out of this background into Christianity, they could have absolutely no fellowship, no communion, and no participation at all in these types of actions. They could not eat any meat that was offered to an idol in an act of worship. In 1 Corinthians 10 and Romans 14 we read that under certain conditions Christians could eat meat, but they could not eat it if it was being offered to a god or participate with those who were doing the offering. This apostolic decree from Jerusalem instructed them about these things.

Luke records that two New Testament prophets, Judas and Silas, went with Paul and Barnabas and other brothers from Jerusalem, and they gathered the church together at Antioch. Acts 15:30 tells us that they read this apostolic decree, and then Judas and Silas, with many words, encouraged and strengthened the brethren. These men, who were prophets and inspired by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 14), edified the church in Antioch, that is, they promoted their growth and built them up spiritually.

Paul's Second Missionary Tour

The Churches of the First Tour Revisited

It is at this point that the record tells us about the beginning of Paul's second missionary tour, which began after they had spent some time with the church in Antioch. Luke writes,

Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us go back and visit the brothers in all of the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing’ (Acts 15:36).

Barnabas said, “Fine, let us take John Mark with us again.” But Paul did not believe that John Mark was mature enough to participate in this particular work of the Lord. Luke writes that there was a very sharp disagreement because it was a matter of judgment as to whether or not John Mark should stay with the brethren in Antioch and work, or if he should accompany them on this missionary journey. “. . . but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work” (Acts 15:38).

In Acts 13 and 14 Paul encountered this disappointment on the part of John Mark. It was not a sin for John Mark to go back home, but he had not kept his commitment to stay with them on the first missionary journey. Paul believed that he had given up during that period of time. He quit during that missionary tour, and as a result, Paul believed that he needed to stay and work with the brethren in Antioch. But Barnabas felt very strongly that he ought to be taken, so after a sharp disagreement, they came to an agreement. There was no disunity; they simply differed, as they had the right to differ in areas of judgment. But there was no division created. Barnabas simply said, “I will take John Mark and we will go the southern route, and you can take Silas and go to the northern area. This way we will have two teams of servants.” And this is what they did. Paul did not forbid Barnabas from doing this, which must have helped mature John Mark. Paul

later commends John Mark for his faithfulness in the ministry (2 Timothy 4:11). John Mark was learning how to be strong and mature in Christ, and Barnabas, who was a relative of his, says, “I think that he ought to return to the work.” Paul and Barnabas were both right, and we learn a great lesson from this about how to resolve a conflict. We then find that the brethren committed these brothers to the grace of God again, and Paul and Silas began the second missionary journey.

In Acts 16:1 Luke writes that Paul and Silas went to the city of Derbe and then returned to the city of Lystra where Christ had been preached earlier. In Lystra there was “*. . . a disciple named Timothy . . . whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek*” (Acts 16:1). Here is our introduction to this man of God, Timothy, to whom Paul will write two letters, 1 and 2 Timothy. The family background information that is provided by Luke implies that since Timothy’s mother was a Jewish believer and his father a Greek, his father was not a believer. Regardless, Paul saw that Timothy was well spoken of by the brethren in Lystra and Iconium (Acts 16:2). Because of his good reputation, Paul wanted him to join the team and be a co-worker with him and Silas in the ministry. Timothy accepted Paul’s offer, and in 1 Timothy 4:14 and 2 Timothy 1:6, we read that the eldership laid their hands upon Timothy to commit him to God’s grace and Paul laid his hands on him so that the Holy Spirit would give Timothy some spiritual gift. There are now three men in the team of ministry, and it is believed that it was at this time that Luke also joined the team, making four co-workers, working together to spread the gospel message.

The Spirit’s Call to Evangelize Macedonia

One of Paul’s desires was to go to Asia and preach about Jesus Christ, particularly at Bithynia, on the border of Mysia. He and his companions had been traveling through the region of Phrygia and Galatia (Acts 16:6), but had been prevented by the Holy Spirit from entering into Bithynia. So Paul had to wait for

miraculous providence from the Holy Spirit to guide him into his next work. In Acts 13:2 the Spirit said, “*Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.*” The Spirit had already been leading them into the area of their work. Today we also need to pray for wisdom and boldness wherever we go, even though the Spirit is not going to speak directly to us. We know that God has spoken through His Spirit, as we have a record of it here in the words of the New Testament, but we are to pray for wisdom and judgment so that we will know where it is we ought to go in order to teach and preach Christ. Luke records that a vision was given to Paul while they were in Troas. In that vision he saw a man in Macedonia who begged Paul to come and help them. Luke then writes, “*After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them*” (Acts 16:10).

Macedonia was a northern province of the Greek empire at this particular time. Paul and his co-workers went there and preached Christ (Acts 16-17). After they completed their work, they went into the southern area, the district called Achaia. Corinth was the capital city of this district and Paul went there as well (Acts 18). The people in the nation of Greece heard the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ. Luke wrote that on the way to Macedonia, Paul and his co-workers arrived at the city of Philippi. This city was a Roman colony, which meant that the customs, the language, the activities and the rulers all resembled the city of Rome.

The Gospel In Philippi

Conversion of Lydia – First Fruits of Macedonia

Paul and his co-workers surveyed the situation in Philippi and found that there was a group of Jewish believers in the city. They did not have a synagogue, but rather, they were meeting outside the city in a place of prayer. These believers came together on the Sabbath, and among those present were Lydia and

her household. Lydia was a successful businesswoman from Thyatira over in Asia and a very devoted believer in the Lord. She listened attentively to the things that Paul was saying as he taught the gospel and Luke writes, “*The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message*” (Acts 16:14b).

The Lord opened her heart by applying to her heart the message of Christ. If a person does not open his mind and heart to the word of God, then the Lord will close his heart. Lydia, however, listened closely and the Lord opened her heart. “*When she and the members of her household were baptized, . . .*” (Acts 16:15a). Lydia and her household responded to the good news of Christ just like everyone else had when they heard the message. We have seen the pattern that whenever people heard the gospel, believed it and responded to it, the Lord built His church, and now the great church at Philippi has been established.

Immediately after her response to the gospel she urged Paul and his co-workers to come to her home and use it as a base of operation. She provided support for them by supplying room and board. In Philippians 1:3-5 Paul said,

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

The day that Paul is talking about in Philippians 1:5 is the day recorded here by Luke. Immediately after Lydia was converted she also became a co-worker with Paul in order to further the advance of the gospel of Christ. We can live without books, but we cannot live very long without cooks. Lydia wanted to be gracious and hospitable and to become a partner with Paul and his brethren in the spreading of the gospel of Christ. So she insisted that they all come into her home, and there she would provide fellowship with them in the progression of the gospel of Christ.

The First Persecution In Greece

In Acts 16:16a we read about a slave girl in the city “*... who had a spirit by which she predicted the future.*” Satan was still at work here in the first century. We learn from teachings in the New Testament that God permitted Satan to dwell in the minds and bodies of people. We do not know why God permitted Satan to have such unusual power in the first century. It might be that since Jesus had come to destroy the works of Satan (1 John 3:8), God permitted Satan to have unusual influence and power in the hearts and lives of people. Whatever the reason was for allowing Satan this much power, we still see the superiority that Christ had over all of the influences and works of Satan.

The slave girl spoken of here had a spirit of divination and this was used by her masters to make money. It was only for economic reasons that the owners of this woman used her. But she began to follow after Paul and his co-workers and the message she kept shouting was true. “*... These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved*” (Acts 16:17).

The problem with what was happening was that while what she was saying was true, the source was from a person who was being influenced and dominated by Satan. You can see the subtlety of Satan trying to deceive the people into thinking that this slave girl, who was under his domination, and Paul and his co-workers were working together. This displeased Paul, because he knew what the consequences would be should the people believe that a relationship existed between the two parties. So, through the empowering of the Spirit as an apostle of Christ, Paul finally spoke and the evil spirit came out of her (Acts 16:18).

The reaction on the part of the people who owned her is predictable enough. They were terribly upset and began to make false accusations against Paul and those who were working with him. Luke writes,

When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and

Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities (Acts 16:19).

Once they had them before the magistrate they said,

These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice (Acts 16:20).

All of this, of course, was untrue. Paul and the brethren were not teaching anything contrary to the Roman custom, which allowed people to worship all false gods as often, and as frequently, as they wanted. But when these men made this accusation against Paul and his workers, and the Roman authorities did not check it out, Luke writes,

The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks (Acts 16:22-24).

Conversion of the Jailer and His Household

In 16:25 Luke writes, “*About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.*” Despite what must have been great disappointment in the way they were treated as Roman citizens, Paul and Silas showed no bitterness or resentment at all. There was no sign of an attitude of vengeance in their heart toward their accusers. Instead, they are singing praises to God and praying, and the record tells us that they had an audience. The other prisoners were listening to them. Luke records what happened next:

Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose (Acts 16:26).

The jailer, of course, was roused out of his sleep when the earthquake came, and when he saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword to take his own life, because he knew that he was the one responsible for all of the prisoners, and they were about to escape. *"But Paul shouted, 'Don't harm yourself! We are all here!'"* (Acts 16:28b). The man was at the brink of taking his life, but hearing what Paul said, *"The jailer called for the lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas"* (Acts 16:29). He then asked the most important question that can ever be asked by a sinner: *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* (Acts 16:30).

The jailer realized that these men must be servants of the Lord. His life had been spared by Paul's message, perhaps he had even heard that they were the ones teaching and preaching in the city. He made the connection to all of these things and asked, "What must I do? I believe I can learn from you what I must do in order to be saved." Paul and Silas told him, *"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved – you and your household"* (Acts 16:31).

Belief is the place where salvation begins. Paul and Silas did not say for the jailer to only believe, and they did not say that he would be saved at the moment he believed. They simply said that the first thing that he had to do was to believe. But, in order for the man to do that, he had to hear the message of Christianity. So the record tells us in 16:32, *"Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house."* Faith comes by hearing the word of Christ (cf. Romans 10:17). The man could not believe without hearing the word of Christ so the message was presented. Once he heard the message Luke writes,

At that hour of the night, the jailer took them and

washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God – he and his whole family (Acts 16:32-34).

Here is another case of New Testament conversion. The man was told he had to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation is by grace through faith (cf. Ephesians 2:8). Paul and Silas presented the word of the Lord to him so that he could believe. We know that he repented. He was trying to undo what had been done previously when the magistrates ordered that many wounds be inflicted upon Paul and Silas. He washed their wounds and then, by faith, he was immersed into the death of Christ. We now have a clear picture. It was after midnight, Paul and Silas' backs were lacerated with many wounds, and yet, at the same hour of the night, the man and his household were taken and immersed into the death of Christ. This further confirms what we have already studied. Men are saved by grace through faith, when by faith they repent of their sins, acknowledge their belief in Jesus, and are immersed into the death of Christ and into the possession of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We know that the merit of our salvation is the death of our Lord, so we do not glory in baptism; we glory in the death of Jesus. We are saved by grace through faith at the point of baptism. Baptism is not something we boast about. Baptism is the moment the blood of Christ washes away our sins.

Vindication of Paul and Silas

Luke writes in the latter part of Acts 16 that the men in authority in the city of Philippi found out that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, and the record tells us that when that occurred, they were greatly alarmed. They were afraid when they heard that Paul and Silas were Romans because it was wrong to mistreat a citizen of Rome the way they had mistreated Paul and Silas. Paul and Silas could have taken them to court and pressed charges

against them. They did not do so, but they did make them apologize and correct, at least in a public way, what they had done. Paul and Silas did not want to leave the wrong impression with the city of Philippi in regard to Christianity.

Christianity teaches us that we ought to respect the authorities of civil government (1 Peter 2:13; Romans 13:1-6). As Christians we ought to be the finest citizens that we can possibly be. Ministers of government, as long as they are functioning the way that God has outlined for the government to function, are God's ministers and we ought to honor them. We are to obey the Lord by obeying them, but Paul wanted the city officials in Philippi to correct the false impression that was made that he and Silas had come and were teaching contrary things to the Roman government. Paul said, "That is not so. We will not slink out of town; we will not just leave secretly. You are going to have to make known in a public way that you are wrong." Luke writes,

The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city (Acts 16:38-39).

These officials now have a change of attitude. They are asking for some leniency here because they had mistreated Paul and Silas as Roman citizens. They escorted them out and kept begging them to leave the city. It seems that Paul and Silas left when *they* thought it was appropriate. They spent some time with the brethren in Lydia's home, encouraging them for a period of time before they finally departed. The church has been built, through Paul and Silas, in the great city of Philippi.

The Gospel in Thessalonica and Berea

Success and Persecution in Thessalonica

After departing Philippi, Paul and Silas traveled to two other

places in Macedonia, Thessalonica and Berea. Luke tells us,

When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, . . . (Acts 17:1-2).

Paul did not go to the synagogue to have fellowship with unbelieving Jews. He went there because he had the opportunity to teach and preach the gospel of Christ to these Jewish people. His message was one of

... explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. 'This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ,' he said (Acts 17:3).

As we studied earlier in Acts 3, when we go to the Old Testament, we see that the Messiah that is prophesied about in the Old Testament was the One to be the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53). The Messiah had to be rejected by His people, He had to suffer and die and be raised again. When we see what the Old Testament predicted, we see that Jesus is the only one who fulfilled these Old Testament prophecies. That is what Paul was preaching to this Jewish audience, and there were some favorable results: "*Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women*" (Acts 17:4).

Some of the prominent men and women became obedient to the faith and became members of the New Testament church. This, again, did not go unnoticed by the Jews who were unbelievers. Luke writes that they became, "*. . . jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city*" (Acts 17:5). The mob rushed to the house of a man named Jason, believing that it was there that Paul and Silas had gone. They wanted to drag them both out

of the house and bring them out in front of the crowd (17:5). But when they did not find them hiding there,

...they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: 'These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house' (Acts 17:6).

Notice the accusation that Paul and Silas have turned the world upside down. The crowd actually had it wrong. Paul and Silas were turning the world right side up; but the crowd said that they were turning the world up side down. What a beautiful commendation of the gospel of Christ. Would it not be marvelous if that was said about us today; that we are turning the world upside down by living Christ and teaching and preaching Him to all the people? The record tells us that Jason was accused of having associated with them by welcoming them.

But, the accusations did not stop there. Luke records the mob saying, "*They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus*" (Acts 17:7). That was a very serious accusation, even though it was untrue. They accused Paul and Silas of preaching that there was another king, Jesus. Again, the crowd had it wrong. Jesus is not just **another** king, like Caesar. Rather, He is the superior King. Here is Jesus Christ, the Lord of lords and King of kings. The crowd misapplied what Paul and Silas had taught concerning the sovereignty and authority of Christ, and equated Him to Caesar.

With the accusations having been made, Luke records that crowd and city officials were thrown entirely into turmoil (17:8). The end result was, "*Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go*" (Acts 17:9).

Success of the Gospel at Berea

In Luke 17:10 Luke writes that the brethren sent Paul and Silas to Berea:

On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Bereans were of more noble character than Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true (Acts 17:10b-11).

The Bereans were checking for the truth in Paul's words, as to whether or not the Old Testament had predicted that the Messiah would be rejected, suffer, die and be raised again. They did this by examining the scriptures and finding that these things were so. The result was that, "*Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men*" (Acts 17:12).

It did not take long for the unbelievers (Jews) of Thessalonica to find out that the word of God was being taught in Berea, so they traveled there and put pressure on the authorities. This in turn created another uprising, so the brethren thought it was wise for Paul to leave, and they took him to Athens. Looking at a map, Paul probably went to the coast, and traveling by ship, entered the Achaian province, arriving at the great city of Athens.

Paul and Silas in Athens

Athens was the intellectual center of the first century world as far as the Gentiles were concerned. Among other things, there was a prominent university there. So Paul arrived at this important city, and was waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him. While there he began to survey the city and noticed that the whole city was addicted to idolatry. They had images and idols that had been erected, one of them with a saying that it had been constructed to an unknown god. The Athenians realized that there was a god out there that was unknown to them, and they had an image set up to honor such a god.

Paul was greatly disturbed by this idol worship, so he went to the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews and God-fearing Greeks. He also spent time each day in the marketplace,

discussing with the people Jesus and the resurrection. This is a key point in the study. Paul was given the opportunity to preach before the governing body called the Areopagus (the city council). But, Paul began teaching and preaching to people in the market place. He was down there everyday talking to people about Jesus, which opened the door for him to be invited to speak before the philosophers and men of the city.

The next chapter addresses Paul's sermon on Mars Hill as recorded in Acts 17. May God bless our continuing study of this important time in the history of the church.

THE GOSPEL IN ATHENS, CORINTH AND EPHESUS

Introduction

In Acts 17:13-15 we learn about Paul being escorted by the brethren in Macedonia (from the city of Berea) to the city of Athens. Athens was the intellectual center of Greek influence and culture in the first century. Paul was waiting for his co-workers, Silas and Timothy, to join him there, as they had remained in Berea. While Paul was waiting, he went through the city and Luke records that Paul, “ . . . was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols ” (Acts 17:16b).

As you would expect from the fearless and bold, confident and yet loving apostle to the Gentiles, Paul went to the synagogue and began talking to the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles about Jesus and the message of the cross. He also spent each day down in the marketplace talking to the philosophers. By virtue of his spending time in the marketplace reasoning with the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, the door was opened for Paul to meet before what we would call the city council, known as the Areopagus, and present this new teaching about the resurrection to them.

The Epicurean philosophy originated with Epicurus in the third century B.C. Epicures taught that pleasure was the highest goal of one’s life. As such he tried to identify the kind of pleasure to which people ought to be committed, such as political pleasure and patriotic devotion. But his disciples began to determine for themselves what pleasures they would pursue and what was the

highest goal of their life. They were taught that **matter** was eternal, rather than **a God** who was eternal and who had created matter. In other words, Epicures' philosophy denied the immortality of the soul.

The philosophers whom Paul was reasoning with were of this persuasion. The Stoic philosopher, Zeno, started the advancement of this particular belief, and, of course, he taught that everything was fated. A person's fate on earth is determined and cannot be altered. Zeno taught that the world came into existence because of the god Zeus and that a person ought to deny himself. In essence, if a person can be unconcerned and unmoved with regard to any situation in life, whether it is pleasure or whether it is sorrow, if they are unconcerned about that situation, then they have achieved what Stoic philosophy taught.

These philosophers, who were at least curious enough to listen to what Paul was teaching, nonetheless called him an idle babbler (17:18). This was a term of derision. It actually meant a seed picker. It was used to describe a bird that would go about picking up scraps from various places, and was used to describe a certain kind of teacher. They were saying in a mocking and sneering way that Paul had picked up scraps of information from here and there, and so, they wanted to hear what he, as an idle babbler, had to say in a public meeting place.

Paul's Sermon on Mars Hill

Paul Declares the Unknown God to Them

Paul was escorted to Mars Hill, where he met with both the philosophers and the city council meeting in the Areopagus. Paul was given an opportunity to present in a more honored and dignified way the teaching of Christ and Him crucified.

Paul began by stating that he perceived they were very religious: "*Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious*" (Acts 17:22b). This literally means that Paul perceived them to be demon-fearing in all respects of their life. He said that

he knew this because,

. . . as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you (Acts 17:23).

This is where he began his sermon. He said, “You have acknowledged, by having this altar with an inscription, that there is a god out there somewhere that is completely unknown to you. I want to tell you about God, who is unlike all the mythical gods that you have been worshiping and serving. He is the true and living God who is unknown to you. Paul was saying that what they were worshiping, they were worshiping in ignorance, but he was going to proclaim to them what they were worshiping. Paul told them that they had a dim and imperfect view with regard to Jehovah God, so he presented an incomparable sermon before the Areopagus. Paul said,

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built with hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, . . . (Acts 17:24-26a).

Paul alludes to the historical truth with regard to the existence of Adam whom God created, followed by the creation of Eve. He goes back to the book of Genesis talking about the first man, Adam, as Paul also talks about it in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul continues,

. . . that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places

where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone – an image made by man’s design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead. When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, ‘We want to hear you again on this subject.’ At that, Paul left the Council. A few men became followers of Paul and believed (Acts 17:26b-34a).

Paul wanted them to understand that we are in God. Since we are in God, being His offspring, we should not think that the Divine Nature, the God-head, the Deity, the One who possesses the attributes of deity, would be merely gold, silver or stone. All of them needed to renovate their thinking and allow God’s will to govern their mind.

Notice that there was success in the teaching and preaching of the gospel, even in this city of intellectuals. True, there were not a great number of believers, but at least there were a few. And with these initial believers, the Lord established His church in the city of Athens. Luke goes so far as to name a few of the believers: “*Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others*” (Acts 17:34).

The nature of God is such that He really is worth worshiping and serving, as seen from this sermon of the apostle Paul. But, notice again, our God is the creator of all things. This was a new

way of thinking to these philosophers. They did not believe that any of their mythical gods was the originator of the universe and all things: life, breath and our very existence. They thought of their mythical gods as being way off in space somewhere, separate, and apart from man's existence, and unconcerned about the conditions and needs of those on the earth. Some Greeks thought it was reprehensible that God would be concerned about our daily hurts and needs. But Paul said that God made the world and all of the things that live in and on it. He is the Lord, and He is still the ruler of all things. He has not abandoned the world. He is greatly concerned about the inhabitants here, those who are made in His likeness and image. Paul said that God not only made us, but He is instinctively our Lord. He is the Lord in whom we live and move and have our very existence. Our existence, the life that we have, is because of God. It is derived from God and ought to be used to the glory of God.

Paul then said that this Jehovah God that he was explaining to them is the one who made one man, and from him all of the people of the earth have descended. Jehovah is also the One who determines the destiny of nations. In comparison, the mythical gods were created by the people who resided in a particular nation. Because of this way of thinking, the Greeks would have thought that Jehovah was the God of a particular nation. But, Paul said, no, this true and living God is the one who has set in motion all of the nations. He is the one who has made from one man, Adam, every nation of mankind to live on the face of the earth. He determines their appointed seasons and the bounds of their habitation. A God like this is worth serving and worshiping: the sovereign Lord, the one who determines the destiny and the duration of all nations.

We know from other passages of scripture that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords (cf. Ephesians 1:20-23). In Revelation 1 the apostle John said that Jesus is the Prince, the Ruler over all of the rulers of the earth. He is the sovereign Lord over all authority that exists here upon the earth.

Paul has affirmed the nature and characteristic of God. God made us incurably religious. He made us in His own likeness, in the likeness of holiness, truth and righteousness (Ephesians 4:13, 15). He made us so that we would seek Him and He wants us to find Him through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only way to the Father, as Jesus Himself taught (John 14:6). God can be found. We can have fellowship and a right relationship with Him.

Paul then said that there is a judgment day coming. God has appointed the Lord Jesus Christ as the Righteous Judge. This is the proof of the judgment that is coming and the need for repentance, to be ready for that day of judgment (17:31). The proof of this judgment has been given to mankind by the bodily resurrection of Jesus. God has supplied ample evidence and testimony for our faith in that Jesus was raised triumphantly from the grave. Jesus proved Himself to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection, as Paul affirmed in Romans 1:4. When we prove the resurrection, we prove that judgment is coming. Proving that Jesus is the Righteous Judge ought to motivate every person on the face of the earth to repent and be receptive to the good news of the Lord. All men must respond to the good news of the Lord in order to be ready for the day of judgment.

When those listening to Paul heard about the resurrection, some of them sneered, just as some will sneer today and will not honestly investigate the proof or the evidence. Some of them said, we want to hear you again concerning this matter, but some also believed at that point.

Paul's Work Continued In Corinth

Paul's Beginning Work in Corinth

After Paul had been successful in preaching Christ in the great city of Athens, the Bible tells us in Acts 18:1 that he left Athens and went to another place in the region of Achaia, which was a southern province of the Greek nation. He went to the

capital city called Corinth, which was a city of about half a million people. The Roman general Mumias had destroyed Corinth. It had been rebuilt, and because of its location, the trade routes ran through the city. Because of this the economy seemed to be great at this particular time. But along with being a thriving city, Paul arrived in a city that was morally corrupt and depraved because of sin. It is here that he taught and preached the gospel of Christ. It is another example of Paul and the other servants of the Lord not hesitating to go to those areas that so desperately needed to hear the saving message of Christ and Him crucified.

So, Paul arrived at the city, and he met a great couple that the New Testament speaks so highly of, Aquila and Priscilla (18:2). The Bible tells us that they were Jews who had to leave the city of Rome because of the edict of Claudius the emperor and had come to the city of Corinth. Paul, as this passage tells us for the first time, by way of occupation, was a tent maker, and so he stayed with them and worked. But Luke writes that Paul also “*. . . reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks*” (18:4). Acts 18:5 tells us that Timothy and Silas came down from Macedonia as Paul had instructed them. It was at that point that, “*Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.*”

In Philippians 1:4, as well as 2 Corinthians 11:8, Paul said that he robbed other churches, taking wages from them to serve the church in Corinth. It is believed that Paul and his co-workers brought some financial support from the brethren in Macedonia, which enabled Paul to devote himself completely to the teaching and preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As Paul preached and taught, the record tells us that some of the Jews resisted and began to blaspheme the gospel of the Lord (18:6). At that point Paul shook his garments, which was a symbol of deep abhorrence of their conduct. He said, “*. . . ‘Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go on to the Gentiles.’*”

The Fruit of Paul's Labor

With his statement made to the Jews, Paul left them and used the house of Titius Justice, a worshiper of God, as his base of teaching and operation. Luke then writes, “*Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized*” (18:8). In 1 Corinthians 1:14 Paul states that he was the one who immersed Crispus into the possession of Christ. Paul said he was not sent to do the act of immersing, others could attend to that, but he was sent to preach Christ, which would require people, if they wanted to received the benefits of the cross, to be baptized into the Lord’s death. Notice again the pattern of the new birth, the pattern of gospel obedience: hearing, believing and being immersed.

The Apostle's Vision

The Lord appeared to Paul at this point and said, “Paul, do not be afraid. No one will attack or harm you in any way, so keep on teaching and preaching.” Paul tells us that when he came to Corinth, he came with fear and trembling. The Lord also said in this vision, “I have many people here.” Here is God’s providence, His foreknowledge in knowing that some would respond to the good news of the Lord, while others would not, and yet, God being no respecter of persons, wanted everyone to have an opportunity to believe and be saved. So Paul spent a year and a half in the city of Corinth teaching and preaching Christ.

Paul's Arraignment Before Gallio

Acts 18:12 tells us about Paul being brought before Gallio who was the proconsul in the city of Corinth. It was the unbelieving Jews who brought a false accusation against Paul. They tell Gallio, “*This man . . . is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law.*” The charge is a generic one because in actuality the accusation was aimed at Paul breaking Achaian and Roman law, and that was not the truth. But

Gallio was very discerning. He said, “I know that you are bringing before me a person who is not accused of any wrong or with having committed a vicious crime, but rather you have questions about words and names with regard to your own law. It is a religious matter and should not have been brought before the court.” So Gallio dismissed the court (18:14-16). Luke writes that those who had accused Paul grabbed Sosthenes and beat him in front of the court (18:17). Perhaps he was the one who initiated this law action against Paul and the servants of the Lord. Either way, Gallio could care less. He was unconcerned but upset because he could see that Paul, a Roman citizen, had not violated any law.

In Acts 18:18-21 Luke records that Paul stayed for some time in Corinth, and then, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila, sailed to Syria where he had his hair cut off because of a vow he had made (18:18). We will read more about this when we get to Acts 21, but after Paul left Cenchrea, he came to Ephesus. Again, he goes to the synagogue to reason with the Jews. After hearing Paul they wanted him to stay longer. He said, “I will return if the Lord wills.” The Lord did will as we will find in our study of Acts 19.

Paul Returns to Antioch of Syria

Acts 18:22 states that Paul landed at Caesarea, greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch. At this point Paul concludes his second missionary tour. Acts 18:23 says,

After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

This is the beginning of the third missionary tour of Paul, which will conclude when Paul comes back to Jerusalem (Acts 21).

We are now introduced to a man named Apollos, one of the

great servants of the Lord. He was raised in Alexandria, which was an outstanding city of the first century world, having one of the finest libraries in the world. Alexandria was also home to a large population of Jews, and Apollos, who was a very learned and capable man, spent a great deal of time in the synagogue teaching about Jesus and doing so accurately (18:24-26a).

Apollos in Ephesus and Achaia

Luke writes that Apollos had come to Ephesus, and it was here that he met Priscilla and Aquila, who had heard him speak. In hearing him speak they had noted that there were some areas that Apollos needed further explaining. Here is an individual who was unique. He understood accurately the nature of the promise that the Messiah would come, be rejected, suffer, and be raised again, but the deficiency in his teaching was that he only knew of the baptism of John.

We will find in our study of Acts 19 that there were some who had been taught, perhaps by Apollos or others who had the same level of knowledge as he did, and had received John's baptism, even after the death of the Lord when John's baptism was no longer valid. This is one topic that Apollos needed further instruction on and which Priscilla and Aquila instructed him. This ought to be our pursuit as well, that we would be taught by others and might be able to help others to know the way of the Lord more accurately. Priscilla and Aquila taught Apollos the truth with regard to New Testament baptism, the baptism of Christ, as was stated in the Great Commission (cf. Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16).

After being instructed, Apollos wanted to go to Achaia (Corinth), and was encouraged by the brethren to do so. They sent a letter commending him to the disciples there, and when he arrived in Corinth, he powerfully, even in public, refuted the Jews, demonstrating from the Old Testament scriptures that Jesus was the promised Messiah (18:27-28).

Paul at Ephesus - Christian Experience Enlarged

In Acts 19 we read that while Apollos was serving the Lord in Corinth, Paul had gone to the upper country away from the coast and returned to Ephesus where he found twelve disciples. In the course of their conversation Paul asked them, "*Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?*" (19:1). That is not an unusual question if one goes back the study of Acts 2 rather than beginning in Acts 19. Paul asked them, "Did you receive the Spirit when you believed?" They said, "Why, we have not heard whether or not there is a Holy Spirit for us to receive." Obviously they had not heard about the Lord sending the Spirit, as we studied in Acts 2, and the significance of that event. So Paul asked, "*'Then what baptism did you receive?'* 'John's baptism,' they replied" (19:3).

Notice that baptism puts us into certain things. The New Testament teaches us that we are baptized into the name of Christ (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27). We are baptized into the possession of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:18-20). We are baptized for the forgiveness of our sins (Acts 2:38). We are baptized into the body of Christ, which is the church (1 Corinthians 12:13). Paul asked, "Into what have you been immersed?" And they said John's baptism. So, Paul explains to them that,

John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus. On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:4-5).

These twelve had been immersed in John's baptism after it had ceased to be administered by divine authority. When John died the baptism of John was no longer to be observed so John said that all must believe on Jesus. Their faith in being baptized by John must be placed in the One who came after him, that is Jesus and the power of His cross. From Acts 2 onward, everyone

had to look back to the cross. They had to be baptized into His death and have done it with trust and confidence and in the name of the Lord. They had to be fully assured that Jesus is now both Lord and Christ and in the power of His death and cross. When all of this was explained to these twelve disciples, they were then immersed into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul Preaches for Over Two Years in Ephesus

In Ephesians 2:8-10 Paul said that the Ephesians were saved by grace through faith, which included the act of baptism. Twelve of the disciples in Ephesus had been baptized twice, but all of them had been baptized once. They were raised together with Christ (Ephesians 2:6). Paul talks about the one baptism, which has to do with the unity of the Spirit (cf. Ephesians 4:4-6).

The church has been built in the great city of Ephesus. Ephesus was very important to the work of Paul in the first century. We find that he spent three years there, according to Acts 20:31, as he met with the Ephesian elders in Miletus. Three years were spent there building the church of the Lord. There was such a great response made to the Good News of the Lord, as recorded here in Acts 19, that the unbelievers demonstrated and had a riot against the church of the New Testament and Jesus. In studying further we will see in more detail the great response that was given to the Good News of our Lord, here in the city of Ephesus.

THE ONGOING MARCH OF THE GOSPEL

Introduction

Acts 19 is one of the most exciting chapters in the New Testament, since it tells of the fantastic progress that the gospel of Christ had in the city of Ephesus. As we have already studied, Ephesus was one of the key cities during the first century. During the three years that Paul labored in Ephesus, not only did the Lord use him to build the church in Ephesus, but throughout all Asia. The seven churches of Asia that we read about in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, were established because of Paul's faithful ministry in this key city.

We also observed that twelve disciples, who had been baptized into John's baptism, had to be taught again, since they had been immersed into John's baptism well after the time that John's baptism had ceased to be administered with divine authority. When John died, that ended John's baptism, so these disciples had to be baptized according to Matthew 28:18-20, with the understanding of the nature of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross (cf. Acts 2:38). When these twelve disciples understood this and placed their faith in what Christ had already accomplished, along with the fact that the Spirit had already been sent on the day of Pentecost, they were baptized into the possession of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul then laid his hands upon these twelve, and the Spirit, through Paul, empowered these disciples with two miraculous gifts, a concept already studied in Acts 2.

Paul's Third Missionary Journey Paul Preaches For Two Years in Ephesus

Paul had tried vainly for three months to reach the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles while speaking in the synagogue, but they became hardened in their hearts. They were disobedient to, and spoke evil of, the word. So Paul left the synagogue and went to a school of Tyrannus, which possibly was a trade school. Paul used the facilities a number of hours each day teaching and preaching Christ. Luke writes, "*This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord*" (Acts 19:10).

What a marvelous example that is for us today: to go to a downtown facility, and use the school or facilities of the school in order to teach and preach the word of God. Notice the emphasis that is placed upon teaching. We cannot establish or build the church without faithfully teaching the word of God. Men, such as Epaphras (Colossians 1:7), heard the word during that two-year period and took the word of Christ back to the part of the world where he lived and the Lord used him to build the church.

The hands of Paul performed extraordinary miracles. They were extraordinary because Paul did not have to be in the physical presence of the people who received the benefits of the Holy Spirit. The record tells us that they were able to take sweatbands or handkerchiefs from Paul, and the people who received them were also blessed. Luke writes that those who were sick, or had evil spirits, were healed. The time that all of these things were occurring was still the age of miraculous gifts of the spirit (1 Corinthians 12). These gifts were restricted to the time of the apostles and were given for the confirmation of the word (cf. Hebrews 2:2-4 and Mark 16 for the revelation and the confirmation of the word of God).

False Exorcists Exposed and Books of Magic Burned

In Acts 19:13-20 Luke writes that there were some Jewish

exorcists living in Ephesus, the word exorcist meaning to exact an oath. These exorcists were attempting to exact an oath by using the name of the Lord on people in order to accomplish what the apostle Paul had been doing through the Spirit. “*They would say, ‘In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches . . .’*” (19:13b). There were seven sons of Sceva doing this. Luke writes, “*One day the evil spirit answered them, ‘Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?’*” (19:15).

Even the evil spirits knew that these men did not have a right relationship with the Lord and that they did not have any of the empowering from the Spirit to do exorcisms. Luke writes,

Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding (19:16).

The effect that this had on the people was that,

When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor (19:17).

The name of the Lord was made large; it was esteemed and respected more than ever. It was then that we see the people bringing all of their magical books that had taught them how to engage in such evil practices, and burning them in a huge bonfire. Luke writes, “*When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power*” (19:19b-20).

That last statement could be the theme of the entire book of Acts: the prevailing power of the gospel over Judaism and paganism. That is the way it is today. If the gospel of Christ, the pure message of Christ, without any perversion, without any alteration, is taught and lived, it will prevail over any kind of

philosophy that is not in harmony with the doctrine of Christ.

Paul Plans to Visit the Cities of Jerusalem and Rome

The record tells us that Paul, at this particular point, decided to return to Jerusalem. After he went to Jerusalem he said that he wanted to go next to Rome (19:21). Paul wanted to accomplish his ministry as we read in Acts 20:24, even though he knew it would include suffering. But, whatever it took, he said that he must make this trip. The latter part of the book of Acts tells us about the trip that finally took Paul to Rome. The King James and American Standard Versions have Paul saying in Romans 1:10 that in his prayers he had continued to ask for God to send him to Rome “*... if by any means at length.*” When we pray that kind of prayer the Lord can fulfill it. We may end up going as a prisoner, as Paul did, but when Paul prayed “*... if by any means at length,*” it meant that Paul wanted desperately to go to the city of Rome to preach Christ, and he had an overpowering sense of duty in his work for Christ.

The Gospel’s Effect on the Stronghold of Satan

Luke writes in Acts 19:23-41 that a mob demonstration was headed up by Demetrius, a silversmith. The demonstration eventually entered the big theater which would hold approximately 25,000 people. It was a demonstration against the New Testament church due to the loss of business for those who crafted images of different gods, most notably, the goddess Artemis (also called Diana in some versions of the Bible. Artemis is the Greek word, *Diana* the Latin form). Demetrius had gathered all of the workmen of similar trades together, telling them that their very livelihood depended upon people purchasing these crafted gods. Artemis (Diana) was worshiped as the mother of all the living; the goddess being esteemed as such in Asia at this particular time. The people who worshiped her claimed that the image that represented her had fallen out of heaven. In pictures of this image, it looks like a black, squat, hideous thing

with rows and rows of breasts and the feet wrapped up like a mummy. This was their goddess, the one that they would sell images of. If people could bring one with them when they left the city of Ephesus, then they had their god with them. They would even bury the dead with some of these graven images of their god.

Demetrius began to get the crowd worked up. He said,

There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis (Diana) will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty (19:27).

One of the Seven Wonders of the World was the temple of Artemis (Diana). It was a temple that was 425 feet by 220 feet. Just imagine this huge edifice. There were 127 pillars in this temple made with Persian marble. It was a beautiful edifice in so far as the structure was concerned, but notice the effect that the preaching of the gospel had upon Artemis (Diana), and idolatry as a whole. Demetrius said that Paul had managed to persuade a number of people that the gods that the craftsmen made were in fact no gods at all.

Paul had obviously been very effective in convincing the people about the truth of the living God, the one in whom we live and move and have our being (cf. Acts 17:28a). This is the evidence of a living Christ, and when people see the superiority of the nature of Deity in comparison to a dead god, we know what is going to happen. The majority of people are going to respond so that they can have a living hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. So many people had responded to the Good News of the Lord that the unbelievers had to demonstrate against the gospel of Christ. Oh, that it were that way today, that we were effective in reaching so many people that the enemies of the cross would

have to get together and demonstrate against the power of the gospel of Christ.

But, the town clerk, a very discerning and reasonable person, began to plead with the people, saying that there was a right way to bring an accusation against any individual. But the people were not doing it that way. They needed to come together at an appointed time and bring charges against these men, but if the Roman officials found out that the crowd was acting in this fashion, then, of course, they were going to bring judgment upon them for an improper meeting. Luke writes that once the clerk spoke to the crowd, he finally was able to dismiss the assembly (19:41).

The Church at Troas and the Elders of Ephesus

In Acts 20 Paul recalls his ministry with the Ephesian elders. He mentions that for three years he was able to labor and work in this great city. Acts 20 tells of the events that occurred as Paul traveled to Jerusalem, and also, about some of the activities of his companions. Paul's companions are called ministers or apostles, messengers of the churches (2 Corinthians 8:16-24). The Gentile congregations in Macedonia had taken up a collection for the poor among the saints in Judea. In Romans 15:25-29 Paul describes the nature of the Gentile congregations sending money to aid the poor among the Gentile and Jewish brethren in Judea. This is the purpose for Paul's trip to Jerusalem.

In Acts 20 and 21, however, the Spirit through Agabus, a prophet, and others, warned Paul that if he went to Jerusalem he would become a prisoner. But Paul still wanted to fulfill his ministry, although it might include imprisonment, which it did for a number of years. But he felt constrained in heart to go to Jerusalem and turn over this contribution to the elders (Acts 21:18). Romans 15:25-29 also states that Paul wanted to use this contribution from the Gentile brethren to bring about a greater spiritual unity between the Gentile and Jewish brethren in the church.

Paul Worships With the Saints in Troas

In Acts 20:6-12 Luke records that Paul came to the city of Troas where he stayed for seven days, even though he was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem before the day of Pentecost (20:16). While in Troas Luke writes, “*On the first day of the week we came together to break bread*” (20:7a). Luke also writes that Paul preached until midnight, but still intended to leave at daybreak. Moving to verse eleven, we see that at daybreak Paul did depart.

This section of scripture enables us to know exactly when Paul came together with the brethren. He came together on the first day of the week, the day that we call Sunday. In all likelihood some of the disciples here in Troas had to work on that day. Many of them were servants, bondservants, and so they had to fulfill their commitment to their employers. They were able to come together later in the afternoon and early evening. They came together to break bread, which is the Lord’s Supper. Here is a case of an apostolic example. Jesus had said for the disciples to eat the Lord’s Supper and here we have the precedent of them doing so on the first day of the week. Paul taught the ways of Christ everywhere in every church (1 Corinthians 4:17), and one of the things he taught to all of the churches was on the appointed day, the first day of the week, the church was to come together to break bread. After the communion (cf. 1 Corinthians 11), Paul preached, and while he was speaking, Luke writes,

Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead (20:9).

This, of course, caused a great deal of alarm and concern among those who were present. But, “*Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. ‘Don’t be alarmed,’ he said. ‘He’s alive!’*” (20:10). Paul, being an apostle of Christ, and having the empowering gifts of the Spirit,

restored the life of this young man. When Paul embraced him the Spirit through Paul restored life to this individual. Luke writes, "*Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left*" (20:11).

Acts 20:7 states that Paul intended to leave the next day. This shows that the way of measuring time was by using the Roman time system, which meant that the new day started at midnight, not at 6:00 pm. They had come together on the Lord's Day, Sunday evening, and had the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week. When midnight came, it was the next day. If it were the Jewish system of measuring time, Paul could not have departed until sunset, but he left at sunrise. The record tells us at daybreak he departed, which was the day after the Lord's Supper, a Monday. This helps us understand the context with regard to the observance of the Lord's Supper. Paul then continued his journey toward the city of Jerusalem arriving next at the city of Miletus.

Paul's Farewell Meeting With the Ephesian Elders

Paul wanted to spend some time with the Ephesian elders, so he had some of the brethren go to Ephesus and bring them back, a journey of approximately 35 miles. When they arrived Paul recalled for them some of the things that they accomplished together in the ministry (20:17-38). In these verses we learn of the relationship that existed between public servants of the Lord: evangelists, ministers and the elders of the body of Christ. This entire section can be summarized by learning something about the preacher's personal commitment to personal holiness in the Lord. Paul speaks of this in verses 18-19, 33, and 35. We learn something of the consistency, the humility and consecration of the apostle Paul, and particularly, his steadfastness. Paul speaks of his courage in verses twenty and twenty-seven. He spoke to them about everything that was necessary concerning the whole purpose of God. That ought to be our commitment today, to present the entire will of God, not just a portion of it. Paul had done this during the three years that he was in Ephesus.

Paul also spoke of his incessant labors, even his physical work, to support himself (verses 20, 28, 31 and 34). He spoke of his devotion and the spiritual strength that he derived from the Lord. Then he said, “Brethren, I want you to take heed to yourselves and to the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you bishops or overseers: Feed, or shepherd, the church of the Lord, which He purchased with his own blood” (20:28).

In verse seventeen the “elders” came. Here, they are referred to as “bishops.” Bishops and elders refer to the same group of brethren. The word “overseer” in this context means one who is charged with a duty of seeing that the things that are done by others, are done correctly. They have the oversight of the local church. In 1 Peter 5:1-5, along with this scripture, we see that these elders oversee one single congregation. There are no references to bishops, or overseers, overseeing more than one congregation. We must respect what God teaches concerning the sovereignty and self-government of each congregation. We can have fellowship one with another, we have already studied that from Acts 11, but it is wrong for a man to assume the oversight of another congregation. That is not biblical.

Paul warned the Ephesian elders that even from among themselves savage wolves would arise. Then he said, *“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified”* (20:32). Elders need to be watchful at all times to insure that the doctrine of Christ is faithfully taught, and that faithful teachers of the gospel are the ones who are teaching in the congregation. In Titus 1:5-9 Paul wrote that elders are to be careful in regard to this teaching and to stop the mouths of false teachers. They are to be capable teachers themselves, and good students of the word, in order that they might keep the church doctrinally pure. They must watch over their own lives as well.

Paul then told them that in all likelihood he would not see them again. Luke writes of their great love and esteem for one another.

They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship (20:37-38).

Third Missionary Journey Ends At Jerusalem

Paul Journeys From Miletus to Jerusalem

In Acts 21 Paul and his companions are still traveling toward Jerusalem. On the way they arrive at the city of Caesarea where Philip the evangelist is again mentioned. In Acts 8 we read about this great servant of the Lord. He was one of the seven selected by the church in Acts 6 to help in the assisting of the widows in the church in Jerusalem. Now he is called the evangelist. He had a home and family here in Caesarea, and his four virgin daughters had the gift of prophecy. Paul spent some time with them there (21:8-15), then, in Acts 21:17, Luke tells of their arrival in the city of Jerusalem.

Paul's Conference With the Elders at Jerusalem

Luke writes in 21:18, “*The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present.*” It is at this particular point that the contribution from the Gentile churches in Macedonia was delivered to the elders of the church in Jerusalem (read 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 to get an in-depth study about the nature of this contribution). These traveling servants of the church wanted to see that the distribution of the money was done honorably before God and men, so they came before the elders and gave it to them so that they could have the oversight of the distribution of it. That is what we studied in Acts 11. Churches have a right to take up a contribution and to send it to a congregation, or an eldership, and the receiving eldership has the oversight of the distribution of those funds.

After this had occurred, the elders told Paul that some of the Jews who had become believers had misunderstood some things

that he had taught. Since so many believing Jews were in the city of Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost, they wanted Paul to calm their fears about what he had taught in regard to their relationship to Jewish customs. It was not wrong for a Jew to observe the Jewish customs if he did it for custom's sake. But if they were trying to observe things from the Old Testament for the sake of salvation, it was wrong (cf. Acts 15). But in order to become all things to all men, as 1 Corinthians 9:22 teaches, Paul said, "I become all things to all men in order to gain them." It was not wrong to observe the customs for custom's sake, but wrong to observe them as a condition for salvation.

Paul's Arrest and the Beginning of His Imprisonment

Since this was a sensitive dealing with the Jews, the elders made a recommendation to Paul. There were four men who had taken a vow, possibly a Nazarite vow. The elders suggested to Paul that he take them, and purify himself, along with them and pay their expense, in order that they may shave their heads. If this was done, then there would be nothing to the charge that had been brought against him, but rather, it can be said that he was orderly in keeping the law. It was not a violation of the law of Christ to adapt to Jewish customs, since Jesus Himself was a Jew, in order to observe those things only to become all things to all men so some of them might be saved. Again, these customs were, and no longer are, for the purpose of salvation, or for the purpose of looking to the law or any of the sacrifices as a means of justification.

It was, however, during this time that some of the Jews saw Paul with a fellow by the name of Trophimus, who was from Ephesus, and they made another false accusation against Paul. They said he had brought a Gentile into the temple area. Even though this was also untrue, it greatly upset the people, so as Luke records, the Jews began to attack the apostle Paul.

Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and

immediately the gates were shut. While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar (21:30-31).

The Romans had constructed a tower called Antonia, which looked down into the temple area. The Roman soldiers who were there descended from this tower into the temple area and rescued Paul.

Paul became a Roman prisoner, but as we will see in our next study, the providence of God was with the apostle Paul during his Roman imprisonment and enabled him, by God's help and care, to be brought to the city of Rome itself. In the study of Acts 22 to 28 we will define the word *providence* and see how it is used in each chapter. May God richly bless us and open our minds to further understanding of His way, as we approach the last chapter of our study.

GOD'S PROVIDENCE IN THE LIFE OF HIS PREACHER

Introduction

In our study of Acts 22 through 28 (we have already studied chapters 22 and 26 when we discussed Paul's conversion in Acts 9), the theme will center on God's providence in the life of His servant Paul. Before studying these chapters, however, we need to talk about the word *providence*.

In Romans 8:28 Paul says, "*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*" By reading this scripture it is possible to get the whole context and see how God works in all of these external circumstances for our good if we love the Lord and if we are called according to his purpose. The word *providence* means that God works indirectly in a non-miraculous way for the accomplishment of his will in our lives.

We have already read in our study of the book of Acts that there were miraculous providential events where an angel would appear to the servants of the Lord or to those who needed to hear the gospel. We have also studied that the Angel of the Lord does not appear and speak to people today. We do have angels who administer to us and strengthen us in our work according to Hebrews 1:14, but we are talking about something non-miraculous and indirect so that God can accomplish His will in, and through, our lives. We want to illustrate four ways that God, through His providence, cared for his servant Paul.

In our study of Acts 21, we saw that the Roman soldiers, by

God's providence, came down from the tower of Antonia, which was a barracks area, and came into the temple area and rescued the apostle Paul. Paul's life was spared at that point by God's care and concern. But how did God spare Paul's life? By using His ministers of government. In Romans 13 Paul tells us that when servants in civil government function in the way that God wants them to function, they are ministers to us for good, and that they punish evildoers. What happened to Paul in the temple area in Jerusalem is a good example of what Paul was talking about through the Spirit, when he wrote to the church in Rome. They had protected Paul, rescuing him from those who would have killed him in the temple area. We will see when we get to Acts 23 that Captain Lysias was trying to find out what Paul was guilty of. What crime had he committed? Why were the unbelieving Jews so insistent upon taking his life? Luke records in the latter part of Acts 21 that the captain thought he would have his soldiers tie Paul up and flog him. He thought that by having Paul scourged, he would get the truth out of him. But Paul told him, "*I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen (that is a Roman citizen) of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people*" (Acts 21:39).

Paul was given that permission. He ascended the stairway and overlooking the vast audience, he began to preach. In Acts 22:1-21 we have the sermon of the apostle Paul recorded. One can only wonder if Paul had wanted to come to Jerusalem for such an opportunity. He was given this opportunity as a prisoner of Rome to preach Christ to this vast number of Jewish people in the temple.

Paul's Life Before His Conversion, His Conversion, and His Mission to the Gentiles

Acts 22:2-16 gives the evidence of Paul's conversion. Everything that he said could be checked out historically to see whether or not Paul had traveled from Jerusalem to Damascus, and whether or not these things occurred. Paul tells his audience

of his former manner of life and the events that led to his conversion to Jesus (Acts 22:17-20). When Paul got to the point that he said the Lord had commissioned him to go to the Gentiles to preach this message, however, the audience became very outraged (Acts 22:21-22).

The Effects of Paul's Speech

The audience had been listening up to this point. But now they raised up their voices and said that Paul should not even be allowed to continue to live. As Paul was about to be afflicted with great physical pain, he said that he was a Roman citizen. That got the attention of the man in charge. If one was a Roman citizen, one would not have to undergo any kind of treatment such as this. Paul could have pressed charges, but even though he did not, he still got their attention. The commander said, "You are a Roman citizen?" Paul said, Yes. The commander said, "*I had to pay a big price for my citizenship. 'But I was born a citizen,' Paul replied*" (Acts 22:28).

They began to treat Paul with courtesy and respect when they found out that he was a Roman citizen. The question is, however, what do we learn from this point? That it is not wrong to use our citizenship of whatever nation we live in for our protection and for our good. That we are not to take the law into our own hands, after all, vengeance belongs to the Lord (cf. Romans 12:19). Read Romans 13 again. How does God deliver vengeance on evildoers? He does so through government officials, and through the laws of the land. So Paul did not hesitate to resist his accusers for his own good. Just as Paul did, we also can use the law for our good. Paul did that as a faithful servant of the Lord.

Paul's Imprisonment In Jerusalem

Paul Before the Chief Priests and Council

In Acts 23 the captain, who was trying to find out what

crime Paul had committed, called the Sanhedrin Council together and took Paul to stand before them. Paul, being permitted to speak, told them that he was a Pharisee and the only reason he was on trial was because of the belief that he had in the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:6). When he said this the Sadducees and Pharisees who made up the council got into a big dispute. From the context we read about the doctrine and practice of the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Pharisees offered their endorsement of the apostle Paul, and with the resulting discussion and dissension between the two parties, the assembly was divided. The dispute reached that point that, “*...the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them*” (Acts 23:10). He had to send his troops in to take Paul away from them by force and bring him safely to the barracks.

This is the second time that God’s providence rescued the apostle Paul. In the book of Acts, Paul made six defenses of himself. In Acts 22 he made his defense before a huge audience in the temple area. Here, in Acts 23, he makes his defense before the Sanhedrin council. In Acts 24 he will make his defense of his faith in, and devotion to, Christ before Felix, the governor. In Acts 25 he will make his defense of his faith in the Lord before Festus, the governor. In Acts 26 he will be given the opportunity to present Jesus to Agrippa the king, as well as the governor and all of the notable important men in the city of Caesarea. This particular occasion was one of great pomp, and all of these important people had been brought together to hear the apostle Paul. Finally Paul is brought to the city of Rome where he makes his defense before Caesar (cf. 2 Timothy 4:16). Paul was given opportunities to make the will of the Lord known to people as a Roman prisoner, opportunities that he would not have been given had he not been a prisoner of Rome.

A Conspiracy Exposed and Paul is Removed to Caesarea

In Acts 23:12-22 Luke records another time that God’s

providence intervened in Paul's ministry. More than forty Jews had conspired together to take Paul's life. They had taken an oath that they would not eat anything until Paul was killed. They developed a plan where they told the chief priests and elders to request the captain of the Romans soldiers to bring Paul back to the Sanhedrin. While Paul was on his way back, these Jews would take his life. But God's providence intervened once again. Paul's nephew heard about this plot, came to Paul in prison, and told him about it. Paul told the centurion to take his nephew to the captain. The captain took him aside and listened to what he had to say. The commander told Paul's nephew to keep quiet about their conversation.

Paul's Journey to Caesarea

Luke records what happens next:

Then he (the commander) called two of his centurions and ordered them, 'Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. Provide mounts for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix' (Acts 23:23-24).

Here is God's providence at work. God is working in a non-miraculous way, using his ministers of government for the good of the apostle Paul. So Paul is taken to Caesarea, accompanied by a letter that Claudius Lysias, the captain, sent to Governor Felix (Acts 23:26-30).

Paul's Defense Before Felix

Paul Is Accused Before Felix

In Acts 24 Paul's accusers come down to Caesarea to make their charges against the apostle Paul. What was the accusation that they had against Paul?

We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect and even tried to desecrate the temple . . . (Acts 24:5-6).

Paul responds to this charge by saying first of all that his accusers ought to be present. He said, “*I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defense*” (Acts 24:10). He then makes the statement that his accusers would have to truthfully admit that in no way had Paul been the source of any trouble (Acts 24:11-13). He did, however, acknowledge one thing: “. . . *I worship the God of our Fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect*” (Acts 24:14). Notice that this was the sect that was being spoken against everywhere (Acts 28:22b). Unbelievers regarded the New Testament church as a sect, as part of a cultic movement. That did not deter Paul, however, as he continued on,

I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man (Acts 24:14b-16).

Paul denied these charges outright. He said, “I am a member of the body of Christ. I follow the way of the Lord, but I am not guilty of any of these charges.” After hearing Paul speak, Felix decided that a decision would be made about Paul when Lysias arrived (Acts 24:23).

Paul’s Defense Before Governor Festus

Acts 25 states that Festus went to Jerusalem from Caesarea, and upon his arrival the chief priests and Jewish leaders again brought false charges against Paul. They wanted Festus to bring

Paul back to the city of Jerusalem. The real intent of their request was to have Paul killed while he was traveling back to Jerusalem. When Festus returned to Caesarea, he had Paul brought before him and he asked him, “Are you ready to go back to Jerusalem?” Paul said, “No. I am here under the jurisdiction of the emperor. I am protected by, and will be judged by, the Roman authorities.” Paul wanted to make it clear that he was a Roman citizen and that he had the right to make his defense before Caesar. In Acts 25:10-11 Paul said,

... I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!

We do learn from these verses that Paul believed that some crimes were worthy of death. We do not have the time to talk about the beginning of the death penalty, as we read about it in the book of Genesis, and how God enacted it not only in the patriarchal age, but also in the Mosaic age. God believes that the Roman authorities should bear the sword. So Paul said, “I believe that there are some crimes worthy of death, but I have not committed any of these. I am innocent, and so I am going to appeal to Caesar.”

Paul could do this with peace of mind, because the Lord had already appeared to him and encouraged him. The Lord would be with him and bring him safely to Rome. Paul did not know when, or how, that would be accomplished, but he knew that he would have the opportunity to go to the city of Rome.

Festus Tells Agrippa About Paul and Publicly States His Case

In Acts 25:13-27 Luke writes that Festus got together with King Agrippa and told him about a man who had appealed his case to Caesar, but he didn't know what the charges were. He believed that Paul should be allowed to face his accusers and to have a fair trial. Festus really saw the whole thing as a religious dispute in which Paul was innocent of any charge, but since Paul wanted to stand before Caesar, he wanted Agrippa to help him write a letter that he could send to Caesar. After hearing all of this, Agrippa decided that he wanted to hear Paul.

Paul's Sermon Addressed To King Agrippa

Paul Relates His Manner of Life Before His Conversion

Paul is once again permitted to preach Christ and to defend his faith in Jesus. Agrippa is impressed with what Paul presented. Paul commends Agrippa for his understanding of Jewish customs and controversies. Paul also said to Agrippa, "I know that you believe what the prophets have said. That is what I believe, and that is why I am a prisoner. I believe what the Old Testament prophets said and that what they said has been fulfilled in Jesus." Paul also recounts for Agrippa the events leading up to his conversion. He speaks about the things that he taught in the synagogues and the persecution that he had endured. His teaching centered on the fact that Jesus had been crucified and resurrected. At this point Festus tells Paul that he must be insane. But Paul, knowing that what he has just said is perfectly reasonable, turns back to Agrippa and questions him about his belief in the prophets. Without any hesitation Agrippa says, "*Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?*" (Acts 26:28). Paul said, "I would to God that not only you but all who hear my voice were such as I am, except for these chains." Paul was simply a New Testament Christian and he wanted

everybody else to be a person who belonged to Christ, nothing more, nothing less, and nothing different: Just a New Testament Christian. So Festus and Agrippa discussed what they might say to Caesar about Paul.

Paul's Voyage to Rome - Winter of 60-61 A.D.

Caesarea to Fair Havens, Storm and Shipwreck, Paul on the Isle of Malta

Acts 27 tells us about Paul and his companions' journey toward Rome and about the shipwreck on the Island of Malta. In this situation the providence of God guided and protected Paul and those with him. All of them were permitted to be safely brought to the Island of Malta (Acts 28:1). There were 276 persons on board the ship and not one of them was lost. Luke also mentions that natives on the island were very kind to them.

Luke then writes, "*Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand*" (Acts 28:3). There are some vipers that when they strike a person, that person will live only a very short time. The natives saw the creature hanging from his hand and were sure that Paul was a murderer, and though he had been saved from the sea, justice would not allow him to live. But Paul simply shook the snake off his hand, into the fire, and suffered no harm (Acts 28:4-5). The natives, seeing that nothing was happening to Paul, became convinced that he was some sort of god. In Mark 16:17-18 the Lord promised the apostles that through the empowering gifts of the Spirit that came upon them, they would be protected from such harm as snakes. This, of course, is a demonstration of the promise that Jesus made as recorded in that chapter.

Paul's Journey Completed

The record tells us that finally, Paul gets to the city of Rome, and when he entered Rome he was permitted to stay by himself,

accompanied only by a single soldier (cf. Ephesians 6:20 where Paul refers to himself as an ambassador in chains).

Paul's Imprisonment In Rome

Luke records that after a number of days Paul,

... called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: 'My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar – not that I had any charge to bring against my own people. For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain' (Acts 28:17b-20).

The Messianic hope of Israel, as foretold by the prophets in the Old Testament, was realized in Jesus, and Paul, being a faithful follower of the Lord, believed in the hope of Israel. He said that this was the reason he was a prisoner. Paul is saying, in effect, that the Jews had made him a political prisoner. This demanded a response from these Jewish leaders.

They replied, 'We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of the brothers who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect' (Acts 28:21-22).

Well, then, who are the ones who had spoken against the Lord's church and His teachings? It was the unbelievers, those

who had made false accusations against Paul and other brethren like him. So a day was set for Paul and the others to meet. They came to where he was staying. Luke writes that large numbers of people came and that Paul taught them about the redemptive, spiritual kingdom of God. He also tried to convince them about what the Law of Moses and the Prophets had said concerning the kingdom that had come to pass.

Paul taught like this from morning until evening. Some people believed what he had to say, while others did not. When they could not come to an agreement, they began to leave. But before they left, Paul had one more statement to make:

The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet: ‘Go to this people and say, “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them”’ (Acts 28:25b-27; cf. Isaiah 6:9-10).

After Paul makes this comment he tells them what the result of their hardheartedness will be: “*Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!*” (Acts 28:28). When Paul finished speaking the Jews left arguing greatly with each other.³

Even though many had chosen not to believe what Paul had

³Editors note: Acts 28:29 makes the statement that the Jews left arguing with each other. However, the New International Version does not include verse 29 in the text. Many publishers of the NIV place verse 29 in a footnote. For this reason verse 29 here is simply summarized.

to say he remained undeterred. Luke writes,

For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 28:30-31).

What a victorious conclusion to this marvelous book. Paul, now in the imperial city of Rome, was doing what he loved to do: teaching and preaching the gospel of Christ from morning until evening with no one stopping him.

It is widely accepted that after two years, when the accusers from Judea did not come and present their case, Paul was granted his release from imprisonment. After his release he went and worked for another four years before he was made a Roman prisoner again. Secular history tells us that he died in AD 67. Luke says nothing about Paul's death, so obviously this book was written before that event. But notice how Paul was permitted to teach and preach the gospel of Christ. In Philippians 1:12 Paul said, "*Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.*"

Being a Roman prisoner, Paul had access to military men who were known as the Praetorian Guard. They had heard that Paul was there. Of course, there was a man guarding Paul twenty-four hours a day, and with Paul preaching from morning to evening, it is certain that those men who were guarding Paul heard the message of Christ. Paul was thankful to God that he was a prisoner at this particular time. What a great lesson from Paul for us to learn today. God, in His providence, can work all things together for the advancement of his cause and for our good if we love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

Everything that we have learned in this study enables us to have a good concept of what Christianity is all about. We are

committed today to be used by the Lord to rebuild and to reestablish the original church of Christ throughout the whole earth. May God add His blessing to us as we are used by Him to build His church.

C.W. "Abe" Lincoln

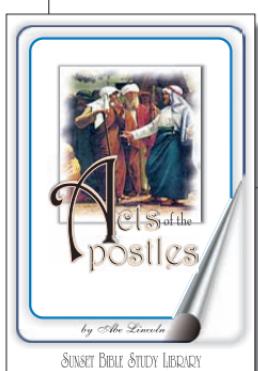
Abe was born and reared on a farm near Sweetwater, Texas. He graduated from Sweetwater High and won for himself a scholarship to TCU and later transferred to ACC, now ACU, from which he received his B.S. Degree in 1950.



Brother Lincoln's first venture was as a high school principal and football coach. Sundays were always devoted to a greater contest than athletics, as he proclaimed the Gospel of Christ. His first love soon emerged as the victor and thus he dedicated full time to the work of an evangelist.

Abe's over forty years on the firing line for the Lord took him to works in Iowa, Odessa, Midland and Fort Worth, Texas and over thirty years teaching in the *Sunset International Bible Institute* in Lubbock. In the late fifties, the Lincoln family labored with the Tex Williams family in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, for three years. Abe was working locally as both evangelist and elder with the church in Seminole, Texas along with his teaching duties in the *Sunset International Bible Institute* when he was called home to be with the Lord in February of 1997.

While at ACU, Abe met and married Dot Dollar. They have a son, Steve, and a daughter, Becky.



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