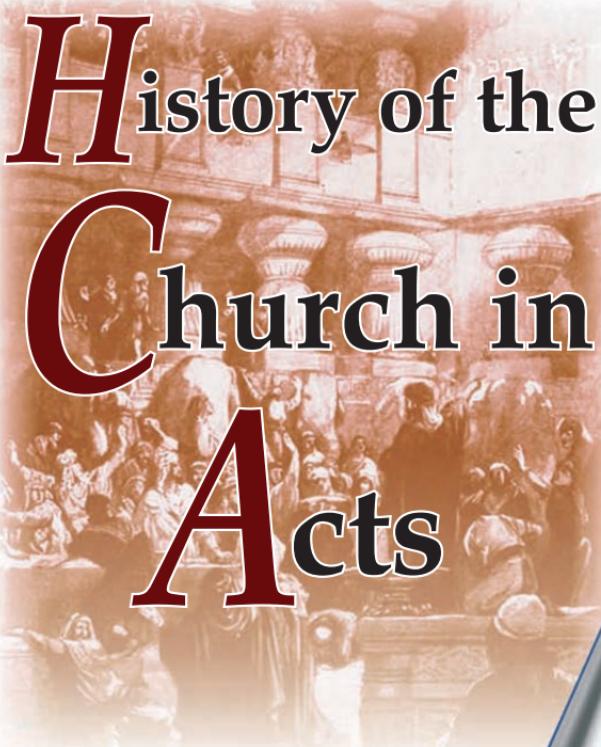


Introductory New Testament Studies



History of the Church in Acts

**The Beginning and Growth
of the Early Church**

by Richard Rogers

SUNSET BIBLE STUDY LIBRARY

History of The Church In Acts

by
Richard Rogers

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History of the Church in Acts

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This book is dedicated to

**The Sunset Church of Christ
and her Shepherds**

where Richard preached fervently and boldly for 10 years and labored with the Sunset International Bible Institute for more than 35 years.



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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.

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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 the study of the History of the Church in Acts is available for purchase through Sunset International Bible Institute External Studies: 1(800) 687-2121 or extschool@sibi.cc.

Table of Contents

I.	Introduction – The First Word.....	1
II.	The First Day and the First Church.....	12
III.	The First Persecution –..... The First Sin in the Church	24
IV.	The First Squabble – First Martyr.....	37
V.	The First Missionary and..... The First World Christian	47
VI.	The First Gentile – First Mission Church. . . The First Prisoner of Christ	57
VII.	Missions Begun – Church Enlarged.	69
VIII.	The Council At Jerusalem.....	81
IX.	Missions Continued – Second Journey.	92
X.	Missions Concluded – Missions Threatened.	104
XI.	Missionary Tried.	114
XII.	Missionary Triumphant.	125

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INTRODUCTION – THE FIRST WORD

Acts 1:1–14

Introduction

In this book we will be looking at the history of the church in the book of Acts which continues the life of Christ. Luke opens Acts by stating, “*In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach,*” indicating that there was more He was going to do and teach. This study of the history of the church will be composed of 12 chapters. We are going to notice about 20 things. The first twelve chapters of the book of Acts details more Peter’s ministry and in these twelve chapter are twelve firsts things, twelve original things to be examined. In the last sixteen chapters, which details primarily Paul’s ministry, there are eight mission statements which will help to describe the work of the church.

As Luke opens his book, Acts 1:1-14, we have what may be called, the first word, the introduction from God. Why did Luke write a two volume work on the origin of Christianity? He wrote the book of Luke, the gospel, and the book of Acts, all to one single man, a Roman official named Theophilus. There are 3 aspects that will help us understand why Luke wrote this two-volume series.

First, he wrote as a historian. He wanted to give the history of Jesus’ work on earth, both personally in his incarnate body and then through and in his church, his reincarnated body. In Luke 1:1-4, we have a preface which covers both of the books.

When he wrote Luke he may have already known he was going to write Acts. He introduces the book of Luke by presenting 5 different stages that he is going to follow in the fulfillment of the history of Christ and the church. Luke begins his first volume by saying,

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 eyewitnesses 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 may know the certainty of the things you have been taught (Luke 1:1-4).

Luke mentioned there five different aspects, or stages, in his development of the history of Christ and the church. First of all is seen in verse one the word **fulfill**. He said, many have undertaken to make a written account of the things that have been **fulfilled** among us. The things that he is going to talk about in the book of Luke and the book of Acts are neither random nor unexpected. They took place in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. So we have here the completion of God's Word.

Then the second stage is seen in verse two, in the word, eyewitnesses. This is not only fulfilled history, this is **witnessed history**. The apostles, who were eyewitnesses of the historical life of Christ, handed down to others what they had seen and heard. This is the biblical meaning of the word tradition. That which has been handed down. Paul told the Thessalonians to “. . . stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye were taught, whether by word, or by epistle of ours” (2 Thessalonians 2:15 ASV). So these were testified things. These were witnessed things.

The third stage is seen in verse 3 in the statement Luke

makes that he had carefully investigated these things. This was not only fulfilled history and witnessed history, this was **researched history**. Luke had not accepted the traditions, the things handed down uncritically. He had carefully investigated everything from the beginning. He was a careful historian. He had done his research.

The fourth stage in this history is seen in verse 3 in the word, “**write or written**.” “. . . it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you.” So this was not simply something that was going to be orally done, he had written these things and he didn’t write them in a vacuum. He says many others had written about Jesus and about the church. Even though others had written Luke was writing because he wanted Theophilus to know the certainty of these things.

And that is the fifth stage in his record historically – fulfilled, witnessed, researched, written and finally **certified**. He wanted Theophilus to know the certainty of the things he had been taught. Luke does not want us to remain in any doubt at all, he wants us to be certain about these things that he writes.

Surely, writing two books to one man would teach us, first of all, the importance of the individual. But more important than that, the importance of discipling the individual. Jesus had said, “. . . go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20). To disciple means to make followers, make committed people. This shows the importance of making one person a disciple, because two books of the Bible were written to do that very thing.

As A Historian

What qualifications did Luke have for writing history, and particularly the history of Christ and the church? Take note of three qualifications which Luke possessed.

- **Number one:** He was a physician, a doctor. Doctors then as doctors now underwent rigorous training. They received the very best education the world had to offer. Normally, as Luke shows himself to be, the doctor would be a cultured person who could speak and write good Greek, stylish Greek. You can check over 50 medical references in the books of Luke and Acts. He was a well-educated, trained, and disciplined physician.
- **Number two:** He was a companion to Paul. Luke was with Paul in many of the places where he preached and established churches. You will notice in reading the book of Acts, that as you begin Paul's life, whenever he and other people are traveling the writer, Luke, will say "they" went here and there. But in Acts 16:10 when Paul gets to Troas the "they" changes to "we." Luke, the writer, is now with them. It is very interesting to look at the different times that occurs in the book of Acts. It starts in Troas and they go over to Philippi and establish the first church on European soil. When Paul is arrested and finally has to leave Philippi, Luke stays behind. Because the "we" becomes a "they." He is going to be a part of the maturing team, a part of the disciplining team in Philippi. In chapter 20:5 when Paul comes back to Philippi the "they" becomes a "we" again. He traveled with Paul all the way to the city of Jerusalem, where Paul concludes the work in Asia Minor and in Europe. Then it is "he" again because Paul is being tried, but when he gets on the boat to go to Rome, as Rome's prisoner, the "he" becomes "we" again as Luke joins him in his most challenging hour, at sea and in the capital of the world. He is there until Paul dies, to the conclusion of his life. He walked with Paul, he talked with Paul, he ate with Paul, he prayed with Paul, he cried with Paul, he laughed with Paul. He was an eyewitness of much that Paul did and an ear witness of all that he had done. He is qualified, by his training, and by his work with Paul.
- **Number three:** A part of his qualification was the fact that

he resided in Jerusalem over 2 full years while Paul was being tried. During that time he would have had opportunity to visit the places of Jesus' life, interview the apostles and others who had seen and heard and talked to Jesus. He could interview those who were in on the establishment of the church and the maturing of the church from the very beginning. During this time he could also have write the Gospel of Luke

As A Diplomat

Luke wrote his two books as a historian, a well qualified, well educated, cultured, disciplined, experienced historian. He writes the book of Acts, particularly, as a diplomat. One who is trying to be diplomatic in presenting the story of Jesus Christ to a Roman official. Luke was very selective in what he wrote in regarding the history of the book of Acts. He was selective about those he talked about. He was selective about the spread of the gospel and he was selective about the churches that he wished to discuss. He didn't discuss everything that happened. He didn't discuss every church that was established. Sometimes he would spend a chapter or two in one particular area. Then maybe only 4 or 5 verses in a city that I would love to know what happened there. But, he was selective. So, he is more than a historian. Historian would have recorded a whole lot more if he was just being a historian than the book of Acts records.

Luke is, in fact, a sensitive Christian diplomat. He is a diplomat in relation to the state, Rome, and he is a diplomat in relation to the church, the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Let's consider first of all to his diplomatic approach to the state, to Rome. Luke was deeply concerned about the attitude of the Roman authorities toward Christianity. They had begun, as he writes the book of Luke, to see the challenge that Christianity really was to the imperial thought of Rome. So, he argues with them, in the good sense of the word. He presents the case to them. He argues, first of all, that the authorities have nothing to fear from Christians. He argues that Christians are neither

seditious nor subversive. He said they are legally innocent, morally harmless. They exercise a wholesome influence on society. Luke wants Rome to know that they have nothing to fear from Christians. Christians intend nothing but good, and do nothing but good to the whole of the Roman Empire. He calls Theophilus most excellent. The New English Bible translates that, as your excellency, Theophilus. Apparently Theophilus was a high Roman official. So Luke is not only writing this book to disciple this believing Roman official, but he is writing this book to give him the answer to all of his fellow Roman critics of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Luke makes three powerful arguments presenting his case. Number 1 – he said the Roman officials had been, and needed to continue to be, consistently friendly to the church. Some of them, he said, had even become Christians, that is why he mentioned Cornelius, the centurion, Sergius Paulus, the governor, and Erastus, the treasurer of the city. He mentions people in the book of Acts who are high in the Roman government that were friendly to Christians and many of whom had even become Christians themselves. Number 2 – Luke makes the point that the Roman officials could find no fault in either Christ, in the church, or in the apostles. Number 3 – the Roman empire should, and in most instances did, concede that Christianity was a lawful or, as they would say, a licensed religion. It was the fulfillment of all that God had promised Israel about their religion. Since Israel's religion was licensed or lawful and this is the fulfillment, the essence, the high point, the apex of all of Israel's religion then this one was also acceptable.

Luke was also a diplomat as he sought to be a peacemaker between the Jewish and the Gentile Christians. He did this first of all by showing the acceptance by God of the Samaritan, the half-breed race, in chapter 8. Then he showed that God accepted the Gentiles, Cornelius and his household, in chapters 10 and 11. I think his primary diplomatic thrust to the Church was the prominence and equality that he gave Peter and Paul.

The Prominence and Equality Luke Gives to Peter and Paul.

Luke give the same prominence and equality to Peter, the apostle to the Jews, and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.

- He said that both of them were filled with the Spirit, Peter in chapter 4:8 and Paul in chapter 9:17.
- He said that both preached to Gentiles and Jews, Peter in chapter 10 and Paul in chapter 13.
- He said both received visions about future work that they were to do, Peter in chapter 10 and Paul in chapter 16.
- He said both were in prison and miraculously freed, Peter in chapter 12 and Paul in chapter 16.
- He said both healed the infirmed, Peter in chapter 3 and Paul in chapter 9.
- He said that both had raised the dead, Peter in chapter 9 and Paul in chapter 20.
- He said that both refused to be worshiped, Peter in chapter 10, Paul in chapter 14.

In review: Both were filled with the Spirit, both preached with boldness, both preached to both Gentile and Jews, both received visions about future work, both were imprisoned and miraculously freed, both healed the infirmed, both raised the dead, both refused to be worshiped. They are presented as equal by the diplomat, Luke. Luke was a historian. He was a diplomat, but at heart Luke was an evangelist, a theologian, if you will, of salvation.

Luke as an Evangelist

Three fundamental facts will stand out in our study of the book of Acts about Luke's teaching of salvation. He will tell us that salvation has been **prepared by God**. He does that first in his gospel, Luke chapter 2. He does that, also, in all of Peter's sermons and in all of Paul's sermons and in Stephen's defense. This salvation is prepared by God. He will tell us that salvation is **bestowed by Christ** (Luke 2:11; 2:38–39), but Acts 4:12 is

the main passage. He says, “*Salvation is found in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*” It is prepared by God and it is bestowed by Christ. He says also that salvation is **offered for all people**. He said that in Luke 24:46-47,

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 at Jerusalem.”

In every single sermon that is preached in Acts, the peoples, and the nations, that is, the Gentiles are mentioned. Luke was a historian. Luke was a diplomat, but at heart Luke was an evangelist.

The Preface to Acts

The first thing that we notice in the book of Acts is the preface. Any book that is worth reading starts out with some kind of preface that catches your attention and tells you what the author intends to say before he begins to say it. This preface has 3 parts, the earthly ministry of Christ, the parting words of Christ, and the glorious ascension of Christ. Jesus must get back to the throne of God before the Church can begin. In Acts 1:1–3 Luke begins by mentioning the earthly ministry of Jesus. Notice also that he looks back to the book of Luke.

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. 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.

Jesus **began** to do and to teach. He began personally, but He **continued** in His body, the church. He is doing this and making it a continuous thing through chosen apostles. Notice the thoroughness of this, He gave evidences that he was alive. He gave instructions to them as to what they were to do. He is giving them His final revelation of Himself. They are taking their final look at Jesus.

His parting words to the apostles are in verses 4-8:

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.” So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” 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 upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

There was a promise and instruction, you wait in the city, I will give you the Spirit. They were ignorant and in that ignorance they made an inquiry. Lord, now are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel? And Jesus encouraged them by telling them that it was not necessary for them to know all those deep things about the kingdom. When the Spirit comes you will be able to do what you have been chosen to do – witness about me. You will witness about me in Jerusalem, you will witness about me in Judea and Samaria, you will witness about me to the uttermost part of the world. They will be successful, he tells them, in the ministry he gives them to do even if they don't understand all the deep things about the kingdom of God.

His Glorious Ascension

Then last of all, see his glorious ascension in verses 9- 11.

After he 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. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

I've tried to imagine them as their eyes went up and they were looking for awhile into heaven. They would have stiff necks from looking so long if someone had not told them “you were not brought to this mountain to look up, you were brought to this mountain to look out and see that you are to carry the word of this ascended Christ, now on David's throne, into all the world.”

Being obedient to the instruction given to them by Jesus they return to Jerusalem to wait (vs. 12 -14).

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. 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 were all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

They did what Jesus said. They went back to the city where they will wait for further instructions. All the apostles were there. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was there. Women were there.

We find later that 120 in all were there. What were they doing? They were together, they were continuing constantly in prayer.

Conclusion

In preparation for the study of the book of Acts, we need to be together. We are going to see, and hear, and read fabulous things in this book. We are going to see the church threatened. We are going to see apostles persecuted. In all of that we are going to see Jesus and the gospel victorious. This is the second incarnation. The first one was God incarnated in Christ. This one is Jesus incarnated in the body.

THE FIRST DAY AND THE FIRST CHURCH

Acts 1:15 – 2:40

Introduction

We mentioned in chapter one 12 different firsts or beginnings in the first 12 chapters of the book of Acts. We focused on the first one, **the first word**, the preface, the introduction to the book. In this chapter we will look at two other beginnings, two other firsts.

Our focus in this chapter will be on the **first day of the church**. In chapter 1:15 through chapter 2:40, Luke will record the fulfillment of the promise made by Jesus in Matthew 16:18 to build His church. Here is the beginning and establishment of the first congregation, the first assembly, the first meeting of the church after it begins. The first section (1:15 – 2:40), we might call: the church empowered. It is here the church is given by God the strength of the Spirit to start and to continue this work.

The Church Empowered

Preparation

In chapter 1:15-26 notice first the fellowship that they had. “*In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty)*” (v. 15). On the day the church is to start the initial group is very small. There are only about a hundred and twenty people gathered together in the upper room. During the ministry of Christ there had been

about 5,000 men beside women and children fed with fishes and bread. Paul said there had been over 500 who saw Him after he was raised from the dead. But now, on this day of days, the start of the body of Christ, a fellowship of 120 people are there. Peter takes the lead filling the void left in the apostleship by reminding the group of the prophecy concerning Judas. In verse 16 Peter says,

“Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as a guide for those who arrested Jesus – he was one of our number and shared in this ministry.” Now Luke records some history. (With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, the Field of Blood.)

Then Peter begins again, “*For*”, said Peter, “*it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,’ and, ‘May another take his place of leadership’” (Psalms 29:25; 109:8). There Luke gives the Biblical history, the fulfillment of which was Judas and his betrayal. Notice the counsel that Peter gave,*

“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 the resurrection.”

Qualifications were necessary to fulfill the work that was to be done. Whoever joins this group of 11 apostles, now that Judas

has killed himself, must be one who from the baptism of John, had walked and talked with Jesus. One who had been taught by Jesus, who had helped Jesus, who had seen Jesus. If he is going to be a witness he has to be an eye witness. The action taken is recorded in verses 23–26. “*So they proposed two men;*” there may have been several who would have met those qualifications, but two men were proposed by the 120 who were gathered in the upper room. But they put forward two men, “*Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus), a just man and Matthias. Then they prayed*”

They communicated with the Lord concerning this important selection. They trust the Lord and not knowing what to do they must receive from God His help. “*Then they prayed, ‘Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen.’*” They find two with the qualifications, but they don’t want to make a choice. They said, Lord, you “*Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.*’ *Then they drew lots.*” That was the Old Testament way of discovering the will of God. Solomon said in Proverbs 16:33 that, “*The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.*” That was the Lord’s promise. They were just fulfilling the Lord’s promise. “*Then they drew lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles*” (v. 26). Now everything is right and ready to begin. Jesus had said in Matthew 19:28 that the apostles would sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel. For the church to begin, there must be 12 apostles for their 12 thrones and their 12 tribes to be ministered to. So, the 12 is now back to their full number.

The First Day – Pentecost Acts 2:1–40

Here is the first day – Pentecost – the beginning day of the church. The apostles are waiting – that is what they have been told to do. In Acts chapter 1, they were to wait in the city until

the Spirit would come. They were told in Luke chapter 24 that they were to wait in Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from on high. When God says “wait” a believer waits. He doesn’t run ahead. He doesn’t get anxious. He waits. So, the apostles are waiting in the city. *“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place”* (2:1). The “they” would go back to the “they” in Acts 1:26, the eleven and Matthias, who was now numbered with the other 11 apostles. These 12 men were all in one place, waiting.

The Spirit descends with a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind. And it appeared to be like tongues of fire and tongues of fire separated. This separated tongues of fire sat upon each one of the apostles and they began to speak with tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. The word “tongues” simply means languages. There are going to be people from all over the Roman world come and listen to this and they are going to hear in their own dialect, in their own languages, what is being said.

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 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?” (Acts 2:5–6).

This is neither gibberish, nor is it the language of angels. This is the language of men. It is understood by men to be their native tongue, the very dialect in which they speak. People came to see that. They heard the noise, that is what brought them first of all. They came to where the apostles were because of the noise of this rushing, mighty wind. Then they hear what the apostles are saying. They are praising God. That is what one does with tongues according to I Corinthians 14. He prays, he

sings and he gives thanks. So, they are praying, they are singing, and they are giving thanks to God.

These Jews are from every single part of the world (vs. 9–11).

Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phyrgia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!

They heard in their own dialect, in their own language and in their own tongues, the marvelous works of God. A crowd has been gathered, a crowd has seen marvelous things, a crowd is ready to hear.

First of all they are confused. They say, “*What does this mean?*” There are some unbelievers there who in mockery say, “these fellows have drunk too much new wine.” Unable to explain this miracle away, the Jewish unbelievers were puzzled, and some resorted to scoffing and asserted, “*They have had too much wine.*” The word “wine”(*gleukous*) means new sweet wine. They must give some answer that would explain to an unbeliever what is occurring. The believers say “we don’t know what is happening.” The unbelievers say “we deny what is happening.”

The First Gospel Sermon

A faithful preacher stands up to preach starting in verse 14, this goes all the way through verse 40. That faithful preacher is Peter and what a sermon he preached. He raised his voice and addressed the crowd and said, “*Fellow Jews and all of you who dwell in Jerusalem, for there were more than Jews there, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.*” Luke had investigated carefully and Peter asked this crowd to investigate

carefully. All we ask is that people give a careful listening to Jesus. We believe they will come to believe. Listen carefully to what I say, “*These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It is only nine in the morning.*” This that you see and hear is that which Joel prophesied of. What did Joel prophesy – that God would pour out His Spirit in the last days. On whom? On all people. Joel’s prophecy is quoted by Peter.

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,
and your old men will dream dreams.
Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.
I will show wonders in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
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
glorious day of the Lord.
And everyone who calls on the name of the
Lord will be saved (Joel 2:28–32).

You and I may not understand that as they would. That is a description of the day of Jehovah, the day of judgement upon a wicked nation. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. That is Peter’s text. Here is his sermon.

Peter begins his sermon by point out things about Jesus that they knew. The signs and wonders and things that He did which they did not deny.

“*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. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge and you, with the help of wicked men, did put him to death by nailing him to the cross”(2:22–23).

They thought Jesus' death on the cross had ended it. Peter says, “*but God.*” Those are two of the finest words in the Bible, “*but God.*” Here’s what you did and here is God did. He raised him from the dead. He freed him from the agony of death because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. David said that in Psalm 16 and Peter quotes that Psalm here. He says, brothers, David was not talking about himself, when he said, “*. . . you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.*” He said David did not say that about himself, but he was a prophet and he knew that God had sworn with an oath that the fruit of his loins would be placed upon his throne. Seeing what was ahead he spoke of the resurrection of Christ. How did David see what was ahead? By the Spirit of God. And he spoke of what? The resurrection of Christ. He was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his flesh see corruption. God has raised Jesus. This is what God has done. God has raised this Jesus to life and we are all witnesses of this fact. All twelve of us standing here saw the resurrected Christ with these physical eyes, we saw the physical body of Jesus back from the dead. “*Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly,*” now he wanted Theophilus to know for certain. Peter says, here’s the evidence. If you will examine it you will know for certain. “*Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.*” What was the result of the sermon that Peter preached? *They were cut to their heart and they cried out to Peter and the other apostles – “What shall we do?”* (v. 37). They heard, they were cut, they wanted to do something. They wanted to be freed from the penalty of crucifying the Son of God. They wanted to be on God’s side and see Jesus raised, not

see Jesus dead.

Peter's response to their question: "What shall we do? Peter replied, Acts 2:38: "*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."*" Repent means that you change your mind, your will about things. Repent of having denied the son of God. Repent of having crucified him. Repent of whatever sins you have committed and be baptized. You know, that is really not an English word. The word "baptize" is just the Greek word brought over letter by letter into the English. The English word would be "immersed." Repent and be immersed. Repent and be dipped. Repent and be plunged. We find out later in chapter ten that baptism is in water. We read in the Gospel of John, that John the Baptist baptized near Salim because there was much water there. Peter said, repent and be immersed in water. In whose name? By whose authority? In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. For what reason? So that your sins may be forgiven. What will be the result? And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, the promised Holy Spirit. Repent, be immersed in water, by the authority of Christ and your sins will be forgiven and you will get the Holy Spirit as a gift. Peter affirms that the promise is not only for you, the promise is also for your children and for all who are afar off, all whom the Lord our God will call. I like that. That means I, a gentile, can be saved.

With many other words he did testify and exhort them saying, "*save yourself from this crooked generation.*" Now that started a congregation of people. The original 120 are joined by 3,000 more that have obeyed the gospel." *Those who received his message were baptized and there were added unto their number that day 3,000 people*" (v. 41). So there are 3,120. Or if the twelve were not included in the 120 then the number of disciple has increased to 3,122.

What a day that was. It was the result of 3-1/2 years of patient, fervent and diligent ministry by Jesus. This is just the

climax. The sermon just brought to a head all of the past life of Christ. But the beat goes on. Jesus will continue to live, He will continue to work, but He will now work in that first congregation.

The First Congregation 2:41–47

Notice what that congregation did. First there was the conversion of the 3000. Because Peter preached faithfully, they heard penitently, they received gladly, and they obeyed completely and implicitly. Luke records the first activities of this new group of converts. They devoted themselves, that actually means they addicted themselves, to the apostles teaching. “*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer*” (2:42). Those that entered into the church were devoted, to being taught, to study. That is the basis and authority of all that they do, the apostles teaching. They were devoted to being with one another. They were devoted to fellowship – that is love and hospitality. In worship, they were devoted to the breaking of the bread. They remembered the death of Christ and looked forward to the hope of the coming of Christ. And they were trustful, they continued steadfastly in prayers. There is their devotion to God and their trust in God.

In verses 44–47 they continue this. “*All the believers were together and had everything in common.*” That is the word we saw back in chapter 1:15 – where the twelve were together. That is the word we saw in chapter 2:1 – the apostles were together. This is the word we have again here. They were together. They, who? All the church, the 3,120 along with those that were being added to them daily. They were all together. There is unity. They had common faith, they had common fellowship, and they even had common funds. They had all things in common, all things together. Everyone was filled with awe, verse 43, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together. “*All the*

believers were together and had everything in common, selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need” (vs. 44–45). Every day they continued. Christianity is daily. “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 . . .” (v. 46). Christianity is also individual and family. “. . . praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (v. 47). They are daily meeting, they are in daily study, they are daily talking, and so the Lord added to their number daily all who were being saved.

There is unity in this group of believers. Unity in the body is necessary. They had a common faith, all the believers were together. Second, fellowship is necessary. Third, funds are necessary. In the final analysis, money, food, clothes, shelter are necessary things that God has promised us. He promised to meet our needs, not to meet our greeds, but to meet our needs. And He will when we are unified with one another and unified in doing His work.

There is a progress also here of the Church. Every day they continued to meet together. First of all, in a public meeting. They met in the temple. They are gathering a huge number of people together in the temple area to be taught by these twelve men who have been inspired by God. God has given to these twelve men, the apostles, His word and they are now teaching it publicly. A large assembly is necessary when a large number of people need to be taught. The assembly in the temple was not merely for their fellowship and their worship, but it was for them being taught and then celebrating the faith they had.

The progress was not only public, the progress was domestic. It says “*They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.*” Until the church of Christ has both the public and the domestic progress, it will not be what the Church in the New Testament was. If we want to be the church that glorifies God, we must come together in the

large public arena to be taught, to celebrate, and to encourage one another. But then we have to take it home, to teach our family and our extended family. We must teach our wives, our children, our grandchildren, our cousins, our neighbors. The extended family concept needs to be brought back into our lives. So that we take what we hear on Sunday morning and share it with our neighbors every single day. Share it with our family, with our friends, with our companions, with our neighbors, every single day for the Lord's will to be done.

Notice the power of the Church in verse 47: They were “*... praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*” The secret of this congregation was the fact that they had great gratitude. They were praising God. He needs to be praised. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. I heard a very skilled concert pianist play one time and at the end of that concert the audience started applauding and before long everybody was standing up and applauding. People were whistling, people were shouting, and I thought to myself, “this feels good.” This is a good thing to do. I think, sometimes, I need to give God a hand. I need to shout aloud for God. I need to whistle for God, because God deserves our praise.

There was not only great gratitude, there was great favor. They enjoyed the favor of all the people. It won't last too long, but, at least for the moment, they enjoy the favor of everybody in Jerusalem. There was divine blessing – in the Lord. There was divine growth – added to their number. There was continual salvation – those who were being saved. What a chapter. What a day. What a congregation.

What is the secret to be learned from chapter 1:15 to 2:47. What is the secret for the body today? It can be seen in four ‘S’ words. First – **salvation**. We need to go here to find out that salvation comes through Jesus Christ. Not only salvation from past sins, but even suppression of sin today on a daily basis. Second – **surrender**. Surrender to Christ is the repression of self. Sin needs to be suppressed in salvation, but self needs to

be repressed by the surrender that I give to Christ. Third – **satisfaction**. Satisfaction in Christ. That is the expression of Him in my life, in an ever increasing way. Fourth – **service** to Christ. That is the impression of power that is infinite. Salvation, surrender, satisfaction, service that is what we take away from this section of Scripture. And that is what we will live today and tomorrow and for the rest of our lives.

THE FIRST PERSECUTION AND THE FIRST SIN IN THE CHURCH

Acts 3:1 - 5:43

Chapters one and two contained a study of the initial three firsts in the book of Acts. This chapter will entail a study of two more of the twelve firsts record in Acts chapters 1 – 12, **the first persecution** the Church underwent in Acts three and four and **the first public sin** the Church had to endure and overcome in chapter five. We might call the section we are entering in chapter 3 to chapter 8:4 – **the Church established**. The church having begun, now it must be tested and matured and seen to stand.

The First Persecution

The Miracle

The first persecution of the church is seen in Acts 3:1 – 4:37. The reason for the persecution is the healing of a man crippled from birth (3:1-11). Look first of all at the human need that Peter and John confronted in verses 1–5.

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer – at three in the afternoon. Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did

John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them (3:1-5).

The need this man has is extreme. He has been crippled from his birth. He is lame. He is helpless. He is not even able to get around with a cane or with crutches. He is being carried and put in different places. Also the desperate character of this man is seen in the place where he is lain in the temple, at the temple gate. He is hoping that the people who are going in to offer their sacrifice will either feel guilty enough about their sin or religious enough about their life that they will give him some money. His tragic need is expressed in the fact that he is carried there and put there, having never been able to move on his own. He is encouraged by Peter and John’s statement, “*Look at us!*” because he expects in the look to receive some money from them.

In verses 6–11 divine power is brought into play, divine power always meets the human need. This man’s need is great, “*Then Peter said, ‘silver or gold I do not have, . . .’*” – A man told me one time that’s because preachers have never been well paid. But, the point is the preacher has left all that behind because there is something much more important to him than that. “. . . but what I have I give you. *In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.*” Peter claimed authority, he claimed absence of money, but presence of power. He shared what he had, the power to give this man the ability to walk again and then he proved it in verse 7 – “*Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up . . .*” Evidently the man didn’t have enough faith to do it alone and he had never had the strength. So he took him by the right hand and helped him up. This is the first time the man has ever been up. Up until this time he was carried by his mother and then by his friends. That is the first time anyone has ever grabbed him by his hand and brought him to his feet. He didn’t know how to get up. He had never gotten up, that is why Peter had to help 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" (vs. 7-8). Having been helped up and cured, he leaped, he jumped, he walked and he praised God. Notice the response of the people to that. "*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*" (vs. 9-10). The man walked, the people were amazed, Peter and John were attested to as the ones who had the right to speak for God. As Nicodemus had said to Jesus, "*Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him*" (John 3:2). So, Peter and John had been proven to be people with whom God is and, consequently they had the right to speak and work for Him.

Peter begins to preach as will be his practice from now on. The beggar is holding on to them in verse 11, he doesn't want to let them go because he had gotten something he had never hoped to have. Money he had some hope to have. Legs that could walk and leap, a mouth that would praise God, these are the great things that Peter has given him. All of the people are amazed and they come to a place in the temple called "Solomon's Colonnade." This is a large porch or portico where thousands of people can gather. When Peter saw all this crowd, he begins to preach. His sermon has several points.

The Preaching of Peter

First, self is disclaimed. He said why does this surprise you? "*Why do you stare at us, as if by our own power or godliness we have made this man walk.*" Evidently they were doing what men do many times, praising the preacher rather than the lesson. Praising the worker rather than the work. Peter said, look, I don't have any ability, any power to do what I just did. Self is disclaimed.

Second, God is honored. Peter boldly states the source of the power for the miracle. He says:

“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 for a murderer to be released unto you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead” (vs. 13–15).

You remember in Acts chapter two we read “*but God raised him*”? This is going to get sort of redundant in the book of Acts. You handed him over, you disowned him, you killed him, that’s what you did, but God raised him from the dead. Peter said that the apostles are witnesses of this. Christ has been exalted by God in the resurrection. Christ has been rejected by men in the denial and in the crucifixion but He has been exalted by God.

Third, Peter offers an explanation.

“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 that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see” (v. 16).

The source of the blessing is the name of Christ. The channel of the blessing is faith in that name. When the texts says the “name of Christ” it is not the letters CHRIST or JESUS. That is not the idea of the name here. When you do something in someone’s name, it means that you do it by their authority and their power. The apostles had Jesus’ power of attorney. When they called a thing to be it was not their power that caused it to be, but Jesus’ power. That was his explanation. That has to be my explanation, also. That whatever I do, God is to receive the

glory. Whatever I do that has any eternal significance is done in the name of Christ. We pray in the name of Christ. We work in the name of Christ. We live in the name of Christ. We do everything in the name of Christ.

Fourth, Peter continues his exhortation. Starting in verse 17, he makes a very generous statement. He explains that what they have done was based on their ignorance, but not their innocence.

“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” (vs. 17–18).

He said you are ignorant of what you have done, but you are not innocent in doing it. Because your heart was as the heart of your fathers, intent on disowning and denying covenant relationship with God.

Fifth, there is urgent pleading. In the first part of verse 19 Peter pleads with them to “*Repent, then, and turn to God . . .*” The word “repent” comes from a word that means “to change one’s mind,” to change one’s heart. Sorrow has to precede that change, but one needs to change his mind about what he/she has done and then turn. That is a change of life. He says you need to change your mind, your attitude, your concept and you need to change your life.

Then he offered gracious promises to be received from a gracious God.

“. . . so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, so that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus” (3:19-20)

Three beautiful, gracious promises, forgiveness, refreshment and fellowship with Christ. These promised blessings followed

their repentance – change of mind, and followed their turning – change of life.

Then he speaks of some clear prophesies. Beginning in verse 21 – Speaking of Jesus – “*He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets*” The book of Amos talked about restoring the tabernacle of David that had fallen. The book of Micah speaks of restoring the former times and the former things. The book of Isaiah speaks of them coming back to a promised land where there will be new heavens and new earth. All of these restoration of Israel promises, and God’s promises to Israel, is now to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ in this period, called the period of restoration or the period of restitution. He must remain in heaven until that has occurred because as it 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. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people’” (vs. 22–23).

So there is the concept of destruction. Two promises – restoration and destruction. Restoration if you will repent and turn, destruction if you will not. Then he applies it to them personally, he says in verse 25 “*And you are heirs of the promise given to Abraham and of the covenant God had made with your fathers.*” Throughout the Bible you will find that what God does He does, not on some presumption, not by some caprice, but by covenant. By an agreement that He has shed the blood of animals to purify. Not His own blood, because you cannot shed the blood of God, but by the blood of animals to purify.

He spoke of this promise or this covenant that God gave to Abraham as applying to them. He says to Abraham, “*Through your offspring all peoples on the earth will be blessed. When*

God raised up his servant (there is that idea of God raising again), he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your own wicked ways” (vs. 25–26). He applies to them this lesson personally and tells them that the healing of this man was in order that they might see that God has sent Jesus, raised Jesus, glorified Jesus, and that all the promises made to Abraham might be fulfilled and all the judgments might be brought upon them. You would think they would respond by being gracious and happy, wouldn’t you? They do the very opposite.

The Persecution of the Apostles

In chapter 4 verse 1 and throughout the rest of the chapter Luke will discuss the first persecution of the church.

“The priests (that is the religious leaders) and the captains of the temple guard and the Sadducees (those are the political rulers of Israel) came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead” (4:1-2).

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. They did not believe that Jesus had been raised. “*They seized Peter and John and because it was evening they put them in jail until the next day*” (v. 3). Here is the persecution manifested. They exercised their power, they brought about punishment by putting them in jail. The gospel will progress in spite of the persecution. “*But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand*” (v. 4). The number of men grew to about 5,000. That would mean about 15, 16, 20 thousand people because women and children always out number men. The Church that had started out with only 120 just a few days before now numbers in the tens of thousands, because of the apostles meeting this opposition.

The next day they go before the judges to be tried.

The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Notice who is there, rulers, elders, teachers. Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, his son-in-law, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family. They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or in what name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! 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 (vs. 6–10).

The attack was made by the Sanhedrin and Peter gives a brilliant answer. He says very simply, "look, we have heard, we have seen, and therefore, we have to speak." But notice chapter 4:11-12 "*He (that is Jesus) is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.' Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*" Peter quotes Psalm 118:22, applying it to Jesus. Here is the assertion that Peter makes, Jesus is the stone upon which all that God had planned will be built and He is the Savior and the only savior that they will ever have for their sins.

Their response to Peter's assertion is, first of all, surprise. Luke 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*" (v. 13). They were surprised at the power of the speech, at the intelligence of the speech and at the courage of these men. They could not explain it by their background. The only

thing that would explain it was that they had been with Jesus. Their second response was silence. “*But since they could see the men 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 with one another*” (vs. 14–15). They were surprised, they were silent, but their third response is subterfuge. That is the attempt to get their way by lying and threatening. They made a confession that they could not deny the miracle that had been performed. They made a proposition that if they let them go on this way their whole nation would crumble. So they commanded them to preach no more in the name of Jesus. But that opposition was mastered by a simple statement by Peter. “*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 about what we have seen and heard’*” (vs. 19–20). They were commanded, do not preach. In the original language it is a double negative in Peter’s reply. He said we cannot not. It is impossible for us not to speak because we have seen and because we have heard. So they released them after threatening them they let them go having “*commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.*”

They minimized the opposition in verses 23–31 by going back to the brothers. They reported to the brothers and sisters in a gathered assembly, of all that had happened to them and they prayed that God would look upon the opposition and take care of them. They also asked God to give the apostles the power to continue to preach. The apostles and all the brethren there prayed and the text says “*And the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly*” (v. 31). That’s quite a prayer session, isn’t it? They departed with great power to preach the Word of God.

The Power of the Church (4:32–37)

The church had great power both collectively and

individually. This power came from the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the disciples.

All the believers were one in heart and mind.” (There is unity.) “No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.” With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. 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, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need (vs. 32–35).

There is unselfishness. There is the power within. The power of unity and the power of unselfishness is seen in the church. There was testimony—with great power they testified, and there was great blessing—much grace was upon them all.

Power was also manifested individually. This power is not simply a collective power. “*Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas* (we’re told about him later), which means Son of Encouragement, sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles feet” (vs. 36–37). This is given here so that we can see the contrast between that statement and the next sentence. Here is a man, who out of the motive of love, wanting to benefit his people, sold a possession and brought the price and gave it to the apostles. I’m sure everybody applauded, everybody praised Barnabas for doing this and in that background is presented the first public sin in the church.

The First Public Sin in the Church

The Sin of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11)

The account of the sin of Ananias and his wife Sapphira reveals God’s attitude toward sin and His concern for the

church. He would not allow His preacher to be deceived and the church be damaged by sin in the body..

Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, 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 apostles' feet. 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? Didn't 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 men but to God." When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him. About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 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." 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. Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events (Acts 5:1–11).

These two came and said here is the money we got from selling a piece of property. They claimed it was the total price but it was not and so they both died. The sin was not in keeping some back. The sin was in lying about the fact. What happened when the LORD smote Ananias and he died for the lie that he

told? What happened when the LORD smote Sapphira and she died for the lie that she had told? You would think that would tear the church up – that much manifestation of the power of God. The very opposite happened. The result was that, “*Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events*” (v. 11). The first result was fear, not simply of the church, but also of everybody else.

“*The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon’s Colonnade. No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people.*” (vs. 12–13). No one would dare join themselves to the apostles, they gave them a wide berth because of what had happened. “*Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number*” (v. 14). The result of this sin and discipline was fear, honor and increase, but it also resulted in more persecution.

The Second Persecution (5:17–42)

When the Jews, the High Priests and their associates and Sadducees see and hear about this, they are filled with jealousy. They arrest the apostles and put them in prison. Here is a persecution of the church that arises because of what God has done in this marvelous and miraculous way. They arrest them, and put them in the public jail, but during the night an angel of the Lord came and opened the door and the apostles left and went back to the temple to continue to preach the Word of God. “*At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people*” (v. 21).

When the court met that morning they were perplexed because there were no prisoners in the cell. They are perplexed because they have no one to try. They are informed that the apostles are in the temple courts preaching. They go and arrest them again and bring them before the Sanhedrin (v. 29). They were told, “didn’t we tell you not to speak? Why are you speaking?” Peter and all the apostles begins to answer again in

front of the high court of the Jews, the supreme court and they say, “We must speak, because we are eyewitnesses of His glory.”

The results of this was that, *“When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death”* (v. 33). There were two reasons they were furious: the apostles had blatantly disobeyed the command of the high court, and they were still preaching and teaching in the name of Christ. They refused to see the truth the miracle proved, that Jesus is the Christ. Now they are wanting to kill them, and probably would have, except for a wise counselor named Gamaliel, *“. . . a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, . . .”* the number one teacher of Israel. He first of all said, don’t do this sort of thing. Don’t you remember the other men that recently have arisen claiming to be the Christ and time showed them not to be of God. Therefore, he gave this counsel *“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”* (vs. 38–39). The Jews received that message as good advice. They flogged them again and released them. The apostles had been flogged, and their life threatened and told to speak no more in the name of Jesus. They left the Sanhedrin, backs aching, body bleeding as a result of the flogging, *“The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name”* (5:41). We have seen that several times in these first few chapters of Acts – the Name of Jesus.

So, what is the first response – a feeling. They rejoiced that they had been found worthy to suffer. Notice their continued action. *“Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, (big group, little group) they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ”* (v. 42). They just continued to do what they had been arrested and flogged for doing. You and I need that kind of faith. We need that kind of commitment. When we are told DON’T be faithful to Jesus, DON’T serve Jesus anymore, we never stop teaching about Jesus

FIRST CHURCH SQUABBLE

THE FIRST MARTYR

Acts 6:1 – 8:4

Luke in his gospel presented the life of Christ personally while he lived on earth. In the book of Acts, Luke continues to present the life of Christ, but now in his Body as it represents Him now upon the earth. In the first twelve chapters of Acts, Peter is the star character. There is a list of 12 separate beginnings, 12 firsts in these chapters of Acts. In this chapter of our book, there will be presenting two more of those beginnings.

The First Church Squabble

Dissension in the Church (6:1-7)

People have always known how to argue, that is human nature. This dissension could have caused division were it not handled properly. The problem is presented in verse 1:

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

It's not altogether a bad problem, it is a problem that is caused by growth. Success frequently causes very serious situations. This was true of the Church in the very first century. At the

very beginning, because they were growing so rapidly, it was easy to ignore and overlook some things that really needed to be handled. So this problem, a very real problem, was caused by growth.

It was also caused by concern. That concern caused them to set up a system of caring for the widows daily. The widow is she who has no natural protector, no natural provider. So, the church is caring for them and because the Church was concerned daily with these widows, and because the Church was growing so rapidly this problem has arisen. If not caused by culture distinctions, it was at least made worse by cultural differences. In a nation like Israel, because it had been scattered throughout all the world, speaks two languages, Greek and Aramaic. When these people come together in one body, they bring all their cultural differences, their language differences, so this problem is worsened by the cultural distinction. The problem was caused by growth, by concern, and by culture. Complaining is a bad method of raising objections. They could have come and raised objections about the fact that they didn't believe they were being cared for properly without complaining against their brothers.

The wisdom of the apostles is revealed by the proposal they give in verses 2-4.

So the Twelve (that becomes a title for the apostles) 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. 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 we will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word

Revealed in verse 2, is not only the supremacy of the spiritual, but also the sanctity of the secular. The secular is as holy as the most spiritual activity. But the spiritual and the life of the

spiritual leaders takes precedent over, predominance over the secular. The bottom line qualifications of anyone who will serve in any capacity in the body of Christ is given in verse three – men “*who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.*” This would be true of the deacon. This would be true of the lady who is caring for the food for those who are bereaved. This would be true of the janitor. This would be true of the church secretary. This is the bottom line qualification for any servant of God to be chosen, a proper relationship to others. Their reputation was correct, was pure and known by other people. In their relationship to God, they were full of the Spirit, which would deal with godliness. In relationship to self, they were full of wisdom which would deal with sagacity, with the ability to provide good answers for difficult problems.

The apostles were not saying that this was just physical work, that this was secondary work, but it was not their prime responsibility. They said that they would turn this responsibility over to seven men you choose that are of good reputation, that are godly and are wise, so that we can continue to dedicate ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. They didn’t say the study of the word, they said to the ministry of the word. The apostles prime responsibility was to pray and minister, to dispense, to teach, to make clear the Word of God. Now how is that received by the church?

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 (vs. 5–6).

Those involved in the dissension approved of the apostles suggestion. They chose the people they wanted and the apostles appointed those seven to the task. What was the result? Because there had been delegation of responsibility the work could be

done. “*So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith*” (v. 7). There was the extent of the spiritual work as the Word of God spread. There was acceptance of the spiritual truth as their number increased and some, many, of their opponents were converted. The squabble worked out because it was given attention, it was given consideration and they worked out a plan to fulfill what needed to be done.

The First Martyr – Stephen

(6:8 – 8:4)

When we use the word martyr we are using a word that has been transliterated, letter by letter into the English language from the Greek. The Greek word is “*martus*” and in that word martyr is simply found the idea of witness. Because so many people in the first and second century gave their lives for the witness of Jesus, the word has come to mean those who died for the witness they give, for the Word, for the faith, for the church, for God. So, here is the first one, not just persecuted, not simply beaten and told to preach no more, but this will be the first one killed. Martyred for his faith in Jesus Christ..

The Accusation

Notice the accusation, beginning in chapter 6:8. “*Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power*” We have already found out in verse 5 that he is full of faith and the Holy Spirit, now he is full of God’s grace and God’s power. “*He did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.*” So, he is no longer simply a server of tables. He is now a performer of God’s miracles. A doer of God’s work and a proclaimers of God’s Word.

Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called) – Jews

of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen, but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the spirit by which he spoke. Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, “We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God.” That was a lie. *“So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. They produced false witnesses, who testified, “This fellow never stops speaking against the holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us”* (Acts 6:9–14).

Very little of that was true. I’m sure they understood him to say that, but he didn’t say that. It was their point of view, that caused them to hear that. The source of Stephen’s work was the power of God. Because of that, opposition arose to what he said and the methods of the opponents are the same methods that have always been used. These are presently being used and will always be used against the servant of God and the service of God. They disputed, they lied, and involved themselves in violence.

The charge against Stephen was blasphemy of the law and treason against the people of God. But they were not able to really say a word against him or his morals. They looked at him, at his appearance, maybe to see his response. *“All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was the face of an angel”* (v. 15). I’ve often wondered what they thought an angel looked like. His face glowed, not with some supernatural glow, but perhaps with the glow of the faith that he had in God. The intensity that he had toward his work, and the love he had toward his people. Light shown from his face. Strength shown from his face.

Stephen's Answer (7:1–51)

Then Stephen answers their charges in chapter 7:1–53. This is the longest defense recorded in all the book of Acts. It has a singular statement to prove. **Christianity is the historical fulfillment of God's purpose from eternity in God's revelation in the Old Testament.** Stephen bases the defense of Christianity on historical development in the Old Testament. Christianity is the climax. Jesus is the apex. The church is the fulfillment of all that God has promised His people from Abraham to the day that Stephen speaks.

In four points Stephen discusses the plan of God in bringing the church into existence. He says number one that **God's dealings always showed constant progress.** God is never stationary. God is never silent. God is never still. God is never mute. God has a purpose and He is working that purpose out point by point, step by step. Stephen illustrated that by Abraham. He talked about God's work in Abraham's life, how He brought him from Ur of Chaldea to the glory of the kingdom of God. He illustrates with Moses and tells how He brought Moses from being the step-child of Pharaoh's daughter to the apple of God's eye and the deliverer of the people of God. He illustrates it by talking about David and how He took David from following the sheep to being the ruler of all of God's sheep. God has always, point by point, made progress in the fulfillment of His purpose on earth. That is Stephen's first point. Don't expect God to be stationary. Don't expect the law to be cast in concrete. Don't expect God to be bound by the law. The law is the expression of the will of God, but it is the action of God in the lives of people through that law or regulated by that law that is of importance to the people of God. That is also true today. The most important thing for us to understand is that God is at work, that His plan is proceeding as He planned.

The second statement that Stephen made is that **God never limited himself to Palestine or to the Temple.** They might have thought that God could only work in the environs of

Palestine or in the confines of the Temple, but Stephen made the point that God does not dwell in temples made by hands. Palestine is not the place of His residence. He is not only omniscient, knows everything, but He is omnipresent, is everywhere. He illustrated that by showing God's work with Abraham in Mesopotamia, by God's work with Moses in Egypt and in Midian in the wilderness. He showed that the temple was really not the center of God's will because God had built a tabernacle. He gave Moses a pattern concerning the tabernacle and the most important and holy thing on all the earth was a little ark that priests carried around from place to place with rings on the side of it where staves could go in so it could be carried. God wanted His people to be a mobile people. He wanted them to never look upon Him as dwelling in a stationary place. God is not an American God. He is not an English God. He is not an Asian God. He is not an African God. God is the God of all the nations and He is not limited in how He works and He is not limited in where He works.

The third point Stephen makes is that **God's people have always resisted Him**. They have always resisted His messengers, as in Abraham's day, as in Joseph's day, as in Moses's day, and as in David's day. The very people who ought to have received God anxiously and eagerly were always resisting Him. You have always resisted, Stephen will say later. As your fathers did, that is the way you do.

The fourth point that Stephen makes is that **God's people, the Jews of the present time, not Stephen were opposed to divine revelation**. It was illustrated by their participation in the sins of their fathers and climaxed in the sin of crucifying Jesus. Stephen's conclusion is that – **Christianity is the historical fulfillment of God's purpose**. He shows that God has a purpose that is in constant progress. He is not limited simply to Palestine. His people have always resisted Him, and you are presently opposed to divine revelation. Stephen's accusation – you have murdered and betrayed His chosen One, your Messiah, God's chosen son.

The Opposition (7:54–60)

The opposition that causes the death of Stephen was fierce. First of all there is madness. “*When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him*” (v. 45). They understood and believed it. They knew he was right and it made them mad. It made them furious. That is one of the very first responses when sin is pointed out, fury and anger. They gnashed their teeth at Stephen because of Jesus. Luke points out in verse 55, “*But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.*” Every other time I read of Jesus at the right hand of God, He is seated. I think He is standing in honor of Stephen. He stands up in honor to Stephen’s faith that is about to cost him his life. “*Look, he said, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God*” (v. 56). He has peace and power in the midst of all this persecution. Look at the fierceness of the murder that these people did. “*At this they covered their ears*” (they didn’t want to hear) “*and yelling at the top of their voices*” (they are frenzied) “*they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul*” (vs. 57–58). When they stoned people in that day, they would take them outside the city and throw them in the pit that they burn their trash in. They would pick up big stones, not little small stones to throw at him, but big stones and hurl them down upon him until they had killed him and finally buried him beneath those stones. They had the consent of their mind to kill him and the cruelty of their heart to do so.

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, but he did not pray, Lord kill them or Lord help me. He was not thinking about himself even at the moment of his death. How like Christ this one is. How like the cross these stones are.

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he fell on his knees and cried out “Lord, do not hold this sin against

them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul was there, giving approval to his death (Acts 7:59 - 8:1).

They put their clothes at the feet of a man named Saul. Saul is there approving and giving approval. They needed his approval to do this. It wasn’t just that he agreed that this was a good thing to do. Being an officer of the Sanhedrin, Saul is giving them the Jewish right to carry out their will against this man of God.

The Outcome – Disciples Dispersed – Gospel Preached (8:1–4)

The outcome is interesting. The book of Acts continually presents man’s attempt to destroy the witness of God. But, it always shows triumph. The murder of Stephen looked like the young church was defeated in its attempt to preach and teach the gospel.

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison (8:1–3).

Persecution resulted from this, but also devotion, as Godly men take their life in their hands and bury Stephen. But notice the dispersion and the success that this stoning of Stephen brought about. “. . . and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria . . . Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” (8:1–4). In the parable of the tares in Matthew 13, the people of God are called the seed of God. God has taken His seed, the people of God, and has sown them, dispersed them, throughout all the world. Wherever they go, they go preaching the Word of God.

They are scattered, surely, throughout Judea and Samaria. They are scattered, surely, throughout all the world. Wherever they go, they go preaching. The will of man serves, indeed, the will of God.

What do we learn from this? This man is presented, not only as my example, but he is presented as the example for the whole Church of Christ. And the church took his example to heart and though persecuted they continued to witness and preach for Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Six lessons to be learned from Stephen's life and Death:

- The need for fearless testimony for God in the face of dangerous foes.
- The need for a splendid character toward God and toward man. Never let anybody's attitude change your attitude. Continue to have the beautiful, spiritual, and loving relationship of Jesus even if it costs a cross or stones.
- The need for a readiness to die for the sake of truth – the will to die rather than the truth be not preached
- The need of a Christ-like spirit. "*Lord lay not this sin to their charge.*" To pray for the people that are killing me, that are persecuting me is to have a Stephen-like spirit.
- The need for a thorough knowledge of Bible truth and the power to impart it. Stephen's answer was a summary of all that God had done.
- The need for a forgiving attitude toward my enemies. Not just the attitude of not laying it to their charge, but to forgive them for what they do. If I learn that lesson then I can join Stephen as one of the long line of martyrs that make known the Word of God

THE FIRST MISSIONARY

THE FIRST WORLD CHRISTIAN

Acts 8:5 – 9:32

The Church Extended

We concluded the last chapter with a discussion of the first martyr of a long line of martyrs, Stephen. This chapter will begin with a study of the first missionary of a long line of missionaries, Philip, one of the Seven. The first martyr was one of the seven chosen to serve the widows in Jerusalem and the first missionary was one of the seven chosen to serve the widows in Jerusalem. So that work has led to even more significant and spiritual work. We will also look at the conversion of the first world Christian, Saul of Tarsus. Saul (Paul) will be the first Christian that is going to have the whole world in his heart and in his mind. It has been in the mind of God from the beginning of time and He will now put into the mind of a man named Saul of Tarsus, who will become the apostle Paul. So we have here a discussion of Philip's work as the first missionary and the work of God in converting the first world Christian, Saul.

The First Missionary

Phillip, the Evangelist

In this section which begins in chapter 8:5 and goes all the way through chapter 12 we will be discussing the Church extended. We have seen the Church started and the Church

established, now the Church will be extended throughout Judea, throughout Samaria and then beginning to be ready to go to all of the world.

The Evangelist and the Crowd.

In chapter 8 beginning with verse 5 “*Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there.*” If you look at a map it is up – north on the map. But, if you journeyed from Jerusalem to Samaria it is downhill. So, Luke is correct. He went down to a city in Samaria and there he proclaimed the Christ.

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. So there was great joy in that city (vs. 6–8).

Philip was one of the Seven, (Acts 6:1-2) a man full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. A man experienced in serving people in their daily physical needs. The place he preached was a city in Samaria, the place of the hated half-breeds. Samaria had come into existence when Assyria took that part of the land, they took all the strong men and all the young men back to Nineveh with them. They left there the women and put a mixed race of people there so that they would no longer hold strictly to the law of God or the will of God.

The subject of this preacher, Phillip, was Christ – he preached Jesus. Not simply about Jesus, but he preached Christ and he preached Him powerfully. He also preached Christ personally. The manner in which he preached was proclamation – he proclaimed. The word means to speak loudly and the tense of the verb means he was continually doing it. It was a **forceful presentation**, an **urgent presentation** and a **constant presentation**. The result of that kind of preaching was that they all paid close attention to what he said, and God proved that it

was from him by miracles and by merciful actions, healing people. That produced in the people, joy and rejoicing.

Every time the gospel is preached in this way, the devil will oppose it and try to destroy the effect of the preaching. Luke tells us in verses 9–11:

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.” They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic.

“But,” there’s that powerful word we have seen over and over again in the book of Acts.

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 (vs. 12–13a).

He was a believer. He was not doing it simply because other people were doing it. He was a believer. He believed and was baptized. “And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw” (v. 13b). He knew this was different from his magic. He knew this was different than his sorcery. He saw here the real and true power of God. Simon’s influence had been great. Everybody paid attention to him. But now Simon’s influence has been weakened and destroyed, by the preaching of Philip and by the Samaritans’ obedience to the gospel of Christ. Simon, himself, has been transformed into a believer and a follower of Jesus. Amazed by what he saw Philip do and the gospel he preached, the false

teacher is converted and becomes a child of God.

The church and the apostles in Jerusalem respond to the news of the preaching of Phillip. Verses 14-17,

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. Here is what is meant by that. Because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Peter had promised that when a person believed and was baptized he would receive from God the gift of the Spirit and that happened here. But, the apostles had the ability to lay their hands on people and they would received from the Spirit some miraculous gift. And that is what the apostles, Peter and John, had come to do. They have come to empower this church with the miraculous power of God. The tidings were received in the church in Jerusalem and accepted and honored. They offered prayers for these people of Samaria that they might continue in the grace of God. They sent the apostles so that gifts could be bestowed upon them. When the church in Jerusalem heard of the work of the evangelist in Samaria, they sent confirming power

Simon approaches the apostles with a proposition in verses 18-24. “*When Simon saw*” with his eyes, not the eyes of his heart. With the eyes of his heart he had seen Jesus and he had been baptized. Now he is looking with the wrong eyes again. “*When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money.*” He tried to buy into the business. “*And said, 'Give me also this ability to that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit'*” (vs. 18–19). He is not doing that because he wants people to

have the Spirit. He is doing that because he wants to be honored by the people again. He is looking with the wrong eyes and therefore he is feeling with the wrong heart. Peter answers him with a rebuke. A request was made but not granted. Here is the rebuke given. “*Peter answered: ‘May your money perish with you’*” Literally, “to perdition with you and your money.”

“. . . 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” (vs. 20–23).

The denunciation is that your heart is not right. You are full of bitterness. You are full of evil. Peter’s exhortation to Simon was repent, change your mind. Quit looking with your physical eyes and feeling with your physical heart. Begin to see with the eyes of your heart and feel with the sensibility of God. Repent and pray and ask God to forgive you. God is in the business of forgiving people. That is His business, if people will repent and pray. Repentance is shown because he does it. In verse 24 “*Then Simon answered, ‘Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.’*” Simon didn’t think it enough for him to repent and pray. He also wanted the prayer of the apostles. That is good. Because the effectual fervent prayer of righteous men will avail much (James 5:16). Simon knew that. So, there is acknowledgment of his sin. There is fear of the judgment the apostle has discussed and there is an honest request to be forgiven.

The apostles had taken care of Simon. They have taken care of the brethren by imparting the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit. They began to preach, “*When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages*”

(v. 25). They stayed there where Philip had been preaching, where Simon needed to be corrected and there they proclaimed. There they testified. Then they went home but, they didn't go straight home. They stopped in all the villages along the way and preached and proclaimed the Word of God. Philip had been sent by the Lord and by the Church to Samaria and Peter and John were sent by the Lord and by the Church to Samaria and as a result not just this one half-breed city, but all of this half-breed nation of Samaria has heard the powerful Word of God. Peter and John were so convinced of God's working among the Samaritans that when they returned to Jerusalem they too shared the gospel with Samaritans, in fact, in many Samaritan villages. This was a remarkable thing for these Jewish apostles to do! The apostles, Peter and John, had testified. They had proclaimed. They had preached in many Samaritan villages. The assignment given by Jesus in Acts 1:8 was being fulfilled!

The Church Extended To Ethiopia (8:26–40)

Now we have Phillip the evangelist and the individual, a man from Ethiopia (8:26–40). A eunuch from Ethiopia which would indicate that he is either a proselyte or a Gentile. He is a eunuch which would show that he has no right to the temple things and the worship of God. This is not only an individual, he is a second-rate individual. He is a high official in a foreign government, but as far as the Jews are concerned, this man would be second-rate. He is an earnest inquirer. He had been up to Jerusalem to worship (vs. 26–28). He had been there, I am sure, seeking the will and the way of God. He is on his way home. He is not reading a newspaper. He is not reflecting on the circumstances of the job he has to do when he gets back to Ethiopia. This man is reading the Word of God. He is reading the prince of the prophets, Isaiah, the favorite of all the Jews, the Messianic prophet. The one who speaks more of the Christ than anyone else. He is an earnest inquirer, but he also is a very lowly learner.

Philip comes up to the chariot. He has left the crowd of the

Samaritan city to talk to one man who is really a foreigner. He speaks to this man and asks him, “*Do you understand what you are reading?*” The passage he is reading is the passage that talks about Jesus being led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before the shearer is dumb, he opened not his mouth. It is a prophecy of the death of Christ, of the suffering of Christ. This man is given an opportunity to learn with this question, “*Do you understand what you are reading?*” Had he been a prideful man he would say, of course I do. What do you think I am, a dummy?’ But this is a lowly learner because he says, “‘*How can I*’, he said, ‘unless someone explain it to me?’” So he stopped the chariot and invited Philip into the chariot with him and he went on down the road going back home to Ethiopia. Philip opened his mouth and preached to him Jesus. All the sermons have been Jesus, I’m sure about Jesus also. But it is one thing to preach about Jesus, it is another thing to preach Jesus. Philip proclaimed unto the eunuch the Christ. He was an earnest inquirer. He went up to Jerusalem looking for God. He was a lowly learner, willing to receive teaching from this fellow who had come to run beside his chariot. Now he becomes a faithful follower.

He has a desire in verse 36, they are traveling along the way, I don’t know if it is the Mediterranean or some river, but they come to some water. The eunuch says, “*Look here is water, what hinders me from being baptized?*” (v. 36). Why shouldn’t I be baptized. That is his desire. His desire is that he become what this teacher is, a servant and a follower of Christ. In the margin of your Bible, Philip said “*If you believe with all your heart that Jesus is the Christ, you may.*” The eunuch answered, “*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*” He was determined to be baptized. They stopped the chariot, Philip baptized him, they came up out of the water, Philip went one way, he went another way. But, he went on his way rejoicing. What do I learn from this? I learn that life is in the Spirit. I learn that the Spirit is behind everything that happens. I learn to lean on the Spirit. I learn to be led by the Spirit. All of that is in

agreement with the Word of God, but if I have an impetus to go preach to somebody, I need to accept that impetus as being from God. Go with faith in God. Go to do the will of God. Go tell people the Word of God, no matter what their personal character or their personal reputation might be. Church history tells us that by the end of the first century, one of the largest churches in all of the world existed in Ethiopia. This eunuch had done a good job. That's the first missionary, Philip, in a long line of missionaries.

The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus

Acts 9:1-31

Saul, the Fanatical Persecutor

Saul's conversion is listed three times in the book of Acts. Twice after this to confirm the fact and the truth of the resurrection of Christ. Saul is persecuting the church in Jerusalem and wanting to persecute the church all over the world (vs. 1-2). With a letter from the high priest, he goes to Damascus, not to preach but to persecute the church of the Lord. He is persistent in his mistaken zeal. He is breathing out, he lives in the atmosphere of persecution. He is fierce in vindictive strength. He is breathing out murderous threats. He is aggressive in his initiative. He goes to the high priest to get letters to go persecute Christians in foreign fields. He is extreme in his lengths. He goes to the synagogues in Damascus to persecute. He is cruel in his extent. He is going to kill them whether they be men, women or children. That is the persistent, fanatical, persecuting Saul.

But on the way to Damascus Saul becomes a penitent believer (vs. 3-9). There is a great light, sudden and startling and supernatural. There is a voice, a personal voice, that says "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*" "*Who are you, Lord?*" *Saul asked.* "*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,*" *he replied* (vs. 4-5). There is revelation of who Saul's persecution is aimed at, it is Jesus whom you crucified. There is a surrender

to him, prompt and practical. Saul persecuting becomes Saul penitent.

Now a penitent Saul is led blindly to the house of Simon the tanner and there he prays for 3 days and 3 nights without eating (vs. 10–19). A disciple called Ananias is sent by God to lay his hands on him that he might receive his sight and baptize him that he might receive the Spirit. Ananias is also to inform him that he is to be the witness of God. He is called to service. He is called to salvation and he is called to suffering

In preparation for preaching the Christ whom he had been persecuting, he joins himself to the body of Christ in the city of Damascus. He has fellowship with the body of Christ and immediately begins to proclaim in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. He proclaimed directly and doctrinally the Word of God. We will find out later that he spent three years in Arabia being taught directly from God the Word that he is to preach. His preaching caused perplexity in their mind (v. 21). His preaching caused doubt and it caused joy.

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 (vs. 21–22).

They were confused and astonished. There was perplexity, but God was manifesting His power in the life of Saul of Tarsus as he preached and baffled the Jews.

Saul has been the persecutor, but now he has been converted. He had been turned toward Christ on the way to Damascus. His conversion has been completed by the statement and preaching of Ananias and by his immersion into Jesus. All of a sudden the persecutor becomes the persecuted. That is always the order of God. The enemies of God who hear the

Word of God and obey the Word of God become then the enemies of the people that once they were with. In verses 23–25 we see Paul beginning to suffer for becoming a Christian. In verse 22, he is proclaiming powerfully the Word of God, he is baffling the Jews and proving to the Jews, that Jesus was the Christ. He did that for many days.

After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall (vs. 23–25).

Opposition comes to the servant of God, comes to Saul, the one who is now proclaiming the Word of God. They plotted against his life. They watched, they had guards at all the exits of the city. So if he tried to escape they would be able to catch him. He is preserved only by the plan and the plot of his brethren, of his followers. They let him down the wall in a basket and he escapes. I think it is interesting. He had moved toward that city as one that was going to be the powerful persecutor. But he fled from that city powerfully persecuted. The persecutor had become the persecuted. Those that he had come to persecute were now preserving his life. Isn't God good? Isn't it wonderful what God does?

Saul Protected (vs. 26–31)

"When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples," He wanted to place membership with them. *"But they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple"* (v. 26). They thought he was trying to run a scam. *"But Barnabas,"* (This is the disciple the apostles called Barnabas who sold his land in Cyprus and laid it at the apostles feet), Barnabas is going to become Saul's first co-worker and best friend. Barnabas, the word means "son of exhortation," is

a powerful servant of God. He is going to introduce here an unwelcome believer and stand good for him.

But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the LORD and that the LORD had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the LORD. He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him. When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. 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 (vs. 27–31).

The disciples would naturally be suspicious at first. I'm sure that it was very painful for Saul, but natural. His reception by that church was not because of his will, but because of Barnabas' right hand. His argument, his disputation was with the Hellenists that he had once been a part of, and because they wanted to kill him the decision was, get him out of the city. What his conversion has brought about was a time of peace for the church. That peace resulted in the church throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria, the whole church enjoying a time of peace from persecution. The church, strengthened and encouraged by the Spirit, grew in number and lived in the fear of the Lord. Four great results. We need to find the present day Sauls and lead them to Christ, so that peace and prosperity and growth and blessings to the church may occur.

The First Gentile

The First Mission Church

The First Prisoner of Christ

Acts 9:32 – 12:25

In this chapter we will look at the last three “firsts” of the twelve “firsts” in these first twelve chapters of Acts. This will be the end also of what might be called the first half of the book. Peter has been the outstanding character and the Jews primarily the ones to whom the Word of God goes. The three beginnings to be examined in this chapter are: The **first outsider**, a Gentile converted. The **first missionary church**, Antioch of Syria. And the **first prisoner** for Christ, the first one that is truly arrested and is to be tried.

The Conversion of Cornelius (9:32 – 11:18)

Peter’s Movements and Miracles

The ministry of Peter, as recorded in Acts, is about to end. So we have three statements here about Peter. In chapter 9:32 Luke gives us an account of Peter’s movements as he moves about all the countryside. He visits the saints in the city of Lydda, and while there he performs miracles of healing, of restoration, healing a cripple named Aeneas. Then of resurrection, of bringing one back from the dead. He raised Dorcas from death through the power of the Holy Spirit, the benevolent lady, who was sewing garments for the poor and all

the widows in the congregations. No one had been raised from the dead in the early church so far as the records of Acts declare, but the faith of the believers was so great they expected the Lord to use Peter to resurrect Dorcas. When Peter arrived, he sent the weeping widows and the other believers out of the upstairs room, prayed on his knees for Dorcas, and commanded her to arise. So there is Peter's movements and Peter's miracles.

Peter's Ministry

Starting in Acts 10:1 and going through 11:18 you have Peter's ministry. This follows the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who will become Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. God leads to Himself the one that is going to carry His Word into the Gentile world before Peter converts the first Gentile. I don't know that this is true, but my judgment is that since Jesus had given Peter the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, it was necessary that he be not simply the first one to preach the word to the Jews, but he be the first one that preaches the word to the Gentiles. Whatever the case may be, notice God's double preparation. First of all He prepares the Gentile in verses 1-8. The place where God is going to send Peter is Caesarea. Caesarea was the political capital, where the governor lived. It was really the center of the Roman domination of Palestine. The man Peter is going to be sent to Cornelius. Cornelius was a centurion. A centurion was a captain in the Roman army and would be over 100 men. This centurion, Cornelius, was a pious man, a righteous man, a prayerful man and in spite of all that, a lost man. All the centurions mentioned in the New Testament seem to be just men. Cornelius, the centurion, received a vision from God. An angel came to him and said, "Your prayers and your alms have come up as a remembrance, as a sweet smell to God. Go get Simon and he will tell you words whereby you and your house will be saved." There was an immediate response. He sent two of his servants and one of his soldiers, who was also a devout man, to go get Peter in the house of Simon. That is God's preparation of the Gentiles.

But there must also be the preparation of the Jew. For the Jew is not ready to go and preach to the Gentiles, that hated nation. Those hated people who were their enemies. So, he must prepare, first of all the man, the Jewish man. The man he prepares is Peter. Peter has first preached to the Jews in Acts 2 and following. Now he must preach to the Gentiles. As Cornelius got a vision, so Peter gets a vision. In this vision on the roof top of Simon's house he sees all kinds of flesh, both clean and unclean, let down in a blanket in front of him. He gets a command from God, "*Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.*" Peter said, "Not me, because I have never eaten anything that was unclean." God answers, "*Do not call anything impure that God has made clean*" (v. 15). Peter learned some lessons from this vision. He learned, that all things have divine source. God has created them and they have real value. God honors them. He learned that the old distinction of his life is no longer valid because God is now cleansing some things that used to be unclean. He learned, primarily, a lesson that all believers need to learn, that it is wrong to refuse whatever God accepts.

Beginning in 10:17 you get a view of the divine providence in the life of this man, Peter. As he is being prepared by God the messengers arrive from Cornelius, and God tells him, "You go with them. You don't ask any questions about whether or not you should, I am telling you, you go with them." He goes down and meets them and welcomes them into the house. They have a request, "Come with us and speak to our master, Cornelius." Peter goes to Cornelius's house. Cornelius is not there alone, he has there all of his family, his relatives and his dear friends. There is a large gathering of the extended family of Cornelius there to hear the Word of God. We learn a lot about Peter's character in this incident. We learn of his humility, because he is going to say when they try to worship him, "Get up, I am a man." I learn about his fearlessness as he stands in spite of the fact that he knows his Jewish brothers will be deeply critical of him for proclaiming the Word of God to Gentiles. I learn of his directness when he asks, "For what

reason have you sent for me?" So, when I am given an unpleasant task, I need to do it in humility. I need to do it in fearlessness and I need to do it with directness.

There is a difficult problem that comes up in chapter 10 beginning in verses 30-33. Cornelius tells his story. He tells of his vision where his prayers and alms were a memorial to God. He tells Peter about the command that he was given to go get Peter so he could be told what to do to be saved and he obeyed it. Then I notice his attitude as he is ready to hear the gospel of Christ and Peter begins to preach the Gospel to this pious, dedicated, prayerful, lost Gentile. First Peter says, "I understand the impartial character of God. It doesn't matter what nationality a person is, if they believe in God, He will accept them." Then he recounts the immeasurable love of God. That God has sent his Son as a manifestation of his love toward all mankind. Then he reveals In verses 42-43 the incomparable gospel and it is all Christ.

"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. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Peter says four important things about Jesus in these two verses:

- He is the master of disciples.
- He is the judge of the living and the dead.
- He is the fulfillment of all prophecy.
- He is the Savior of all believers.

He is the master of disciples, the judge of the living and dead, the fulfillment of all prophecy and the Savior of all that believe.

There is definite proof, given by God, that Peter is right. Because, while Peter is preaching, the Holy Spirit fell on these Gentiles. They began to speak in tongues. They began to witness to the truth of God. The Holy Spirit is seen, not just by

Peter, but by the Jews who had come with Peter to Caesarea. They see that God is accepting these Gentiles fully and uncompromisingly. He bestows power upon them. It is immediate power and it is definite power. It is power that warrants discipleship. Peter turns to his Jewish brethren and says, “Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” They are baptized and it creates fellowship and that fellowship is granted by God. The outsider, the Gentile has been led to Jesus. The “keys” given to Peter and the rest of the apostles have been exercised again.

When Peter goes back to Jerusalem he is immediately in trouble with his brethren. They object to the fact that he has granted equality to the Gentiles. They are right in their thinking, that is exactly what he has done. Perhaps Peter didn’t like it at first any better than they did, but God had sent him to do it. He explains it to the brothers. He simply states it. He does not argue for his being right. He simply states what had happened, how God had appeared to him. How God had told him to do it. How he had done it and the Gentiles had obeyed. They had accepted it. After Peter had recounted the event, they rejoiced that God had granted the Gentiles also repentance unto life. Notice that word “granted” in verse 18 of chapter 11. *“When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, ‘So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.”* God has granted, God has given the Gentiles repentance unto life. It was the gift of God’s grace that these Gentiles repent and be included in the kingdom, the church.

The First Missionary Church (11:19–30)

Now the church is ready to take the gospel to the Gentiles, the whole Gentile world. The first missionary church is in Antioch of Syria. This will become the very center of the movement to convert the entire Gentile world. That church is

born through the efforts of scattered disciples. Certain of those that were scattered went up to Antioch. They began to proclaim the Word of God to the Grecian Jews. But then Gentiles started wanting to obey and so they also converted Gentiles to Christ, a great number, it says in verse 21. "*The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.*" A great number, now we human beings may exaggerate, but the Holy Spirit does not exaggerate. It was a great number, thousands of them probably, turned to the Lord. They believed and turned to the Lord. I learn a very, very important thing here – the glory of the ordinary. A few unknown believers, ordinary Christians, started the work which was going to become the center of the Gentile Christian world. You don't have to be anything special to do the Lord's work. God is the one who is always behind His work. That is the birth of this church in Antioch. The beginning of this church resulted from Stephen's martyrdom in Acts 8:1-4, and as soon as it is born it needs nourishment.

The Church Is Nourished and Grows

Not only had they been led to Christ, they will now live for Christ. Notice the nourishment of the church in Acts 11:22-24.

News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 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. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

In Jerusalem the church hears of this and sympathy is created. They send Barnabas, the disciple who had sold the field and had hazarded his reputation for the unwanted disciple, Saul. Three things were said about Barnabas: **he was a good man**, he was **full of the Holy Spirit**, and he was full of **faith**. Luke

wrote this description of Barnabas *after* the confrontation between Paul and Barnabas, recorded in 15:39. Since Luke was Paul's traveling companion, this statement about Barnabas must have been Paul's assessment as well. They send Barnabas up to Antioch and he strengthens them, he encourages them. Luke says that a great number of people were brought to the Lord. He goes to Tarsus and gets Saul to come and work with him. "*So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch*" (v. 26). The church was nourished and the church grew. It advanced in fellowship and teaching. God acknowledged that. God allowed them to have a new name, Christian. I don't know if the people in Antioch called them this or whether it came directly from God. But a new name was given to the disciples. The disciples were first, there is also a first – a new name. The disciples began to be called Christians at Antioch. Christians mean those that look like Christ, that follow Christ, those that belong to Christ. Notice the vitality of the church as they began to practice love in Christ. Luke states in verses 27-30:

During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gifts to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

Barnabas and Saul carry this gift to Jerusalem. This prophet instructs them as to what is about to happen. Stirs their interest and they send help to Jerusalem. The church in Antioch was born in adversity. It was buried in its elements. Evangelistic in

its power. Earnest in its work. Mighty in its influence. Liberal in its giving and missionary in its spirit.

The First Prisoner for Christ (12:1–25)

Now the last first, the last beginning – the first prisoner for Christ. Here we have the miraculous delivery of Peter from prison. First of all there is peril. This is the last we will hear of Peter in the book of Acts in great detail, as we switch the emphasis from Peter to Paul and from the Jew to the Gentile. Luke contrasted the love of the church at Antioch for the saints at Jerusalem with the cold-hearted enmity of Herod and the Jews for the church in 12:1-5:

It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. This was the first apostle put to death. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. 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.

So Peter was kept in prison, here was the peril. The church was threatened by the murder of James. The church was threatened by the imprisonment of Peter. Herod was malignant against those that belonged to Christ. Herod was servile to the Jews in trying to please them. Herod was a hypocrite in his pious regard for the Passover while plotting against the saints. What is the church doing during that time? “. . .but the church was earnestly praying to God for him” (v. 5). The contrast is obvious: Peter was bound, but prayer was loosed! In verse 12 they are continually praying to God for him. They were united in their prayer, unceasing in their prayer, earnest in their prayer

and definite in their prayer. I don't know if they were praying for him to delivered or not because they are surprised when he is at the door. Maybe they were praying that he remain Peter, the rock, firm and steadfast.

But God brings peace beginning in verse 6 – “*The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance.*” Peter slept three times, this is the only good time, in Luke chapter nine he slept on the mountain of transfiguration, the sleep of unripe experience. In Mark chapter 14 he slept in the Garden of Gethsemane, the sleep of an unfaithful one who would soon lie about even knowing Jesus. But here he sleeps the sleep of unquestioning faith and trust. In the presence of danger, he is perfectly calm. In the eyes of God, he has a pardoned heart. In the duty that he has done, he has a pure conscience.

Notice the power of God coming upon that prison cell – “*suddenly*” (v. 7). When God acts sometimes it takes years and even decades. This is suddenly. “*Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell.*” This had happened earlier to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus. Now it happens to Peter in a prison.

He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter’ wrists. Then the angel said to him, “Put on your clothes and sandals.” And Peter did so. “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,” the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him (Acts 12:7–10).

Notice the power of God in this story, in this record of what happened. There was extreme circumstances here. All the circumstances of life seemed to be against Peter. He was in prison. He was chained between two guards. There were four guards at the gate. He was waiting just for the Feast of Unleavened Bread to be done so that he could come before Herod and be tried and put to death. In the midst of all that extremity, notice the ease with which God brought him out of Prison. Nothing is hard for God. As we have read so far the 12 chapters of the book of Acts, we've noticed that nothing is hard for God, that nothing can stand against God. Not the evil will of man, not the powerful will of Satan, not disease, not disorder, not death, not anything. Nothing, absolutely nothing is hard for God. This angel is instantly there. The light instantly shines. The angel overcame the walls of the prison. He overcame the chains that had held Peter to the guards that were sleeping with him. He overcame the guards that were standing at the door to hinder Peter from getting out or someone coming to release Peter. He withstood all these men and he overcame the gates. Peter and the angel go to locked gates and the gates of that prison open as if they were automatic doors, before the power of God and the power of this angel – all was easy. The extent of God's power in this case was complete, utter and absolutely complete.

The perception of Peter was instant. The perception of the church was gradual. They walked the length of the street and “suddenly” the angel left him.

Then Peter came to himself and 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.” When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark. Where many people had gathered and were praying (12:11–12).

Peter instantly perceives when the angel has left him “I’m not having a vision. I’m not dreaming. This is literally happening. I am being delivered by the great power of God. He instantly understood. Now the church’s perception or understanding of that will be gradual. *“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 she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, ‘Peter is at the door”* (vs. 13–14). She left him outside, Now they should have said, “Open the door, let him in, that is what we have been praying for.” That’s not what they said. *“You’re out of your mind, they told her.”* It’s impossible, in their mind, for Peter to be at the door. *“When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, ‘It must be his angel.’”* They think maybe Peter has died and his angel, his spirit has come back to talk. *“But Peter kept on knocking.”* They won’t let him in. He is going to get in though. *“But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet.”* They are hollering, they are confused, they are anxious. He described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. He says to this gathered group of Christians,

“Tell James and the brothers about this,” he said, and then he left for another place. In the morning, there was a great commotion among the soldiers. “What could have happened to Peter?” they asked. 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 (12:17–19).

He was protected from the search and he was protected from Herod’s foul plot.

In the providence of God, Herod honors himself and receives honor at a banquet because of what he had done in relieving Tyre and Sidon from difficulty. And because of that pride, God smote him with worms and he died. *“But the word*

of God continued to increase and spread" (v. 24). Every attempt Satan makes to stop the march of the Gospel only cause it to spread more and more. That really brings to an end the story of Peter. In spite of all the opposition, all the persecution, all the threats of death, it says, the Word of God spread and continued to increase. Barnabas and Saul finish their work and go back to Antioch with John Mark. They will be sent by this church to go and preach to the Gentiles.

From this closing chapter and study of the beginnings of the church, we learn four lessons.

- We learn a lesson about the power of Satan – it is a real power. It is not unlimited and not to be overrated. The power of God overcomes that.
- We learn a lesson of the power of the believer. If we believe and trust, we have power that is deep, power that is perfect, power that is a practical reality for the day.
- We learn the power of the body. The corporate body of Christ is an essential power, earnest power. It is a prevailing power through the prayers that she offers.
- But primarily, in these 12 chapters, we learn about the power of God, our inner line of defense. No matter what happens – "but God." He raised Jesus from the dead and He will empower us even in the threat of death, in the moment of death, and beyond death. Let's have hope, comfort and confidence in belief of this.

MISSIONS BEGUN THE CHURCH ENLARGED

Acts 13:1 – 14:28

In our survey of the book of Acts we have looked at the beginning and extension of the church in the first twelve chapters. Now in the last half of the book we will look at the enlargement of the church of Christ. Coming to this point in Acts, we enter the second and last division. To begin with the church was centered in Jerusalem and made up for the most part of Jews and Peter was the central figure. We will find now that Gentiles take center stage and Paul will be the leading actor. By this time the organization of the church is taking shape. There are elders, deacons taking leadership in the church and prophets supplying the biblical instruction needed for growth and maturity. We turn here from the establishment and the extension of the Church to the enlargement of the Church. As it is extended to the ends of the earth.

The Start Into The Gentile World (ch 13)

In Acts 1:8, Jesus had said to the apostles, his emissaries, “*You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*” Acts chapters 1 through 7 has shown the gospel permeating and the witness of the apostles having influence in Jerusalem. Acts chapters 8 through 12 have discussed the extension of that witness into Judea and Samaria. Beginning in chapter 13 we will see that witness extended to the ends of the earth. There is no more thrilling history in all the world than the history of the expansion of the

Church. Little by little Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and now the ends of the earth hears the gospel story.

We saw in chapters 1 through 12, twelve separate beginnings as certain things were begun. Here we will change from the concept of beginnings to the idea of missions, as the mission of Jesus is carried to the “fields that are white unto harvest” of the entire world.

Missions Begun (Acts 13:1–52)

Peter will no longer be the central figure. Paul will be our key character from chapters 13 through 28. In chapter 11:25-26 Barnabas who had come up to the city of Antioch to encourage them to continue in the grace of God, went over to Tarsus to get Saul to help because the work had become to big for him. For the space of a year they preached and taught there in that city. They were called down to Jerusalem by the Holy Spirit and by God to carry the relief money for the poor among the people in Judea. Now they have returned back to Antioch. “*They returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark*” (12:25). I don’t know how long they are back in Antioch of Syria working, but now the Holy Spirit intervenes and sends them out on their mission to take the gospel to all the world.

The Call of the Missionary

First of all there is the call of the missionary and his coworkers who will start the work of preaching to the ends of the earth.

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. 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.” So after they had fasted

and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off (Acts 13:1–3).

There was a variety of gifts in this congregation in Antioch. There were prophets and there were teachers. That was their position, their capacity, and as he names these men, it is interesting to me that one of them was from Africa, Simon called Niger. One of them was from an island in the Mediterranean and one of them from a royal background, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch. The gospel has been powerful throughout the world already and in the household of the king of Israel.

Their daily activities involved worship and fasting (v. 2). “*While they were worshiping and fasting.*” They were serving God to the extent that they were denying themselves or going beyond the need of daily food. In the midst of these daily activities a divine commission is issued. The Holy Spirit said, “*Set apart for me.*” Key prepositional phrase, not for them, not even for the work, but for me. “*Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.*” When Saul was converted, he was told that he would be the apostle to the Gentile world. The time has come for that prophecy to be fulfilled. “*So after they. . .*” that’s the whole group of apostles and teachers “. . . *had fasted and prayed they placed (or laid their hands) hands on them and sent them off.*” They fasted, they prayed, they laid hands on them, they commissioned them. They sent them to do the work. That is the missionary call.

The missionary work begins and continues. It is time for the work to begin. “*The two of them. . . ,*” we will find out later that John Mark was with them, making three. The two is Barnabas and Saul. Barnabas is named first, in the group of apostles and teachers, and Saul is named last. He is the newest of the workers on the missionary team. He is about to become the chief worker in all the kingdom of God. “*The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia.*” That is the port of Antioch. That is the first station on their

journey. “*And they sailed from there to Cyprus.*” Cyprus is an island, not far off the coast in the Mediterranean Sea. “*When they arrived at Salamis,*” that is the first city they came to, “*...they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues.*” The reason for that is not respect of persons, but because they had a ready audience there. “*John was with them as their helper.*” He is the aide, he is the assistant, he is not one preaching. There is no trouble there, but there will be trouble as they travel farther, because they are preaching. In this whole section from chapter 13 through chapter 28 there will be a recurring cycle, preaching, opposition, persecution.

In the midst of all the preaching, opposition and persecution there is going to be a keynote and that keynote is victory. In verse 6, “*They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos.*” That is the capital city of this island.

There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith (13:6–8).

Here is the preaching of the gospel and opposition from Bar-Jesus. Saul said he was a child of the devil. Saul said he was full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Saul asked him how long he was going to keep perverting the word of the Lord. Then he brought judgement on him. He said, “You will be blind for a season and you will be lead about,” and immediately he was blind and they began to lead him around. “*When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord*” (v. 12). You might have expected it to say, that he was amazed at the miracle that had been

performed. The miracle got his attention, but the thing that amazed him was the thing that Saul and Barnabas said, the teaching about the Lord. He is converted.

They leave there with the proconsul of all the island, the Roman official converted to Christ and the Jewish opposer blinded. Now they go to the mainland of Asia Minor. “*From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem*” (v. 13). That is disappointment because John Mark, a co-worker goes home. I don’t know why he went home, maybe because it is no longer Barnabas and Saul, it is now Paul and Barnabas. He was a nephew of Barnabas. Maybe he was more interested in serving his uncle than he was in serving the Lord. I don’t know why he left, but I know it was desertion because Paul says in chapter 15 as they get ready to start a second journey that he would not take John Mark with them because “. . . *he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. . .*” (15:38). He didn’t leave for legitimate reasons, he deserted them, he turned back at Perga.

Now they travel to one of the biggest cities in the world at that time. “*From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch.*” They had been commissioned by the Lord in Syrian Antioch, now they come to Pisidia Antioch. One of the top ten cities of the world.

From Perga they went down to Pisidia Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak” (vs 14:15).

The longest recorded sermon in the book of Acts is given here in Antioch of Pisidia, It follows exactly the same form, the same basic outline as every sermon preached in Acts. Stephen’s defense is longer than this, but this is a sermon. Here is the

greatest trade center in all of Asia Minor, one of the top 5 trade centers of the world. Paul does not commend them for the greatness of their city. He preaches about salvation. He starts where nearly every sermon in the book of Acts starts – with a review of Jewish history, from Abraham to David. He is speaking to the covenant people about the fact that God is still keeping covenant, that He is now going to fulfill the covenant that He gave to Abraham.

He presents in verses 23–25 Jesus as the fulfillment of all that God had promised. He is David's seed, He is the promised child of Abraham who is to bless all the nations of the earth. Then in 38-41 He makes an offer to them. That offer is salvation and there is a warning that if they refuse there will be judgement. There are four basic points in every sermon in Acts, review, presentation, declaration and offer. Many did respond. Luke tells us in verses 42–43,

As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. When the congregation was dismissed, many (notice that) of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism (proselytes, Gentile proselytes) followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

There was beautiful acceptance, hearty acceptance of the gospel by many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism. “*On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord*” (v. 44). How is that going to make the Jews feel?

In verses 45 through 47 the record says that intense opposition arose. Again the pattern of preaching, victory, and opposition. The Jews are filled with jealousy and they talk abusively against Paul and Barnabas. Paul and Barnabas just continue to answer them boldly. They said, “*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” (v. 46). This fulfilled a passage that Isaiah had recorded in Isaiah 49:6.

“I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”

The Jews responded with opposition and persecution, but the Gentiles respond in a positive way. Luke tells us in verse 48, “*When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed to eternal life believed*” (v. 48). Notice they were glad, they honored the Word, they accepted the will of God in their life and they believed on God. The preaching of the gospel results in conversion and more preaching.”*The word of the Lord spread through the whole region*”(v. 49). There was victory but after preaching and victory comes opposition.

But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution 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 (vs. 50–51).

Opposition and persecution has followed them every where they have gone. They expelled them, they drove them out and they go to the city of Iconium. But with that opposition and persecution there comes a word of victory. “*And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit*” (v. 52). Opposition is not going to be able to overcome the mission work of God. There was a great opportunity in Antioch of Pisidia and Paul and Barnabas met the opportunity, so there were great results.

Mission Work Continued (Acts 14)

They leave Antioch and begin their journey eastward through the province of Asia Minor and they come to Iconium. Here is the continuation of this mission work. We have seen it begun, we have seen it opposed, we have seen the missionaries persecuted and we have seen them victorious. Now they are going to go through peril, toil and pain but again there will be victory. Luke gives the account in Acts chapter 14: “*At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue*” (v. 1). They gave the Jews the first opportunity to accept, wherever they went. Until the Jews opposed them to the point where they left the synagogue. “*There (in the synagogue) they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.*” Effective preaching always produces conversions. They spoke the message in an effective manner. They spoke boldly and courageously, and a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. But with successful preaching and teaching always comes opposition. “*But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers*” (v. 2). Luke does not say they did not have enough evidence to believe. They saw the evidence, but they steadfastly and on purpose, refused to believe. They stir up the Gentiles and poison their minds against the brothers. The way to overcome opposition is to continue preaching. “*Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, . . .*” because of the opposition, “*. . . speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs*” (v. 3). That divides the multitude, some want to accept the message, and accept the messengers and become Christians and, there are some that do not. The opposition arises so greatly that they are going to stone Paul and Barnabas. They find out about that and they flee to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe. Lystra will be the eighth station on this missionary journey. “*Where they continued to preach the good news*” (v. 7).

In Lystra there was a man crippled in his feet, lame from birth and had never walked. Paul says to him “*Stand up on your*

feet" and the man jumped up and began to walk. He didn't just stand, he jumped up and began to walk. When the crowd saw this they are amazed and they begin to cry out in their language "*The gods have come down to us in human form*" (v. 11). They thought Barnabas to be Zeus, and because Paul was the chief speaker they concluded him to be Hermes (Mercury), who spoke of the greatness of Zeus. When Paul and Barnabas saw that they were going to worship them, they said : "*Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you*" (v. 15). Paul and Barnabas begin to speak of God. They speak of Him in verse 15 as the God of nature, who made heaven and earth and everything in it.

They speak of God in verse 16 as being the God of history. They said He has not left Himself without testimony. In the past He has let the nations go their own way. Then they speak of Him as the God of providence in verse 17: "*He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven.*" Later on in the city of Derbe – they will speak of Him as the God of grace, the God of salvation. Our God is the God of nature, history, providence, grace and salvation. This is the message that is continually proclaimed in the book of Acts. The result of that is that the people of Lystra got so upset that they took Paul and Barnabas outside the city. Threw Paul down and stoned him, I believe, to death. When they left, the Lord raised him and he went back into the city, spoke to the brethren and went on into the city of Derbe, where he preached the Word of God.

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. They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch (vs. 20–21).

Having planted the church in Derbe, it is now time to go back through all of these cities where they planted the church,

strengthening and encouraging the disciples. He went right back where he had been stoned, back to where he had been persecuted. They returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples. They are discipling the believers, and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. So the first thing they did was to go back to disciple the disciples. But, they also organized the churches. It says in verse 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.*” This is an important lesson. The new disciples must be led to further faith in God and encouraged to remain true to the faith they have and they must have shepherds to help them.

Mission Report to Sending Church

“*From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch (watch this phrase) where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed*” (v. 26). So the brethren at Antioch had not committed them to the work. They had committed them to God’s grace, to God’s help, for the work that they had now accomplished. Upon arriving back in Antioch they give the first missionary report. “*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*” (v. 27). When the apostles returned to Antioch (retracing their steps through the provinces of Pisidia and Pamphylia and preaching in Perga, they gave to Antioch, the sending church, a full report of all that God had done. The statement, “how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles,” is most important: (a) It shows the gospel had gone to Gentiles. (b) It was a “by-faith” message and not by works of the Law. (c) God did it, for He opened the door. So the brethren at Antioch had not committed them to the work, they had committed them to God’s grace, to God’s help, for the work that they had now accomplished. We end with victory. “*And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.*” God gave

them a good furlough, a good time together with the disciples at Antioch.

Paul and Barnabas praises God for what He had accomplished through them. They had been committed by God, to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. They report what God has done. They report how God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. They took no credit for any of the work that was being done. Missions has begun, the assignment to go “into all the world” has begun.

There are several thing we learn from this about the demands of mission work.

- It takes the very best talent to do the very best job. They didn’t take young men. They took men of experience, men most useful at home to send them to preach in far flung places.
- There was the divine call. That is necessary, too. The men going on the mission must be convinced that this is what God has willed for them, what God has called them to do, after they had been prepared.
- We see full consecration. Unless a man or men have been separated by God to a work, they will not get much of it done.
- There was Christian sympathy. They received support from the home church. I don’t mean financial support, maybe they did, but I don’t mean financial support. I mean the spiritual support of prayer and fasting.
- We learn a lesson about true living as Paul and Barnabas will be called to practice faith and faithfulness, encourage in spite of all opposition.
- Divine power as the Holy Spirit motivates them and as the Holy Spirit empowers them to do their work. That is the demands of mission work.

We also learn some things about the difficulties of mission work.

- There is the difficulty that home ties make. It is hard to break those home ties.

- There is journeying perils on the sea and on the land.
- Satanic influence seen, primarily in this case, in Elymas, the sorcerer and the Jews that are constantly stirring up opposition.
- There is human opposition from the Jews, and that must be overcome.
- The varying influence in each one of these cities. No two cities are alike.
- There is the problem of fickle friends as well as fearful foes. That is the difficulties of mission work.

But not only do we learn of the dangers and difficulties, we also learn about the joy, fulfillment and delight of mission work.

- The divine leading of God. The sense that God is leading me to do this.
- Grand opportunities as God opens great doors of opportunity among the Gentiles.
- Real interest with people, as they preach and people gladly receive the Word and gladly obey the Word.
- Necessary power will be provided. One of the great delights in working for God, particularly in mission work, is the doing of what men think of as impossible. No better feeling than being the other side of what was impossible, knowing that it was God's power that brought you there.
- Divine blessing – God goes with those that go. Jesus said, "Go into all the world and I will go with you." There is the presence of God, the blessing of God and the power of God.
- Full compensation. They are compensated by their faith that God is working with them. They are compensated by the obedience to the gospel. They are compensated by the reception they receive from the church when they get back home.

THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM

Acts 15:1-35; Galatians 2

In the last chapter we talked about the fact that missions was beginning and that, finally, the gospel would be spread to the ends of the earth. In Acts chapters 13 and 14, Paul and Barnabas went to Cyprus and to most of Asia Minor, starting at Antioch of Pisidia and going over to Derbe and coming back. They had preached in the synagogues because there was a ready audience and the gospel had to first go to the Jews. “. . . and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). But, primarily, they had spoken to Gentiles and these Gentiles had been won to Christ, had believed and been baptized without being circumcised. The Jews had very little problem, in the beginning, about the Gentiles being taught because it was just a few and occasionally. But now the great push seems to be in the Gentile world so a difficulty arises. There is a conference by the apostles and the elders and the whole church in Jerusalem about the difficulty that Paul and Barnabas’s work has brought to them.

Missions Challenged and Interrupted

The Battle for Gentile Christian Liberty

The difficulty is stated in chapter 15:1: “*Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: ‘Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved’.*” We will find out later that these were believing Pharisees, Christians but who still belong to the

Pharisee party, the strict legalistic sect of the Jews. So the difficulty was a simple one, on what grounds are the Gentiles to be saved. The discussion is no longer can the Gentiles be saved, but on what grounds can they be saved. Can they be saved on the grounds of the pure grace of God or do circumcision and the rituals of the law need to be observed by them as well. They are accusing the Gentiles of being unacceptable without becoming Jews.

The lawyers for the accused are Paul and Barnabas. They will argue, strongly, in court that the Gentile can be saved without any recourse for the law. The prosecuting attorneys are going to be these believing Pharisees who say that grace is good as far as it goes, but you have to add circumcision and the law to it. There is the difficulty to be addressed.

The dispute was disturbing the church in Antioch. “*This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them*” (v. 2). It was a sharp dispute and debate between Paul, Barnabas and the pharisaical Christians who had come up from Jerusalem. There is sharp contention.

So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them (vs. 2–4).

This begins the reception that Paul and Barnabas will receive by the church in Jerusalem. They are welcomed there in Jerusalem and they are welcomed by the churches on the way. On the way they rehearse what God has done among the Gentiles and all the brothers are glad. In Jerusalem they rehearse what God has

done among the Gentiles and most of the brethren are glad.

The discussion about the difficulty – on what basis will the Gentiles be saved begins. The dispute: Paul and Barnabas say, that the Gentiles have been saved by the pure grace of God without any recourse to the law. The Judaizers say that Gentile Christians must keep the traditions of the law in order to be saved. So, here is the contention of the believers who belong to the party of the Pharisees, they stood up and said that the Gentiles must be circumcised and they must be required to obey the law of Moses. Their simple contention is that circumcision and law keeping are essential for salvation. The grace of God is not sufficient. It is not adequate, it is good, it is necessary, but our works, our obedience to law, the ritual of circumcision must also be kept. All that the law had taught was also required.

It is easy to see how that would be a belief, because for over 1,500 years they had been keeping this law. It is the law of God. It is the will of God for them throughout all of Israel's history that they place themselves under the authority of the law. That they be subject to the Law. No Jew can inherit the land, and no Jew can enter the place of worship without being circumcised. There is no such thing as the Jew being the child of Abraham, under the law, without being circumcised. Since Paul is teaching the Gentiles that they can become children of Abraham, to these Judaising Pharisees that is equivalent to saying they must be circumcised. In their mind, to become a child of Abraham, requires circumcision. That is true, for the physical nation of Israel. Paul as he later writes to some of these churches will say, you have been circumcised, “*. . . not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead*” (Colossians 2:11–12). We are no longer circumcised in the foreskin of our flesh, we are circumcised in our hearts, in our minds, in our eyes, in our ears and in our hands. We are the total circumcised people of God, because we have been circumcised by the Spirit inwardly in our

spirit. That is what Paul and Barnabas were teaching, but it was easy to see how these believing Pharisees, could misunderstand.

The People and the Problem (15:5–21)

Now comes the decision that must be made and it must be based on evidence. It is really a trial that is going on here. The teachings of Paul and Barnabas are being tried and the salvation of the Gentiles is being tried. First we have Peter's address, "*The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion . . .*" I'd like to have been there to hear that.

... Peter got up and addressed them: "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. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith." Notice he even knew where the circumcision took place. "*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?*" (15:7–10).

He said for 1,500 years we and our fathers have proven that the Law is a burden that humanity cannot bear. No, he said, don't do that. "*No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are*" (v. 11). Notice the order in which Peter put that? We Jews are saved by the grace of God just as they the Gentiles are saved by the grace of God. Had he said we believe that they are saved just as we are saved, then the believing Pharisees would have gone on arguing, yes and we are saved because we are circumcised. But, he didn't say that. He said, we circumcised have been saved by the grace of God in the same way that these uncircumcised Gentiles were saved. Peter says that circumcision is nothing and

uncircumcision is nothing. The only thing that is anything is the new creation. So Peter rehearses the initial work among the Gentiles and draws the conclusion that the only way for Jew or Gentile to be saved is by the true, the pure, and the absolute grace of God.

Then in verse 12 Barnabas and Paul give their testimony and Luke does say this time, not Paul and Barnabas, but Barnabas and Paul because they are back in Barnabas' home congregation, back in Jerusalem. "*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*" (v. 12). They don't testify about the salvation of the Gentiles, Peter has already done that. They don't testify about the grace of God, Peter has already done that. They testify about the work of God among the Gentiles. God has done among the Gentiles, the same great things that He has done among the Jews. Paul and Barnabas were not alone when they preached in Antioch and in Iconium and in Lystra and in Derbe. God had been there working with them and through them. They rehearsed what God had done in approving their work, and is still doing by those on whom Paul had laid his hands on and conferred the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit. Paul had laid his hand on some of these Gentile brothers and they were still doing the great signs and wonders of God. There is the testimony of the apostle Peter and the experience of Paul and Barnabas. Now when you have apostolic testimony, and you have apostolic experience, elders can make decisions. That is what James does. James is one of the elders, not James the apostle because he has already been beheaded. James, the brother of the Lord, is one of the elders of this congregation in Jerusalem and when the apostolic testimony was given and the apostolic experience is seen, then human decision can be made and can be made correctly. There is no evidence that James is inspired here. He is looking at the inspired testimony of Peter. He is looking at the miraculous experience of Paul and Barnabas and so he draws his conclusion.

When Barnabas and Paul had finished their discussion James addresses the gathering, “*When they finished, James spoke up: Brothers,*” He starts the same way Peter did. “*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*” (vs. 13–14). He is saying, “Look, Paul and Barnabas had not done anything that Peter had not already done. He has already been to the Gentile world and the Gentile was brought into the kingdom of God without circumcision, without the law, when Peter preached in the house of Cornelius.” James now brings scripture into his decision. “*The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written.*” Now he quotes Amos 9:11–12 – “*After this*” – after I have brought my judgement upon Israel and put them away, “*After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent.*” God says through the prophet, I will rebuild the house of David and put the true David there. “*Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it.*” Why? “*That the rest of mankind may seek the Lord.*” There’s the Jews. “*And all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things that have been known for ages*” (vs. 16–18). He said, “Look, Amos has already said that what Peter and Paul have done is the will of God. Not only from the remnant, of the Jews that are left are people who have come to God, but Gentiles are to come and know his name.” Where is this to occur? In the house of David, in the fallen tabernacle of the nation of Israel, the Gentiles are to find their place. Paul will call this the grafting of wild olive branches into a good olive tree in Romans 11:17–18. James appeals to Peter’s argument, and he appeals to Scripture. He states the agreement between both of them.

It is important to see that the decision is reached by all. “*Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church.*” Learn here the principal of consensus. If just the apostles and elders had made this decision, there would still be division in the church. But once the evidence has been given, once the elders have reached a conclusion, the whole church is brought into

this discussion so that a consensus can be reached, an agreement made and unity achieved and united work done. “*Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas, called Barsabbas, and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers*” (v. 22). From the very midst of this leadership group, this church, men will be chosen to go and deliver the decision made here by the apostles, the elders and the whole church.

There is another very important consideration to look at when you are trying to solve disputes. Whenever you have human beings you are going to have disputes. Even in the first century church dispute is a constant ingredient. How do you solve disputes? First of all you look at the evidence. Secondly, the leaders make a decision. Third, the whole church is brought in to approve of that decision and fourth, leaders among the brothers are chosen to carry out and deliver the decision that has been made. “*With them they sent the following letter:*” Here is the letter, from the Holy Spirit, through the apostles, through the elders with the agreement of the whole church. Here is the letter. “*The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings.*” That is the way James speaks in the book of James, also. “*Greetings, We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. So we all agreed (the apostles and the elders and your brothers) to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends (notice the respect they have for Barnabas and Paul) Barnabas and Paul – men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (vs. 27–29). Paul was even stoned and left for dead. God can raise the dead, can’t He?

Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas To confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements.” You are

to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things (vs. 27–29).

Why is he telling them that? Are those things wrong in and of themselves? No. Look at verses 20–21. James says, “*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. (Why?) For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.*” James is asking the Gentiles to compromise what they can do. Fornication is wrong in and of itself and must be avoided because of that, but Paul will say in I Corinthians that there is nothing wrong with things strangled, there is nothing wrong with things offered to idols, there is nothing wrong with the blood. As a matter of fact Peter has already been told that. God has cleaned all that man would call unclean in the area of food. But, these Gentiles are being asked to compromise what they have the right to do because of Jewish associates. If the Jews are to accept the Gentiles without circumcision and without any obedience to their law, then the Gentiles need to be concerned about how their activity affects the Jewish brethren.

“*The men were sent off (that is Paul and Barnabas and Barsabbas and Silas) and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message*” (vs. 30–31). The idea is that they read it carefully. I’m sure they had been troubled. They had been wondering about what had been going on in Jerusalem. They had been troubled by the teaching from Judea. They evidently thought that this teaching was from the apostles. James says that these people went out from us without any approval from us. We did not send them, they went on their own. What they said they are now finding out is not in agreement with what the apostles, the elders and the whole

church at Jerusalem believed. That encouraged them and they rejoiced because of the message that they have received. Then, “*Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers*” (v. 32). They not only delivered the letter, they delivered the Word of God. They preached in a way that made the brothers know that they considered them full brothers, without any circumcision without any recourse to the law. “*After spending some time there, they were sent off by the brothers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them*” (v. 33). Silas did not go back home because Silas is going to be used by God to go with Paul on a second evangelistic journey.

Paul and Barnabas remain in Antioch and continue to preach and teach. “*But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord*” (v. 35). Many people were encouraged to preach the Word of God because of the acceptance they felt, not only by God, but also by that great group of brothers down in Jerusalem, all the Judean brothers, and all the Jewish brothers in all the world. There is an encouragement, a fellowship and a unity that is found only in the Word of God. Many great lessons can be learned from this incident. This incident in chapter 15 helps us to solve our problems. There will be problems anytime people are involved. Because people themselves are problematic.

There are 7 steps given in this 15th chapter on how to solve our problems. We need to pray about them, think about them, meditate upon them, but let's just mention them briefly. How do you solve problems?

- Number 1 – by frank discussion (v. 7). It is amazing how many times we run from our problems and don't want those problems discussed, thinking that the discussion of them will add to the problem. It is like the sore, left alone it will only fester. It needs medicine, it needs attention, it needs care. Any problem needs to be discussed frankly, honestly and openly.

- Number 2 – a simple creed (v. 11). We need something that we believe together. That is that God is justifying everybody by grace. Our creed is – “for by grace have you been saved through faith.” – an obedient faith. It is not by good works or people would boast. We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God our Father got ready ahead of time for us to do (Ephesians 2:8–11). The simple creed is – Jesus Christ saved people by the grace of God. We will have differences, we will not believe everything alike, but “that” we do believe alike. That is our simple creed – Jesus is savior and the grace of God is what is necessary for salvation.
- Number 3 – a teachable spirit (vs. 12–13). The brethren listen to what Peter is saying and they nod their heads. They listen to what Barnabas and Paul say and they nod their heads. There is a very teachable spirit in this church. So many times our spirit is not a teachable spirit.
- Number 4 – the rule of faith (vs. 15–18). James in drawing the conclusion brings them back to the Word of God. *“Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God,”* Paul says in Romans 10:17–18. Faith rules, not works. If faith rules, then the Word of God rules because that is how faith comes. Solve your problems by going back to the authority, the Word of God.
- Number 5 – a liberal decision made (vs. 19–21). Both sides of the issue are considered. The Jews with their love for the law is considered. The Gentiles, with their no application to the law, is considered.
- Number 6 – perfect agreement (v. 22). This after a decision has been made or if after a conclusion has been drawn by the leaders, the whole church has to be brought into it, so that the decision is a perfect decision, a complete one, not an incomplete one.
- Number 7 – Always remember, that all of this is because we have a divine head, a divine authority. The text says,

“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit.” Our decisions must be based upon God’s decision, upon God’s character. Frankly discuss it, have a simple creed, have a teachable spirit, let the Word of God rule, let your decision be liberal enough to involve everybody, reach perfect agreement and follow a divine head. The problem was great. It could have destroyed the church, but instead of destroying the church, it made them ready for greater ministry among the Gentiles.

MISSIONS CONTINUED

THE SECOND JOURNEY

Acts 15:36 – 18:28

Preparation for the Second Journey

Paul and Barnabas, as they seek helpers for their work, have a sharp contention and a division. Now there will be two fields reached rather than just one. “*Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing*” (15:36). There is Paul’s commitment to the work. “*Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them,*” 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” (vs. 37–38). Mark went back home from Perga on the first journey. There is Paul’s commitment to the work, even above his commitment to the discipling of John Mark. “*They had such a sharp disagreement . . .*” The idea is that they yelled at each other, “. . . that they parted company.” Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. Now, it is a bad thing that they had such a sharp disagreement. It may even seem to be a bad thing that they parted company. They parted company but they did not part fellowship, because Barnabas will always be beloved Barnabas in Paul’s teaching. And Barnabas will bring John Mark back to a steadfast commitment to the work of the Lord because that is his nature.

He is the son of exhortation. Paul's nature was the outreach – the pioneer, the fella who was going into new territory. John Mark had already indicated that he didn't have the capacity to do such a work. So, the division was good, based on the giftedness of Barnabas and the giftedness of Paul. Now, rather than having 2 hands on 1 plow there will be 2 plows in the field. Twice as much work can be done. Paul chose Silas, who had been sent as one of the leaders of the church in Jerusalem, to take the place of Barnabas.

At Lystra Paul, ever vigilant for faithful men who manifested the desire and ability to be true evangelists, pressed young Timothy into the service. "*He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived . . .*" Timothy is from Lystra, the city where Paul had been stoned. ". . . whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek" (16:1). Although it does not say so his father was probably an unbeliever. So, he lived in a house, half of which was Christian and half of which was not. Half of which was Jewish and half of which was Gentile. That is Paul's new aide, Timothy. "*The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him*" (v. 2). He has been working in both cities. "*Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek*" (v. 3). So in behalf, again, of the Jewish community and the Jewish believers in that area he had Timothy circumcised. He chose Silas to take the place of Barnabas and he chose Timothy to take the place of John Mark as an attendant, as a helper, in his area. They are strengthening the churches as they travel from place to place (16:4–5). They are confirming the brethren chapter 15:41, they are delivering the letter that the apostles and the elders and church in Jerusalem had written. Because of that there is victory. "*So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers*" (v. 5). There is the outcome of Paul's beginning a second journey with two new helpers. Instead of Barnabas it was Silas, instead of John Mark it was Timothy.

The Spirit's Directions (16:6–18)

They traveled beyond Syria and Cilicia and Derbe and Lystra and Iconium to a new region (16:6). They traveled through the province of Phrygia and they traveled through Galatia, preaching the Word of God. They come to a place called Mysia where Paul wanted to go to Bithynia, but the Spirit of God did not let him. God was not interested in Paul going to Bithynia. We don't know all the reasons why, but in I Peter, in the early verses, we find that Peter wrote his epistle to this very area that Paul wanted to go preach. Paul's dispensation was to preach where Christ's name had never been named. So, perhaps he was not permitted to go there because of the will of God and because of Peter's ministry there.

There comes a distinct call in 16:9 at Troas, they journey from Mysia to Troas. We are not covering every place they went. There are over 20 places in this single journey that they visited during their travels. They came to Troas.

During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” 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” (vs. 9–10).

Notice the “he” changes to “we.” Luke lives in Troas and it will be we for a while. “. . . concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.” Paul had an impulse to preach in Bithynia and in Asia, but the Spirit wouldn’t let him. Paul got a call to come to preach in Macedonia. The decided conviction was that they would go there and preach in Macedonia. So they journeyed straight to Samothrace, then to Neapolis and from there to Philippi, the chief city of that province. There he will preach the Word of God. They go down to the river at the time of prayer, expecting to find some Jewish believers there. There were evidently no men, just some women. One of them was

named Lydia. Paul preached the gospel to her and her household. She and her whole household accepted the Word of God and compelled Paul and his company to use her house as their house for the whole time they were there.

They were followed around by a girl who prophesied for her masters. The slave girl's prophecies were an annoyance to Paul because they blurred the fact that salvation came through Jesus alone. The young girl at Philippi was apparently demon possessed.

This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her (vs. 17–18).

He was opposed, very quickly by the masters of the girl who had the evil spirit that enabled her to predict the future. Paul put his hands on her and drove the demons out of her. He is going to be opposed by the masters of this girl, because he is taking from them their means of livelihood. He will stand firm for the faith against this opposition. Notice again that any time the preaching brings victory, the devil brings opposition.

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. They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice." 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 (vs. 19–24).

They suffer persecution because the owners of this girl stir up the people against him to the point that they have Paul and Silas severely flogged and thrown into prison. The jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. He put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in stocks. This was unjust and cruel treatment. God will not allow that to happen.

The opposition and persecution must lead to victory. So, about midnight when Paul and Silas are praying and singing, they are rejoicing that they have been counted worthy to suffer for the gospel of Christ. An earthquake comes, shakes the foundations of the prison, opens the door and loosens their bonds. You would expect them all to run, but they do not. The jailer comes, sees what is happening determines to kill himself because he is responsible for these prisoners and he knows he will answer with his life. Paul cries out “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!” The jailer is impressed, relieved, and released from the threat of death. He comes into the prison cell and takes them immediately to his house. There they preach the gospel to him. He and his household believe. He and his household are baptized. He and his household are now redeemed and comforted by the beautiful, beautiful grace of God.

Paul and Silas reveal their Roman citizenship and the officials want to release them. Paul replies, “I will not be released secretly.” He maintains his rights. He says, “I was brought here publically, I have been judged publically, I’ll be released publically.” So, in front of all the city, the rulers of that city release him and make him a free man once again. Here a new element of resistance to the gospel is experienced by the missionaries—arrest by the civil authorities, not the religious Jews. It was important that Christianity not be seen by Rome as an illegal religion. The false accusations sought to brand Paul

and Silas as Jewish subverters of Roman law and order. The initial punishment was reversed by the power of God. Again, not even prison could hinder the movement of God's message in this new region. In fact, God used this difficulty as the means to plant a strong congregation of the Lord's church.

He goes to Lydia's household and has fellowship with the brethren there and then he will travel on the next day to Thessalonica. The "we" in chapter 16 becomes a "they" in chapter 17. That indicates that Luke stayed behind in Philippi. This might be a part of the explanation why this Philippian church would become such a powerful church, why they will love Paul in a way and to a degree that no other church in all of Paul's ministry loved him. Because they will be discipled by the beloved physician, Luke.

The Gospel Reaches Thessalonica (17:1–9)

Paul and his company leave Philippi and come to the city of Thessalonica. Thessalonica was the trade center of all that area. One of the most commercial cities in all the Roman empire. Unlike Philippi, there is a synagogue here. So, Paul goes into the synagogue and preaches the gospel of Christ for three straight Sabbath days. He will be here a very short time, six or seven weeks at the most. He shows the divine authority of Jesus. He makes an argument about the deity of Christ. He appeals to these Thessalonians to accept the Word of God. Many of them do. *"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"* (17:4). Some Jews, a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women. The gospel has been received. Opposition arises here as it has in other cities.

The Jews were jealous because of the fact some of them had believed (v. 5). The God fearing among the Greeks in their synagogue believed and quite a few of their prominent women believed. So those opposing the gospel rushed to Jason's house where Paul is staying in Thessalonica trying to drag them

before court and be judged and be killed. They arrested Jason and some of the brethren, but Paul was not in the house. In I Thessalonians 1:3-11 Paul praised these brethren. He says their faith is made known throughout all the earth. There is the power of new converts, and those brethren matured without Paul's personal presence and without Timothy, without Silas or without Luke. They matured facing God and facing his word.

The brethren, to save Paul's life, get him out of the city and he goes down to the city of Berea. There again he enters the synagogue and there again he preaches the Word of God. This audience is receptive. This audience has a reverent attitude. Verse 11 says that the Bereans were more noble even than the Thessalonians, because they received the word with readiness of heart and searched the scripture daily as to whether or not these things were so. Notice three attitudes they had toward Paul's preaching – receptivity, research and responsiveness. Those three R's need to be present in our life. We need to be receptive of the gospel. We need to research it to prove it is true. We need to respond to it in a way that will bring glory to God. But again success brings opposition.

When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. The brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea (17:13–14).

The unbelieving Jews from Thessalonica come and stir up the city of Berea and they are going to arrest Paul and stone him. So, he leaves again in the middle of the night, but this time he leaves Silas and Timothy behind. They are going to disciple this great church and these great people.

The Gospel Reaches Athens (17:16–34)

Paul travels by boat to the city of Athens (17:16). In this great city there will be less response than in other places. It

might be because of their philosophical mind-set. In Athens the citizens met daily for the basic purpose of considering new things. They didn't want to hear about the old things. All they wanted was some new teaching, some different teaching, some odd thing. Paul's spirit is grieving as he enters the city, for the city is literally full of idolatry and idols. There were idols for every god they had ever heard of and in case they had missed one they had erected one that was called the idol to the unknown god. *"For 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"* (v. 23). Paul said you have neglected to worship the only true God. The one you worship in ignorance, I now proclaim to you. He preached to the Greeks and he preached in their synagogues. *"So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with whoever happened to be there"* (v. 17). He went where the religious people were and reasoned every Sabbath day with them. Every day in the marketplace he is building his tents for these people, and speaking the Word of God to whoever happened to be there. The greatest mission field in all the world is your job site and the people you need to speak to are whoever happens to come to your job site.

He declares God's person in a fabulous sermon that deals with the evidences about God. He says God does not dwell in temples made with hands, that God has made of one blood all the nations of the earth, and that God is not served in any way, but from the heart. Even in this philosophical city of Athens, there is success given by God to the preaching of His word, not as much as in other places, but success. In 17:32 –33 Luke tells us,

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. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

A few men, a few women, a few in number, but the offer was received by some even in this most philosophical city in all the Roman empire.

In Corinth and Trip Home (18:1–22)

Then he moves on to one of the major cities of his work, the city of Corinth. As Athens had been the most philosophical city in the Roman empire, Corinth is the most immoral city in the Roman empire. A prostitute was called a Corinthian. To carouse and be drunken was said to be Corinthianizing. This city gave the model of what immorality was and yet here Paul will find a very, very fruitful and effective place to minister. Five things happen in this city. Number one was discipleship. Paul himself is being discipled by two great Christians, a man and his wife who have recently come from the city of Rome, Aquila and his wife Priscilla. They are being discipled by Paul. Aquila and Priscilla tent-makers by trade and they were making tents in the city of Corinth. They were from city of Rome, but, along with all the Jews, had been ordered to leave Rome, chased out by the persecution that Claudius had placed upon the Jews. So, Paul builds tents with them and lives in their house. He reasons in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. He waits and he witnesses. He reasons and he persuades.

In verses 5-8 Paul continues his work in faithfulness and in fearlessness. Something about this city frightened Paul, I don't know what it was, but something frightened him. He had a vision in the middle of the night and God said to Paul:

“Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and

harm you, because I have many people in this city”
(vs. 9–10).

God never told anybody not to be afraid that was not afraid. He told Paul, do not be afraid I have many people in this city. So, Paul in obedience to God, preached and a great number of the people believed.

Then there was hardship as Paul is confronted by his enemies. There has been success, so we would expect opposition. The Jews made a united attack against Paul. They bring him into court and charge him before Gallio, the proconsul of all the province of Achaia, who lived in the city of Corinth. Any judgment pronounced by him would establish legal precedent. They accused Paul of teaching the people to worship God in a way contrary to the law. Paul is about to make a defense, but he doesn’t need to. Gallio says very simply:

“If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you. But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law—settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things”
(vs. 14–15).

To Gallio Christianity came under the realm of Judaism and therefore was not a matter to be settled in a civil court. This decision was crucial for it was tantamount to declaring Christianity is a legitimate religion in the eyes of Roman law. They kept trying to get Gallio to say something “*But Gallio showed no concern whatever*” (v. 17), because they are not violating Roman law.

In verses 18–22 Paul has friends that help him as he departs the city of Corinth and sails for the province of Syria. Priscilla and Aquila go down with him to Cenchrea, the port city of Corinth. He shaves his head because of a vow that he had made there. They sail with him to Ephesus where he leaves them

behind. He reasons in the synagogue, as always, and then he leaves. They wanted him to stay, but he leaves and tells them he would come back if God wills. He left Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus to preach the Word of God. Paul will come back to Ephesus later and find that Aquila and Priscilla are doing their job well. He goes back now to the city of Antioch and spends some time there greeting the brethren and being greeted by them.

In review, we learn some lessons from Troas and Philippi where Paul does his first new work. One thing learned is that they were called by God to that work. There was human need, the fields were white unto harvest. There was personal readiness as Paul and his team abode in the Word of God. There was prompt action, as soon as the vision was given, they immediately endeavored to fulfill it. There was complete conviction that God had called “us” to this work. Most important of all, there was spiritual power in the work. They were kept by the Spirit, in verse 6. They were guided by the Spirit of Jesus in verse 7 and they were given success by God in verse 10. There was a call in the work, but there was also a care in the work. They were guided by God because there was an open and effectual door there. They were preserved by God. They persevered in the will of God because they sailed straight for Europe. They were used by God in teaching and personal work. They were blessed by God, as Lydia’s heart was opened and that was a sure sign of the Lord’s presence.

From the city of Athens, we learn a lesson about the messenger of God, the orator and the preacher, Paul. He was conciliatory. He introduced his teaching in a way that complimented them. He was clear in the proposition he offered and he was concise in the exposition he gave. And he was persuasive in the application of that to their life. We learn about the message of God. Here are the points that need to be presented to a pagan, unbelieving, philosophical world.

- God is the divine creator – 17:24
- God is the universal Lord – same verse
- God gives bountiful life – 17:25
- God is the almighty ruler – 17:26
- God is an unseen Spirit – 17:27 and first part of 28
- God is a tender Father – the last part of 28 through 30
- God is a righteous judge – 17:31

From Corinth we learn about practical Christianity. We learn from Aquila and Priscilla how to make home life into missionary life. We learn from Paul and Aquila and Priscilla's building of tents, how that daily toil can be missionary. Paul, every time a Sabbath day came, was worshiping God in that synagogue presenting the Word of God and persuading the Jews. Without fail, Paul always gave his gospel testimony. He lived in great faithfulness. He had loving compassion. He had spiritual communion with God. All that brought about inevitable suffering. All of these things will happen in our life if we will give ourselves to what Paul and his team did; to the spreading of the gospel of Christ and the glorifying of Jesus Christ as Lord.

MISSIONS CONCLUDED

MISSIONS THREATENED

Acts 18:23 – 23:25

In this chapter we will see two additional things about missions. We are going to see missions concluded in the third journey made by Paul. Then we will see missions threatened by a Jewish trial in the city of Jerusalem.

In Acts 18:23 we read – “*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.*” He always begins his journey by going back to where he had been before, fulfilling the work of making disciples of them. Meanwhile, in the city of Ephesus where Paul had left Aquila and Priscilla, there is a disciple named Apollos. Apollos is an incomplete disciple. A preacher with an incomplete message. “*Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, . . .*” That means he had been to school. “. . . with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures.” This means he had studied the Word. “*He had been instructed . . .*” He has had teachers. “. . . in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor . . .” Good preacher “. . . and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.” Everything he knew was accurate and everything he said was true. He just did not have a complete message. “*He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of the Lord more adequately.*” He is learned and

spiritual. He is fervent and eloquent, but he is ignorant. Now he is being instructed Paul's co-workers. Apollos accepted all that Aquila and Priscilla taught him. “*When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, . . .*” He wanted to go over to Corinth. “. . .*the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed*” (18:27). That is an interesting phrase, isn't it? Who by grace had believed. “*For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ*” (18:28). But knowing now the total message of Christ, he is even more fervent. He is even more faithful. He debates, he proves that Jesus is the Christ. He is successful.

Missions Concluded (19:1 – 20:38)

The Third Missionary Journey

Paul arrives at Ephesus in chapter 19. This is just a continuation his activities in chapter 18. “*While Apollos was at Corinth.*” What Paul is about to encounter in Ephesus, is the result of Apollos' incomplete preaching. He finds some disciples there who he believes are Christians. He asked, “*Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?*” He was asking if they had been miraculously endowed. They answer, “*No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.*” They knew nothing about the Holy Spirit. That made Paul wonder about their salvation. He said, “*Then what baptism did you receive?*” They answered, “*John's baptism.*” In 19:4 Paul responds,

Paul said, “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. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all (vs. 4–7).

Paul declares to them the reality of the Holy Spirit and they admit that they know nothing about it. The Holy Spirit is conferred, both in the reception of it when they were baptized and in the empowering of it when Paul laid his hands on them. Their Christian experience is now enlarged. They now know the total Word. They now know the total truth, as Apollos had learned.

It is time for Paul to preach again. “*Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God*” (v. 8). The message is given boldly. The message is given clearly and completely. He argued. He argued persuasively about the kingdom of God. There is victory and then opposition. “*But some of them became obstinate;*” stubborn, “*they refused to believe*”, they saw the evidence, they knew it was true, but they refused to believe and “*publically maligned the Way. So Paul left them*” (v. 9). He left the synagogue and took the disciples with him. Some had been converted by his arguing persuasively. He took the disciples with him and had discussions with them daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. One text says from 2 o’clock in the afternoon to 4 o’clock in the afternoon, the time that they closed the shops in the hottest time of the day. Paul is teaching them in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. “*This went on for 2 years so that all the Greeks and all the Jews who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord*” (v. 10). There was great response to great preaching as he proclaims and attests to the truth of the Word of God. Then God attests to it. Beginning in verse 11 – “*God did extraordinary miracles through Paul.*”

Opposition arises again. “*Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, ‘In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out’*” (v. 13). They are trying to do now their miracles with the power that they saw Paul using. The counterfeit, the false is always there when the true is there. “*Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. The evil spirit*

answered them, ‘Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are you?’ (vs. 14–15). The demon said that you don’t have the power of Jesus, you don’t have the power of Paul, why should I listen to you. *“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”* (v. 16). One man, demon possessed, has driven 7 Jews out of the house. When that becomes known response occurs. All the Greeks and Jews are seized with fear in verse 17. They held Jesus in high honor in verse 17. They burned \$20,000 worth of magical books in verse 19. In this way, by the preaching and by the opposition, by the commitment of the brethren, in this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. The Word of God has been affirmed, Christian experience enlarged and the message given.

Trouble arises again. Verse 21: *“After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. ‘After I have been there,’ he said, ‘I must visit Rome also.’”* We learn later that God has told him that in dreams. *“He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer”* (v. 22). He sends two of his coworkers to prepare Macedonia for his coming so he wouldn’t have to spend too long there. *“About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way”* (v. 23). “The Way” is a title given to the church or the spread of the gospel or Christianity. Not simply “a” way, not the “best way,” the Way, the only way. Jesus said *“I am the Way, the Truth, the Life, no man comes to the Father but by me”* (John 14:6). Peter had said that there is no other name under Heaven given among men wherein we must be saved.

Demetrius, the silversmith, stirs up trouble for Paul and for his brothers in the preaching of the gospel. Very cleverly, he charges Paul with hurting, not only the economy, but also the religion of the city of Ephesus, the god of the Ephesians. He stirs the people up greatly, but calmness and coolness is always present with the disciples. In 20:29 Gaius and Aristarchus are

captured and the people rush into the theater to try to kill them, but the coolness of the city clerk calms all that. He told them, “Look, we don’t want to be found here striving against our law. If these men have done things worthy of punishment let it be brought up in the legal assembly. Let it be brought up in the regular court. Let evidence be presented and then we will judge them according to our law.” Of course, that does not happen. The reason that does not happen is simple, because God does not intend for his gospel to be hindered by the opposition of man. Now when the uproar had ended Paul continues his travels. He stayed in Ephesus until Ephesus’ problem had reached the point of solution. Now he moves on.

Paul at Troas

When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said good-by and set out for Macedonia. He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece, where he stayed three months” (20:1–3).

He goes through Macedonia until he finally gets to Greece. That is probably the city of Corinth where he stayed three months. Because the Jews had made a plot against him he decided to go back through Macedonia rather than sailing from Corinth which was probably his initial plan. Because these Jews are threatening him he retraces his tracks back up through Macedonia. He was accompanied by a large group of people. It will be revealed later that he was carrying the money that had been given by the Gentile brethren for the poor among the brethren in Judea. Those accompanying Paul are listed in 20:4–5.

He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica,

Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and from the province of Asia Tychicus and Trophimus. These men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas.

These are companions, but more than companions, these are agents, these are apostles from the churches carrying their contribution to Jerusalem. Paul had a very wise policy concerning money. He didn't handle the money. Each church chose its own messenger to carry the money there.

Now the word “we” comes back into the picture in verse 6 which means that Luke was traveling with Paul again. Luke has been at Philippi from the time Paul left him on the second journey until on the way home on the third. “*But we sailed from Philippi after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and five days later joined the others at Troas, where we stayed seven days*” (v. 6). They had a much harder journey going from Philippi to Troas than they did from Troas to Philippi. That is because of the currents in the Aegean Sea. He said we stayed at Troas seven days. The reason for that is revealed in the next verse. “*On the first day of the week we came together to break bread.*” Paul has a reason to want to stay in Troas until the church gathers on the first day of the week. You learn that reason in 2 Corinthians 2:12–13 where it says he came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, but he didn't find Titus. Although God opened a great door for him to preach, he didn't find Titus, his brother there, so he went on into Macedonia. He had the opportunity to preach. He had the ability to preach. He had the will to preach. He had come to preach, but he didn't preach. He knew to do good, but he didn't do it. He wants to explain to these brethren in Troas the great and effectual door that is open for them to preach.

Here in Troas beginning in verse 7 going through verse 12 the Christians gather on the Lord's day to celebrate the Lord's supper and while there Paul preaches to them for a long time. About midnight, a young man sitting in a window named Eutychus falls out of a window and dies. Paul goes down and

raises him to life, they go back into the upper room and Paul talks the rest of the night until the dawning of the day. What a service that assembly was. Sometimes we complain when the sermon goes just a little bit over time. Paul preaches all night and all through the early morning until finally daybreak. Then he dismisses himself from that service and he goes on to the city of Assos.

Paul's travels in the next few verses chapter 20:13-16 is both by land and by sea. His company gets into a boat and sails in that boat to the city of Assos. Paul walks across the land to the city of Assos. Why? I am persuaded he needed to be alone. In the midst of a lot of endeavors there is a need for solitude. He is about to face trials, persecution, beatings, and finally, death. He knows, he has been told by prophets that Jerusalem holds nothing but trouble for him. He is going anyway, because he has a mission from God to fulfill and that is to deliver the money he has been given for the poor among the brethren in Judea. He meets that boat in Assos and they travel on to Mitylene, Chios and Samos until they come to Miletus in chapter 20:17-35. At Miletus he has a final meeting with the elders from Ephesus. He is not going into the city of Ephesus, that would take a day's journey there and a day's journey back. He sends for the elders at Ephesus to meet him and his company in Miletus, one of the port cities of Ephesus.

As he talks to them about the welfare of the church, he reminds them of five things they need to consider. He tells them first of all that they need to look backward. He says, you remember what I did when I was with you. You remember the manner of my ministry (v. 19). He said he was there in great humility, his ministry was a lowly ministry. He said I was there with many tears, it was a tearful ministry. You know how many things I endured, it was a trying ministry. The ministry of Paul was lowly, tearful and trying. The methods of his ministry were well-rounded. He said, I didn't keep back from you a single thing, I taught you the whole counsel of God. I taught you publically and I taught you from house to house. Remember he

is talking to the elders. He said I taught you elders, and I'm sure he taught the same thing to the whole church as well, but here he is talking to the elders. He said I taught you elders publically, that was in his preaching. I taught you from house to house, that is either going to their house or meeting with house churches in which these elders were. The message of his ministry in verse 21 is repentance in faith. He said I proclaimed to both Jews and Gentiles that they ought to repent and turn to God and have faith in Him to be saved. He said to look to the past, my work among you has been well-rounded – public, private, and redemptive.

Then he says look forward (vs. 22–24, 29–30). He says there is trouble ahead for you. From your own midst men are going to arise speaking perverse things to draw the disciples after them. But, he said trouble is not omnipotent. He said, I've got trouble ahead for me. I've been told that when I get to Jerusalem I will be persecuted and imprisoned for the gospel. He said, that means nothing. The only thing that matters to me is that I finish my race and I complete my task. That's the ultimate.

Then Paul looks inward in verses 25–27 and views his own personal life among men and his ministry among them. He tells the elders to look inward as well, in verse 28, to take heed to themselves, to the flock and to the doctrine. Then he says that elders are to lead the brethren to look within as they search the body for the troubling people. There is a look backward, a look forward and a look inward. Then there is a look to the Book. “*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*” (v. 32). The look backward, the look forward and the look inward is not going to be of any effect unless there is a look to the Book. Unless there is a look to the Word of God.

Then he said, look at my example. You need to look to the example that I have left you. Paul says “*I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that*

these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions" (v. 33). Paul was so good at making tents that he met his personal needs and he met the personal needs of those that traveled with him. "*In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'*" (v. 35). That is not recorded anywhere in the gospels, but Jesus said it somewhere in His life. I don't know how many hundreds of beatitudes there are in the Bible, but there is one supreme beatitude. Only one time does the Bible say it is more blessed. No one knows better just how blessed it is to receive than those of us who receive the goodwill of people. We understand how good that feels and how good that is. But, He said it is more blessed to give than it is to receive. I want to do the more blessed thing. I want to give as Paul gave – himself, his life and his effort to the gospel.

Missionary Threatened

Paul leaves Miletus and journeys to the city of Jerusalem.

When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. 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 (vs. 36–38).

There was great prayer and sad parting. Three phrases are indicative of Paul's preaching – the grace of God, the kingdom of God and the whole counsel of God. When Paul arrives in Jerusalem he will have his witness threatened. En route it is threatened, at Tyre he gets one week of sweet fellowship, but they warn and beg him not to go on to Jerusalem. At Caesarea he stayed in Philip's home, warned by Agabus and begged by the brethren not to go. He journeys on to Jerusalem. He is accompanied by the brethren. He will spend over two years here in Jerusalem and Caesarea being tried by the Jews. He meets

with James and the other brethren and he shows that he is not against the traditions of the Jews by going good for people who have taken a Nazarite vow. The people, the Jewish people, begin to trouble Paul and begin to plan against his preaching. They stubbornly and constantly resist him and his teaching. There is such a clamor that the Roman garrison there is afraid that Paul will be killed. And so, a good Roman centurion gave Paul the strong protection that he needed. the book of Acts presents every centurion as a just man, an honorable man. To reach such a position in the Roman army was a great honor and it took honorable and just men to reach it. The Jews planned to kill him. The centurion gives him the right to stand before the council of the Jews to be tried. They accuse him of things that are not true, even of bringing Gentiles into the Temple. Paul appeals to them based upon his life, past and present, to find one thing wrong with what he is doing. God encourages Paul in verse 11 of chapter 23 and says "*Paul you do not be afraid of anybody during this time of trial. It is my will, you must preach the gospel in Rome before Caesar himself.*" They have a plot to kill him. They formulate it, they swear they will not eat or drink until they kill him. One of Paul's sisters sons knows of that and goes and tells the centurion who gives him protection. The centurion gets 470 men on horseback and on foot to accompany Paul outside of the city. A days journey outside and the 400 foot soldiers of them go back, but 70 horseman continues on. The seventy-man calvary of the Roman empire accompany Paul to Caesarea with a letter to Felix. In that letter the centurion says we have tried this man, we found nothing worthy of death or imprisonment in him. Therefore, I am sending him to you, the highest Roman governor in all that province to find out if there is any reason that Rome should have anything against this person. The Jewish trial was failing. Now Paul will stand before the court of Rome.

MISSIONARY TRIED

Acts 24 – 26

God's Missionary on Trial

We have seen in the second half of the book of Acts, the concept of missions. Now we turn to look at the missionary himself. For the missions of God to be proven to be of Him the missionary must be tried and found to be triumphant. Paul has been carried, under protection of the Roman army, from Jerusalem to Caesarea with a letter from the centurion to Felix, the governor. Felix reads that letter and asks Paul where he is from and when he finds out he is from Cilicia, since that is in his province, one of the areas he is judge, he says I will hear the case. But, “. . .he said, *I will hear your case when your accusers get here. Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod' palace*” (23:35). Five days later his accusers arrive from Jerusalem. There will be three Roman trials while he is in Caesarea. There will be a trial before governor Felix in chapter 24. He will be tried before governor Festus in chapter 25. and then in chapter 26 he will defend himself before Herod Agrippa. Herod is recognized by Rome as being the king, of all of this province.

Paul Stands Before Felix (Acts 24)

Notice first of all the prosecution, the accusers and the accusation, and the testimony of these people who have come to prosecute the trial.

Five days later the high priest Ananias went down to

Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor. When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix: (Watch him first of all compliment Felix) "We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation. Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude. But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly. 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; so we seized him. By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him." The Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true.

The accusation is three-fold. They accused him of sedition, of sectarianism and of sacrilege.

Now Paul makes his defense beginning in verse 10, and he defends himself against all 3 of these charges. His defense against the charge of sedition begins in verse 10.

When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied: "I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defense. You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me" (24:10–13).

Against the charge of sedition, he says I only was in the city in worship 12 days and they did not find me arguing with anybody, trying to get anybody on my side or trying to stir up trouble.

Beginning in verse 14 he presents his defense against the charge of sectarianism.

“However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers, as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. 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” (24:14–16).

He said what I am preaching is the fulfillment of all that the Law says. What I believe is the fulfillment of all that the Prophets said. I have my hope in the singular religion of God. In the singularity of God’s purpose, of God’s promises and of God’s prospects. He says I am not sectarian, I am worshiping the same God as Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Moses and David and all the righteous men of the Old Testament worshiped.

His defense against the charge of sacrilege, that he has desecrated the temple begins in verse 17.

“After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance. But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me. Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood

before the Sanhedrin – unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: ‘It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today’” (vs. 17–21).

He said, look, not only is my conscience clear, but my body is clean because of the Nazarite vow and because of the benevolent reason that I came to Jerusalem. So that is the prosecution and it is found to be as false before Felix as it was before the Sanhedrin.

The verdict was that there would be no verdict. “*Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way . . .*” He was well acquainted with the Way. He knew about Christianity. He knew the innocence and the freedom that these people proclaim. He adjourned the proceedings. “*When Lysias the commander comes he says, I will decide your case. He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs*” (vs. 22–23). He is postponing the trial. There is no doubt about that. He is procrastinating. There is no doubt about that. He is doing his best to treat Paul as a Roman citizen should be treated; with care and dignity.

Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said,” The word literally means terrified. “. . . that’s enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you. At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him. When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, he

left Paul in prison (vs. 24–27).

The sermon terrified governor Felix. The judge was guilty of procrastination and postponement because he wanted a bribe. He wanted money. If Paul had given him money he would have been set free. Paul had money, but he would not pay his way out of a pagan prison. He was waiting for the will of God. While waiting he preached a sermon. He preached of righteousness, that's God's command and God's demand, upon Felix. He preached of temperance. The need for Felix to bring his life under control. Felix was living with a woman he had no right to live with. He was an immoral person seeking a bribe. He was in no way temperate. Paul preached of temperance and he preached of judgment to come, the dread penalty of sin. The dread penalty that awaited Felix, rather than seeking or currying Felix's favor, he preached to Felix's need.

Paul Before Festus (25:1–27)

Felix was replaced as governor by Festus and so there will be a trial before Festus. "*Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem . . .*" Remember Paul has been there for two full years (24:27). Festus was looking over his territory. "*. . . where the chief priests and Jewish leaders appeared before him and presented the charges against Paul. They urgently requested Festus, as a favor to them, to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem. For they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way*" (vs. 2–3). They are still making an effort, this time a fresh effort, not only to have Paul accused, but to have Paul assassinated. "*Festus answered, 'Paul is being held at Caesarea, and I myself am going there soon. Let some of your leaders come with me and press charges against the man there, if he has done anything wrong'*" (vs. 4–5). He has the letter that the centurion has written Felix. He has Felix's testimony, that he could find nothing wrong against him. He hears the shallowness of their charges in Jerusalem. So he says, you come with me and we will try this

man where he ought to be tried, in my court in the city of Caesarea and not in your court in the city of Jerusalem. “*After spending eight or ten days with them, he went down to Caesarea,*” So now he has been away for several weeks. “*and the next day he convened the court and ordered that Paul be brought before him*” (v. 6). So now we are going to begin the second trial, a thorough, complete examination.

“*When Paul appeared, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many serious charges against him, which they could not prove*” (v. 7). Not a single shred of evidence on their side. Then Paul stands to make his defense. “*I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar*” (v. 9). I have not violated the law. I have not violated the ritual and I have not violated Roman law. “*Festus, wishing to do the Jews some favor, said to Paul, are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?*” (v. 9). Paul didn’t see the difference that would make, they did not having any more arguments. They have no more evidence, there will be no reason to go to Jerusalem to be tried by the Roman government. Paul knows what the plan is, his assassination, his death.

So Paul answers.

“*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*” (vs. 10–11).

That is a Roman citizen’s privilege and Paul is demanding his right, and that is that he be given a trial before Caesar himself. Festus says “*You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!*” (v. 12). But before he lets him go, Festus makes one more attempt to appease the Jews. He says let’s have a consultation

with King Agrippa. Agrippa arrives with Bernice, a woman he has no right to. Festus goes before the king and he reviews everything that has happened in his court and in Felix's court. He says that now it is going to depend upon you as to whether we should continue this trial. Festus wants this troublesome case before the Jews off his hands. He is a time serving politician. He is less of a man even than Felix was. Felix wanted a bribe. Festus is trying to curry the favor of the Jews. So, he asked King Agrippa, would you like to hear from this man yourself. King Agrippa says, I will hear from him tomorrow.

Festus Reviews Paul's Case to Agrippa

"The next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the high ranking officers and the leading men of the city. At the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. Festus said: King Agrippa, and all who are present with us, you see this man! The whole Jewish community has petitioned me about him in Jerusalem and here in Caesarea, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. I found he had done nothing deserving of death, but because he made his appeal to the Emperor I decided to send him to Rome. But I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him. Therefore, I thought he ought to be brought here before you. And especially before you King Agrippa. So as the result of this investigation I may have something to write" (25:23–26).

He said, I don't know what to tell Caesar. He says I have found nothing wrong in this man. *"For I think it is unreasonable to send on a prisoner without specifying the charges against him"* (v. 27). They tried him in Jerusalem and they could find nothing according to Moses's law or even Jewish traditional law that

would cause him to be put to death. He has been tried before two Roman governors and they have searched carefully, wanting to please the Jews by causing him to die. They found absolutely nothing worthy of death. He doesn't have a single proof of any accusation he can write to Caesar and say "Emperor, here are the charges, here is the evidence and we now await your judgment as to whether or not he is going to be put to death." As much as he wants to curry the Jews' favor, he definitely wants no displeasure from Caesar. To send a man to Caesar without any definite charges or having any evidence to back it up would be stupid and would bring shame for him.

Paul Before Agrippa (26:1-31)

Now, he will present his defense before Agrippa. *"Agrippa said to Paul, 'You have permission to speak for yourself.'"* Paul begins very courteously in verses 1-3 – *"King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently."* He spoke about his conduct. He said that from the very beginning of my life I have been a faithful Jew, of the strictest sect of the Pharisees. And now I stand before you to be judged because of the hope that I have in God and in the things promised to my fathers. *"O king, it is because of this hope that the Jews have brought me there. Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?"* (vs. 7-8). But, that is the reason for which I stand here on trial. The center of Paul's testimony in verses 9-18 was his confession of having been a persecutor of the church in days gone by. His conversion on the road to Damascus, particularly his commission to preach the gospel, not simply to the Jews but also to the entire Gentile world. He relates to Agrippa the assignment and the promise he received from Jesus Christ in the vision. *"I will rescue you from your own people and from*

the Gentiles. I am sending you to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” (vs. 17–18). Paul said that was the commission that God gave him.

The Culmination and Consequences of Paul’s Testimony

The culmination of Paul’s testimony is seen in verses 19–23:

“So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me” (vs. 19–21).

That is why they tried to kill me because I preached the fulfillment of all the Old Testament Law and all the Old Testament prophecies. Paul said it was by God’s help he escaped their attempts to kill him.

“But I have had God’s help to this very day, so I stand here testifying to small and great alike. That I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen – that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles” (vs. 22–23).

There is the center of Paul’s testimony again. He states, I am doing absolutely nothing and saying absolutely nothing but what the Law and the Prophets would say.

Immediately opposition arises. The consequence of Paul’s testimony is first of all Festus’s accusation, his criticism of Paul. “*‘You are out of your mind, Paul!’ he shouted. Your great*

learning is driving you insane” (v. 24). Not able to answer the defense of Paul. He must attack the man, the missionary. He says, Paul, you are crazy, you are out of your mind. Paul answers very calmly. It is amazing when you know you are right how calm you can remain.

“I am not insane, most excellent Festus,’ Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable. The king is familiar with these things and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner” (v. 25–26).

Paul says everything I have done, I have done out in the open before all of you. Paul issues a challenge to King Agrippa. *“King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.”* Agrippa answers: *“Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”* (vs. 27–28). He is not wanting to face honestly the evidence that Paul is presenting about the fulfillment of prophecy. Paul replied in verse 29 – *“Short time or long – I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am (a Christian, a servant of God), except for these chains.”* With that the discussion is ended. *“The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them. They left the room (for a consultation), and while talking with one another, they said, ‘This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment’”* (vs. 30–31). That is the third or fourth time these Roman governors and this Jewish king have said this man has done nothing worthy, even of imprisonment much less, death. *“Agrippa said to Festus, ‘This man could have been set free, if he had not appealed to Caesar’”* (v. 32). God has told Paul that he must preach in Rome and by appealing to Caesar that is where he will go. The Jewish trial found nothing wrong in Paul’s actions. The Roman trial found nothing wrong in him. And the trial before King Agrippa found nothing wrong in Paul.

The testimony of the law says there is nothing wrong in this man's actions. He should have been set free, but he must go to Rome. The apostle to the Gentiles must preach the gospel in the house of Caesar himself. He must go to Rome where he will be seen to be triumphant over all the accusations that are made against him.

How Paul Faced Adversity

How does Paul face all the trouble that these Jews continually bring upon him? First of all he faced this trouble through fellowship with the Master. He knew that Jesus was by his side and therefore it didn't matter who accused him. It didn't matter whether he was in prison or free. It didn't matter whether he was beaten or not. It didn't matter whether he was liked or not. It didn't matter whether the truth about him was told or not. He had fellowship with Jesus. He treads the pathway of suffering. He treads the pathway of wrong, but he is not disheartened by it. He is not made sullen by it. He faces it with courage and with kindness, like Jesus had done before. He accepts his enforced quiet now, his time that will enable him to look deeper in the truth about Christ's gospel. To produce the great epistles that he wrote.

He faces these trials with faithfulness to the will of God. Paul had learned to wait as well as walk. He had learned to wait as well as to work. This was because he had surrendered wholly to the will of God. Not only through faith and not only through faithfulness does he face his troubles, but through faith in God himself. The deepest secret of all was Paul's trust and confidence in his God, in his God's wisdom, in his God's love, in his God's power. So whether working or waiting, serving or suffering, Paul was there. He knew it would turn out for his salvation and to his strengthening through the power of God.

MISSIONARY TRIUMPHANT

Acts 27 – 28

This chapter will conclude our survey of the book of Acts, emphasizing the beginning and growth of the church throughout the world. We scoped chapters 24 – 26 seeing Paul, the missionary, as he was tried, on three different occasions and found without fault. They could find absolutely nothing wrong with him, in Jerusalem, in Caesarea. No fault was found in him before the Jews, before the Romans nor before the king. It was his destiny that he witness for Christ, in Rome before Caesar himself. Since he has appealed to Caesar, he must now be sent to Caesar. To get to Rome involves a sea voyage. It will involve a storm Luke will tell us about in chapter twenty-seven. The storm will occur as Paul and his traveling companions journey from Caesarea to Malta. After a period of time on Malta, the journey will continue on to Rome itself. One of the most stirring points in all of Paul's life is this sea voyage and the storm that it entails. One of the greater lessons that I have ever heard preached was preached by a man named Rob Thompson, an old Scottish sailor, as he talked about this storm, this northeaster that Paul will endure. I will do what I can in showing the triumph at sea in chapter 27 – the journey to Malta.

Paul's Triumph At Sea (27:1 – 28:16)

First, there is the beginning of the voyage in 27:1–8. He goes from Caesarea to Sidon and then from Sidon to Fair Havens. Paul is rejoined again by Luke on this journey. We have a new “we” section for the first time in several chapters. *“When it was decided that we would sail for Italy. Paul and*

some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment” (27:1). This centurion, Julius, will be another just man. All the centurions mentioned in the book of Acts, in fact every one in the New Testament, were men of justice. This centurion named Julius was of the Imperial Regiment, the highest order, the Praetorian guard. They boarded a ship that was bound for ports along the coast of the province of Asia.

We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us. The next day,” it just took a one day journey, “we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs (27:2–3).

These Roman centurions know that they are in the company of an honorable, honest, sincere, faithful man in Paul.

From there (from Sidon) we put out to sea again and passed to the lee (the peaceful side) of Cyprus because the winds were against us.” It is a hard trip, due to contrary winds. “When we had sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia. There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board (27:4–6)

They changed from one ship to another here at Myra and had difficulty arriving at Cnidus.

We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving off Cnidus. When the wind did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee off Crete, opposite Salmone. We moved along the coast

with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea (vs. 7–8).

Here is a place where they should have stayed for the winter and waited for spring, but they refused to do so.

Paul gives them some sound advice in verses 9–10, but they will not take it.

Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Fast. So Paul warned them, “Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also” (vs. 9–10).

They needed to stay here at Fair Havens, there was an opening toward the northwest and the southwest that would have provided safety, but they did not believe so.

But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbor in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest (vs. 11–12).

They thought if they could get to Phoenix there was no storm that would be able to sink their ship, but God does not intend for them to find safety. He intends for them to find the storm that will show His power and His care for them. That storm begins in verse 13 and goes all the way through verse 38.

The Storm (27:13–20)

Notice first of all the extremity that they find themselves in.

When a gentle south wind began to blow, they thought they had obtained what they wanted; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. An island out in the Mediterranean. Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the “Northeaster,” swept down from the island. The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; . . . Which was what you try to do in a storm. . . . so we gave way to it and were driven along. As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure. When the men had hoisted it aboard, they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Such a terrible storm. Fearing that they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard (27:13–18).

The first day they tied the boat together, the second day they threw the cargo overboard to try to lighten it.

On the third day, they threw the ship’s tackle overboard with their own hands.” Desperate. “When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved (27:19–20).

The best of sailors had become desperate in the throes of the worst of storms. Paul exhorts the ship’s crew and promises safety for all.

After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: “Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss.

But now I urge you to keep up your courage. Because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed' (27:21–22).

Here is a landlubber trying to tell seasoned sailors not to give up courage. Paul tells them how he knew these things.

"Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island" (vs. 23–26).

He did his best to encourage them because God had granted by His grace their lives.

Luke tells us about the shipwreck. Paul's faith and trust in a faithful God shines forth in this event. For two weeks they are driven by this storm.

On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea, when about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land. They took soundings and found that the water was a hundred and twenty feet deep. A short time later they took soundings again and found it was ninety feet deep. Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. That is what you did with Mediterranean boats. In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow. Then Paul said to the centurion and soldiers, He knew they were trying to escape. "Unless these men stay

with the ship, you cannot be saved." So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it fall away. Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. "For the last fourteen days," he said, "you have been in constant suspense and gone without food – you haven't eaten anything." For 2 weeks they have constantly been trying to escape this storm. "Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head." After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. Altogether there were 276 of us on board. When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea. More and more desperate. Here is the disastrous result. When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. Cutting loose the anchors, all four of them. they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. In one last desperate attempt. But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf (27:27–41)

There is the disastrous result of the attempt to land. Death is thwarted as Paul had predicted, God was sparing those with Paul, who might have been lost. Notice the safety that God will bring. The attempt of the soldiers to kill the prisoners is stopped by the centurion.

The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. But

the centurion (their ruler) wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. The rest were to get there on planks or on pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land in safety (vs. 42–44).

God had told Paul that all would be saved – all 276 of them swimming, floating on planks, floating on pieces of the ship reached the isle of Malta, safely. The promise of God had come to pass, their lives had been saved.

Victory On Malta (28:1–10)

God takes care of His preacher, protecting him from the bite of a poisonous viper. They get honor and good treatment from the people who live on this isle called Malta. Verse 2 says

The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. Paul helped, he always is working. Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put in on the fire, a viper (a poisonous snake), driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, “This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, Justice (that is one of their gods) has not allowed him to live”(28:2–4).

“In heathen mythology, “Justice” was a goddess, the daughter of Jupiter; and it was her duty to take vengeance and to inflict punishment for crimes”¹ Not the sense of justice, but a god called justice has not allowed him to live.

¹ Reese, Gareth L., *New Testament History Acts*, College press, Joplin, MO.

But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall over dead, but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god (vs. 5–6).

They thought that one of their gods, a god named Justice, had sought to kill him, but when they found out he didn't die from the poisonous snake's bite they concluded he himself was a god. They were wrong the first time and they are wrong the second time. This is simply preservation from the God of Paul. But they are surprised.

There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and for three days entertained us hospitably. His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him”(vs. 7–8).

So they were being hospitable to Paul, so Paul is hospitable to them.

“When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. They honored us in many ways and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed” (vs. 9–10).

Paul, besides not being harmed by the viper, was used by God to heal others. No wonder the islanders honored the shipwrecked men in many ways, even giving them supplies before they set sail three months later (v. 11). These supplies were no doubt given in gratitude for Paul' services. After the storm they found succor and safety and sustenance on this island for 3 months. Publius and all the inhabitants of Malta's land honored and help and succor Paul and his company.

After three months we put out to sea in a ship that wintered in the island. It was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux. We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days (vs. 11–12).

The journey was carefully traced by Luke: from Malta to Syracuse, Sicily; to Rhegium (today Reggio) on the “toe” of Italy; to Puteoli (today Pozzuoli), 152 miles south of Rome; and finally to Rome itself. Here is the journey to Rome.

From there we set sail and arrived at Rhegium. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli. There we found some brothers who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we went to Rome. The brothers there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged. When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him (vs. 13–16).

He was allowed to stay in his own hired house guarded by a Roman soldier.

Victory in Pagan Rome (vs. 17–31)

The climax of the book is found in these closing verses which speak of another rejection of the gospel and of Paul’s taking the message to Gentiles.

First of all he preaches. He preaches by a statement of his life and that he is fulfilling scripture. But notice the final sanctuary that he received there. The Jews came to him and Paul tells them that because of his preaching and the rejection by the Jews, they wouldn’t listen, salvation had come to the Gentiles and they will listen. Look at verses 30-31 and our book

closes. Two years tried in Jerusalem and Caesarea, four long months lost in storm on the sea and peace in Malta.

For two whole years Paul stayed there (in Rome) 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 (vs. 30–31).

Finally in the city of Rome, the pagan capital of the Empire itself, the gospel of God is being accepted without hindrance. Victory – opposition. Victory – opposition. Victory – opposition, again, again and again until finally in the capitol of the pagan world God's gospel is seen to be victorious.

Epilog

One question commonly raised pertains to Paul' activities after this two-year captivity. What happened? Perhaps no charges were filed in Rome and Paul was released. The Jews would know they had no case against Paul outside of Judea and so would be reluctant to argue their cause in Rome. Probably Paul returned to the provinces of Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia and then turned west to Spain according to his original plans (Romans 15:22-28). Then he ministered once more in the Aegean area where he was taken prisoner, removed to Rome, and executed.

Conclusion

The book of Acts is marked by four great features. Constantly we have seen the predominance of the divine element. It is not because of Peter's power, it is not because of Paul's preaching, it is not because of Stephen's steadfastness, it is not because of Philip's honesty, it is not because of any human being that the gospel has won. It is because of the predominance of the divine element.

The major feature has been the universality of the gospel.

It is not just for the Jews, it is not just for the Jews and the Samaritans, it is for the Jews, the Samaritans, the Gentiles, the rich, the poor, the bond, the free, man and woman. It is for everybody.

Another major feature is the hostility of the world toward Christianity. The world never has, doesn't now and never will like Christianity. But the keynote of the book of Acts is not really the predominance of God's divine power or the universality of the gospel or the hostility of the world. The keynote and the prime note is **the continuance and the continual victory of the Church over all of its opposition.**

So ends the book of Acts with a victorious Church. So ends the book of Acts, a book filled with challenge for us, with instruction for us, with hope for us. May the lessons of this book so grip our lives that we in turn will take our place among those who turn the world upside down. Like them, may we become disciples who are committed to the Lord Jesus Christ with all of our heart, body and soul. Who are reliant on the power of God amidst all of our troubles and trials, who are guided by the Spirit of God in all our ministry and all our work. Who occupy ourselves in reaching out to the lost people with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Who are devoted to the edifying of the saints. Until, like the brethren in the first century, we too will be absolutely victorious.

As the church advanced with the gospel in the book of Acts, the men and women were trained to witness. They were equipped with a message. They were committed to the vision of spreading the gospel throughout all the world and they humbly yielded themselves to God's will for their lives. They had such an impact on their world that I stand amazed. If we would have that same impact today, and we must, then we too must see things as Jesus saw them. We must see people the way Jesus saw people. We've got to see the lost the way Jesus saw the lost. We must see the devil the way Jesus saw the devil. But most of all, we must see ourselves as Jesus saw the disciples in Acts, as people who with His power could conquer the entire

world. We must see things as Jesus saw them.

We must have a missionary mentality. We must see ourselves, whether we work at a hamburger place or in the king's palace, whether we are preachers or paupers, whether we are missionaries or not, we must have the missionary mentality that sees the next person as the person that we must reach. We must reach all of the world. We must see things as Jesus saw them. We must have a missionary mentality. We must use all of our resources and all of our giftedness in carrying out the great commission. Then we will be the church that continues the life of Christ. Then we will be the people that continues to fulfill Jesus's mission of seeking and saving the lost. That is why the book of Acts is in the Bible, to complete the history of God's purpose that began with the promise that the seed of woman would bruise the devil's head. That was funneled through Abraham's family and David's royal line and came to climax in the birth of Christ and continues in the history of the Church of Jesus Christ. That will take His word to every creature in all the whole world. We are the one that Jesus intends to use to complete this task of seeking and saving the lost. May God give us the power, the strength and the faith to fulfill our destiny. God bless you. May you continue to study His word on a daily basis.

"Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among them that are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

Richard Rogers



Richard Rogers was born in 1936 in Dallas, Texas. Educated at Abilene Christian University and Florida Christian College, he was an avid reader, a diligent student of the Bible, and authored some twenty teaching workbooks and published outlines.

Richard was well known and recognized as a gifted evangelist, teacher, and lectureship speaker. He mentored church planting teams in California, Mexico, Thailand, and the Philippines.

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